

*Peel Inlet and Dawesville Channel — Airboats — Adjournment Debate*

**HON SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [5.15 pm]: I listened to that speech with great interest. I regret that the story I am about to tell the house is not nearly as edifying as the story Hon Helen Morton just told us. But then I do wish that some of her colleagues on the front bench were as assiduous in pursuing the things that matter in our community as Hon Helen Morton appears to be.

Today in question time I asked a question without notice of which some notice was given. I submitted it initially to the Minister for Environment and I did that for two reasons. The first reason is that on 6 October last year the honourable David Templeman—who as we all know was the previous Minister for Environment and therefore has a fair idea about the sorts of things that fall within the province and interest of the Minister for Environment—wrote to the minister drawing her attention to a very serious environmental problem in the Peel region. I then looked very closely at the issues that David Templeman had raised and decided, because the opposition had not had a response from the minister all these months later, that I would frame it in a question. I looked at the points that had been raised by the honourable David Templeman —

**Hon Donna Faragher:** Did he provide you with a copy of the letter?

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** I should think the Minister for Environment could go back through her correspondence.

**Hon Donna Faragher** interjected.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** I will just interrupt myself here. We heard Hon Norman Moore today in the debate on motions on notice express extreme displeasure about the number of freedom of information requests that the government is getting from members on our side of the chamber, particularly Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich who is doing a fantastic job —

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** Full of passion!

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** She is indeed full of passion, and it is driving the government crazy.

Several members interjected.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** In fact I am not sure that the government is particularly well placed to cope with the level of passion Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich is showing.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** No.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Government members look absolutely worn out; they look as though they have absolutely had it!

However, I did listen with interest to Hon Norman Moore, who was expressing particular unhappiness about the number of requests that government members were getting for us to look at their diaries under freedom of information legislation. I am not surprised that he is distressed because I can tell members that some of the results we are getting are absolutely pathetic. I would like to put in regular requests to see the diary of Hon Donna Faragher. I can tell members that one thing I know I will not find there is a section blocked off on sitting days with the notation “Preparation for Question Time”. I know that will not be there, because I will tell you, Mr Deputy President (Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm) and honourable members here this evening what happens when a question goes into the office of the Minister for Environment. I will just recap the question for the benefit of honourable members who might not have been paying the attention in question time that they wish they had been paying. My question was in four parts and asked —

- (1) Is the minister aware of the concern being expressed about the activities of airboats on the waterways around the Peel Inlet and Dawesville Channel?

That was a pretty straightforward question. I suppose if we had a minister for airboats, I could have addressed it to that minister. But as this question was about the activities of airboats on the waterways, I thought it would be appropriately directed towards the Minister for Environment. The second part of the question asked —

- (2) Is the minister confident that uncontrolled use of these vessels will not have an impact on the erosion of the foreshore reserves around Peel —

That question was perfectly appropriately directed to the Minister for Environment, as it is about the erosion of foreshore reserves —

and the habitats of the birdlife, which are such a valued aspect of the Peel–Harvey system?

Again, I would have thought that that question was quite correctly addressed to the Minister for Environment. The third part of the question was —

- (3) If so, what is the basis for that confidence?

I am not being confrontational in my style of questioning at all; I am being positively collaborative in trying to draw some information out of the minister.

The fourth part of the question asked if the minister was not aware of the concern, which began to appear it might be the case as the days, weeks and months ticked past with no answer from her, or she was not confident that the uncontrolled use of these vessels would not cause damage, would she act to ban or restrict the use of these vessels in this environmentally sensitive waterway and when will the bans or restrictions come into effect. I put that question in by the due time this morning.

**Hon Michael Mischin:** Well done!

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** I thank Hon Michael Mischin. I will take credit where it is due. We then got a note to say that the question had been redirected to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Water. I raised my eyebrows at that and thought it very strange because the minister was already sitting on the letter and, quite clearly, all these questions I raised fell within the range of responsibilities of the Minister for Environment. Nevertheless, I was then informed that the minister's office looked at the question and said, "This is not us; this is for the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Water."

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** How pathetic is that?

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** It is just extraordinary. I was not surprised because, as I have shared with the house before, when I put in a couple of questions a few weeks ago about one of the pastoral stations that —

**Hon Donna Faragher:** Don't start with that one.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** I will start with that one. Does it make the minister uncomfortable?

**Hon Donna Faragher:** We've bulldozed some homesteads, have we?

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm):** Order, members! There is still ample time for other members to make a contribution to the adjournment debate. If you wish to, please do so. Let us just keep to one member for the time being.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Thank you, Mr Deputy President. I am sure that the minister needs the guidance that you have just provided.

When I put in the question about these particular stations, I got the standard "no response" from the minister. It was obviously written by one of her bureaucrats. She would have seen the question come across her desk. The minister knows that I more often ask questions without notice than on notice. There are other methods of getting answers to questions. If they require a lot of detail, I always put them on notice. If I want the minister to respond to something, I prefer to ask them without notice. On that occasion, I gave the minister notice of the question because I knew that the minister would want to think about her answer. She clearly did not do that. I can only assume that she did not see it, in which case there is something wrong with the systems in her office or she saw it and she did not care or she saw it and it was all too hard. I do not know what the answer to that is. Clearly, there is no mechanism in place in this minister's office for giving decent answers of substance to some of these questions. I do not know what happened to the question I put in this morning but it clearly got the flick.

The minister indicated to me by way of interjection—which reinforces the point I made before in this place about the fact that this government really only governs by interjection—that she does not think she has seen the letter, so I will go through it. The letter is from the honourable David Templeman and is dated 6 October. It begins —

Dear Minister

Re: Airboats on Peel Waterways.

I ask honourable members to listen to this and tell me whether I made a mistake and whether the honourable David Templeman made a mistake in addressing this question to the Minister for Environment. It states —

It has come to my attention that there are now one or two Airboats that have been seen, and heard, on the Peel Waterways. On the Monday long weekend holiday recently, —

Remember, this is last October —

I witnessed one such vessel in the Dawesville area just south of the Dawesville Channel.

These vessels are extremely noisy and the large fans that propel them cause quite a disturbance to the water, particularly when they come close to the shore. I witnessed the vessel at Dawesville coming almost right up onto the foreshore which is cause for concern given that such uncontrolled access has an impact on erosion of foreshore reserve.

The other major concern is the noise created by the vessel. This noise is way above that created by other motorised vessels on the estuary. The noise and fan propulsion clearly disturbs bird life on the waterways and has the potential to impact on the habitat of much of our local bird life as well as the migratory birds for which the Peel Harvey System is famous.

In view of this threat to both wildlife and amenity for local residents and visitors to the region, I am asking you to either enforce a ban or at the very least a severe restriction to such craft in the Peel Harvey Estuary. These vessels have a greater capacity to reach areas that other vessels are unable to reach in and around our local waterways and such a ban would protect habitat and amenity in this environmentally sensitive waterway.

I look forward to your immediate response to this serious concern.

Yours sincerely

DAVID TEMPLEMAN

That was clearly the honourable David Templeman's mistake; he said, "I look forward to your immediate response".

The minister has made it clear, over and again, that she has certain expectations about the way in which people will behave in our community. In response to a question asked recently about the use of certain pesticides on the river foreshore, she said —

... I expect that any user of a pesticide or herbicide utilises those products appropriately...

...

... it is my expectation that people will do the right thing...

The fact is that people do not do the right thing, and it is the minister's responsibility to go after those people who are not doing the right thing, to put mechanisms in place to protect the environment and the foreshores, and the wildlife that inhabits those foreshores. She cannot continue to duck and weave and hide behind these empty words.