

WATER CORPORATION - FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO CANOEING WA

Motion

Resumed from 28 March on the following motion moved by Mr T.R. Sprigg -

That this house calls on the government to ensure the Water Corporation honours its commitment to provide \$10.85 million in financial assistance to Canoeing WA to replace the Harvey international slalom course it was forced to relinquish in 1998.

MR T.R. SPRIGG (Murdoch) [4.01 pm]: I have some terrific illustrations that I can show to the house. The first is a photograph of champion Western Australian sportsman Robin Bell, who was the world C1 slalom champion in 2005. He is a Western Australian boy born and bred. However, because of the loss of the Harvey international slalom course, he has been lost to Western Australian sport. He was the joint winner of the title of Western Australian Sportsman of the Year in 2005. He has been lost to Western Australian sport simply because the facility that he needs to train for international competition is no longer available. It is certainly a crying shame when Western Australia loses its champion sportspeople.

There has been a loss of recreational waterways throughout the history of Western Australia. I am indebted to Canoeing WA director Colin Thorpe, who is in the gallery today, for providing me with a lot of this information. There has been a loss of sporting and recreational rivers as a result of dam building. The map in my hand shows what has been lost to recreational water sports. The Helena River was lost to recreational water sports in 1903 with the construction of the Mundaring Weir, which happened before even I was born. The Canning River was lost in 1940, the Wungong River in 1979, the Serpentine River in 1971, the North Dandalup River in 1994 and the South Dandalup River way back in 1972. I am working south down the coast. We all know that the Louge Brook Dam is under threat as well. The Harvey River, which we are talking about today, was lost as a recreational waterway for the slalom course in 1998. The Harris River was lost as a recreational waterway in 1990 and the Wellington Dam in Collie is under threat as we speak. Those recreational waterways have been lost. It is certainly disappointing when that happens, especially when it leads to the loss from Western Australia of sportsmen of the calibre of Robin Bell.

When the Harvey Dam area was being developed way back in the late 1990s - the slalom course was established at that stage - a deal was done between Canoeing WA and the Water Corporation. I will go into the history of what happened. In March 1999, the Water Corporation said that it would incorporate the needs of the Stirling Dam slalom course in the planning and design of the project. It said that release provisions were in accordance with those specified by the Water and Rivers Commission in the water allocation plan for the Harvey basin. I am saddened to report that that did not occur. In November 1999, the Water Corporation confirmed that once the upgrading works were completed at the Stirling Dam in 2003, the new outlet works would be able to provide discharge rates of 12 to 14 cubic metres per second as required for whitewater canoeing. In January 2000, the slalom committee was willing to forgo its request for water for the Australian team training in July and August 2000 and the summer of 2000-2001 as part of its support for the Water Corporation's involvement in this significant community project. That meant that Canoeing WA gave up the facility that it had for its sport for the greater community good. In April 2000, the Water Corporation included money for a whitewater park in its budget program. An amount of \$20 000 was set aside for a feasibility study in 2000, \$830 000 was set aside for 2001, \$8 million was to be provided in 2002 - obviously to start the building program - and \$2 million was to be provided in 2003. A total of \$10.85 million was set aside. The contract to build Harvey Dam was let in September 2000. In March 2001, the Water and Rivers Commission said that it had no fundamental objection to Canoeing Western Australia negotiating alternative arrangements, particularly an alternative facility with the Water Corporation. In May 2002, just over a year later, the Water Corporation said that its role would be to provide Canoeing WA with financial support to design and construct the whitewater park. That promise and commitment was made by the Water Corporation. In July 2002, Canoeing WA said that in view of the progress towards the proposed whitewater park, it was prepared to forgo its water provision from Stirling Dam for the summer of 2002-2003, which followed on from previous commitments made in 2000 and 2001. The dam was completed by October 2002, and in November of that year the Water Corporation terminated the employment of its whitewater park consultant. In September 2003, the Water Corporation withdrew its budget allocation for the whitewater park that it made in April 2000, so the \$10.85 million that I spoke about disappeared. In June 2006, the Water Corporation advised Canoeing WA that funding for the proposed whitewater park was a whole-of-government issue. This is where the minister comes in. In August 2006, the chair of the Water Corporation board declined a Canoeing WA request to discuss Water Corporation's business practices in its dealings concerning the Harvey international slalom course. My summary of what happened is that the Water Corporation reneged on a deal that it made with Canoeing WA to fund a new whitewater park. I have copies of letters that prove that that commitment was made. The purpose of speaking about this matter today is to try to get something happening, because this sports facility is very much needed in this town.

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A fantastic campaign has been waged by not only Colin Thorpe but also other members of Canoeing WA and the general public. I note that Professor Fiona Wood, a former Australian of the Year, has got behind this campaign. There has been something in the order of 8 000 signatures in support. Uniquely, people have signed the paddles used by the canoeists. Professor Fiona Wood added her weight to the fact that the canoeing facility has been lost to the Western Australian community.

There is a way forward. The minister is in an ideal position to fix this issue very quickly because he is the Minister for Sport and Recreation as well as the Minister for Water Resources. One thing that can happen is that the minister can get up and make a terrific political statement and say that he agrees with everything I have said and that it is a shame that the facility has been lost and that Robin Bell has left the state for somewhere else. However, that is not what we want here today. I give the minister an undertaking that we are prepared to work with him in a bipartisan way to try to resurrect this process and to try and get the facility under way as quickly as possible. It has been mentioned that Champion Lakes near Armadale-Kelmscott is a likely area for the new course. My colleague the member for Serpentine-Jarrahdale will talk about that. Canoeing WA is keen on forming a committee involving the minister, the Department of Sport and Recreation and the Armadale Redevelopment Authority, which is involved with Champion Lakes, in order to get things happening. I believe that things are starting to happen and I am very gratified.

I read in some of the correspondence that there seems to have been a bit of a move away from the government making a commitment through the Water Corporation in 2000 to provide the \$10.85 million. It seems that someone somewhere might have seen an opportunity. He may have recognised that there was a commitment made but that a private developer might be able to do it. In that way, the money could be saved. There is nothing wrong with that because a proposed whitewater park is likely to be a profit-making concern. There are many parks like that in Australia and the world that are making good profits. It may be that there is a chance for a developer to build the course. Nearly always in these projects and opportunities there will be a need for government funding. Such government funding through the Water Corporation was promised in 2000. I am advised by Canoeing WA that the funding is still very important. It may be that a private developer comes to the project. If that happens, let us hope that it does not slow the process because the people of Canoeing WA have been without their facilities since 1998, which is moving on to 10 years. That is long enough, one would suggest. I spoke earlier about Robin Bell leaving. Other young canoeists have left the state as well. If a private developer were to come in and say that it could get the project up and running until 2015, that would not be satisfactory. We have to get something happening straightaway. If that means putting money in the budget that the Treasurer will bring down tomorrow or having a forward appropriation, that is what has to happen. There is no doubt that Perth and Western Australia need a first-class rowing and canoeing facility. There is also no doubt that Champion Lakes will be a very good area for that.

I know a couple of other members wish to speak on this issue. When the minister replies, I would like him to give me and the public of Western Australia an undertaking that he will put his personal stamp on this and get this up and running as soon as possible and provide the money that is required for Canoeing WA. That should be organised next month. I know that the minister is a very busy man and has lots of meetings, but he should organise a meeting of all the relevant people - the Armadale Redevelopment Authority, Canoeing WA, Rowing Australia and the Water Corporation - to get this process started so that we can get this facility in Western Australia.

MR A.J. SIMPSON (Serpentine-Jarrahdale) [4.14 pm]: I have a poster here that sums up the situation. It states "Have Paddle But No Creek." The member for Murdoch and I have spoken about the number of areas in the state that have dried up and are not suitable for canoeing. The Minister for Water Resources realises how big an issue water is and how the recreational use of our waterways is drying up. Water is now far too precious for that use. However, Champion Lakes is coming on board. It is a fantastic facility. Mr Acting Speaker (Mr P.B. Watson) attended on the Sunday of the opening. I did not get an invitation but I turned up anyway. It was a great day. About 4 500 people turned up to look at the facilities. History was made with the first regatta. It proved what a fantastic facility it is. The facility would go hand-in-hand with a whitewater rapids course. It would work very well. The water is available but the slalom course needs to be built.

I visited the Penrith Lakes in Sydney, where I attended a barbecue. We rode our bicycles around the course and up to where the slalom course is. We had a cup of coffee and watched the events. It is a fantastic facility. I can only hope that the new facility will be just as good. It could be even better because we can learn from other people's mistakes. The Penrith facility is great; it was good to see it in action.

Slalom canoeing is often described as a drug-free high. It is an adrenalin rush just watching the videos of people going down the rapids whether it is in a canoe or even a rubber boat. Going down in a group is a lot of fun.

Champion Lakes is the perfect position for the course. The government has spent about \$30 million putting the area together. Surrounding land will be developed through the Armadale Redevelopment Authority. It will be

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of zero cost to taxpayers when the process is completed, which is great. A slalom facility will go hand-in-hand to develop and enhance the existing course. As we know, when we build these facilities, the more people we can get to use them the far better they will be. I remember that the original plans referred to a water park with slides and so forth. There are benefits to incorporate more facilities. The facilities are well located in a suburban area; it has a residential area on its doorstep. In addition, the sport has no impact on near neighbours when compared with motor sports or a horse track, which have impacts on people nearby. That is the beauty of this type of facility. The facility will add amazing value to the Kelmscott area. It will be the follow-on step of the Champion Lakes setup. I understand that a business plan has been done to make this a zero-cost proposition to the government. As more and more facilities are built we must ensure that the ongoing costs of running the facilities are not a cost burden on taxpayers. In fact, two business plans have been done: one recently with the Armadale Redevelopment Authority and one a number of years ago with the Water Corporation. We can prove that it will work. There is a great plan and a great location. There is a letter of support from the Water Corporation stating that it agreed to provide the money when it shut down the last slalom course. All we need now is for the minister to come on board and work with all the people who have input on this so that we can make it come together and become a fantastic facility. I can only emphasise what the member for Murdoch said about bipartisanship support and getting this off the ground. It is a fantastic facility. We need to get the water course and all the rest of it happening. It will be a great icon for Western Australia. I think the minister mentioned that it is not an open body water course. Regattas cannot be held on uncontrolled waters. As we now have a world-class regatta event we can go one step further and get the slalom and whitewater course happening. That will be fantastic. I look forward to what the minister has to say.

MR T.K. WALDRON (Wagin - Deputy Leader of the National Party) [4.19 pm]: I give my support to this motion. In doing so I must say that the details have been put very well by the previous two speakers. I will touch on those details in a moment.

We talk in this place a lot about preventive health, physical fitness, obesity, leadership in our communities, good communities, belonging to things and self-esteem. These are things we all like to espouse. Sometimes I think we underestimate the value of sport to our community - I do not think you do, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr P.B. Watson) - although we do not mean to do so. Sometimes it might not be politically popular, and it is easy to ask why we need a new football stadium or canoe course when we need more hospital beds and better education. I acknowledge that, and I think it is a fair statement, but it is about getting the balance right. I have been accused in the past of being too biased towards sport, and I take that criticism on board, because I have a sporting background. I often used to think about things and remember that, although I thought something was a good idea, that was because I came from a sporting background, and I should look at it from the other side. I have always tried to do that, but the longer I live and the more I have been involved in this Parliament - seven years - and managing country football - nine years - and see problems with our youngsters, in families and with public health, the more I am convinced that sporting clubs and other groups in which people work together are very important. At times it is easy to push these organisations aside and give priority to other areas, and this is what has happened here. Back in 1998, we needed the water, and I think the people involved in Canoeing WA recognised that. As good citizens, they gave up what they had because they could see the benefit to the general public. They also gave it up on the strength of a promise, or at the very least a real commitment, that at some stage they would have their course replaced or another facility built. In fact, I understand that \$10.85 million was quoted as the commitment at the time. This development has not happened, nearly nine years on.

The member for Murdoch made a very good point about the minister being responsible for water resources as well as sport and recreation. While it might be a good point in relation to this issue, it could also pose a difficulty for the minister; he has two hats to wear and must try to put the two responsibilities together. My point in this debate is that we have a responsibility to all sectors of the community, particularly where those sectors display responsibility and good faith in entering into agreements. The agreement might not necessarily have to be written down, dot point by dot point, although I think the evidence presented by the member for Murdoch is self explanatory. It seems to me that, in this case, this group has been completely let down. A wonderful facility has been built at Champion Lakes. I see it from the air sometimes when I am flying south, and it looks fantastic. I did not go to the opening, but a couple of weeks ago I was at the Willetton Sports Club, and the younger brother and the father of the big ruckman Aaron Sandilands were there. They come from Mt Barker and I know them.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Are they both big blokes like you?

Mr T.K. WALDRON: A couple of me put together would still not reach the young bloke, who is only 15. It was interesting talking to him. He is very keen on football, but he is also a rower. We were talking about football, but he was more excited about the fact that he was going out to be part of the opening of Champion Lakes. His dad was wondering how he was going to spend a morning with his younger son, and then get to the Dockers' game on time to see his other son play. I have spoken to Colin Thorpe a lot on this issue over the past

couple of years, but the way this kid spoke about his rowing and the opportunity he was being given made me realise that there are also canoeists who are not receiving that opportunity. Whatever sport people take up, they should be given every opportunity. In this case, we are denying that opportunity to a sport that has shown good faith. We are losing Robin Bell, whom the member for Murdoch mentioned, and other athletes from our state, and we are simply not providing the opportunity for our children. The idea of having a facility at Champion Lakes, if that could happen, would be a wonderful idea.

I will not go through the details of this issue, because they have all been covered by previous speakers. My thought is that this is a case in which we can sit down with the Water Corporation, the minister and Canoeing WA to come to some arrangement under which a facility can be found and got under way as soon as possible. Obviously, it is for the benefit of the sport, but why should that sport not have the same chances as the sports in which I am involved? Why should children and families in this state not have the opportunity to participate in sport for competition, fun and good exercise to provide them with better mental and physical health. That is an important part of it. The benefits will not result only from the new course. Years ago, when Lillee and Thomson were in the ascendancy, all the kids wanted to bowl fast. Then Shane Warne came along and all the kids want to be spin bowlers. Look at the numbers on the backs of the kids who go to West Coast Eagles games. Years ago those numbers were different from those of today, because different players are now the heroes. If we can produce champions in the sport of canoeing, more kids will want to take up the sport. Not many of them will make it to the top, but they will have good healthy exercise, and it will address a lot of the issues that we talk about in this Parliament. We also talk a lot about leadership in the community, and leadership courses. I think the team-oriented activities - they may be repertory clubs, church groups or whatever - actually breed leadership skills, because people learn by doing it. We overlook that all the time, and we are missing an opportunity there as well. I encourage the minister to closely consider this issue. I think it has reached the stage at which these people have had enough, and rightly so. All of us need to take action, and we are raising this issue to help the minister do that.

MR J.C. KOBELKE (Balcatta - Minister for Water Resources) [4.26 pm]: I begin by thanking members opposite for bringing on debate on this important issue. It is important that the government provide facilities in a range of sports, and canoeing has a particular set of issues and deserves some debate in this house. I would suggest, however, that this debate would not have come on but for the very determined efforts of Colin Thorpe and Canoeing WA. He is to be applauded for the effort he is putting in to ensure that his sport of canoeing can continue to flourish, and that facilities are available for people to pursue canoeing, particularly a slalom course. I know that he will not give up, and he will continue to push until the government provides that facility.

Members have canvassed a range of issues, but I will need to go over them again to fill in a few of the details that members did not put into their contributions to this debate, or perhaps were not aware of. The Harvey River below Stirling Dam was used as a whitewater canoeing course between 1976 and 1998. It was one of the few locations where whitewater slalom canoeing could occur. Members suggested that a range of locations were available, but I am not sure whether there are many that are accessible and near major cities. This was a very important course, and as the member for Murdoch has commented, people such as Robin Bell became world champions through being able to learn the skills on that course. Canoeing WA itself benefited from the availability of that slalom course. It was a real boon to canoeing, and demonstrated the benefits by producing Robin Bell.

A range of issues developed that led to that course no longer being available. The course was an opportunistic use of the water in the Harvey River, which was the release of water from Stirling Dam during the irrigation season from October to late April to supplement the irrigation water stored in the old Harvey Weir. Whitewater canoeing on that stretch of water was using water that was never actually a licensed allocation. It did not actually have any legal status as a right to the water. The sport grew through that opportunistic release of water, because the water had to be let out of one dam into another dam. The volume released ranged from 35 to 40 gigalitres per season. However, the larger capacity of the new Harvey Dam, which replaced the old Harvey Weir in 2001, reduced the need to release water from Stirling Dam during the irrigation season to an average of 19 gigalitres per season. In 1998, the Water and Rivers Commission released the proposed Harvey basin surface water allocation plan, which provided for flow rates of 14 cubic metres per second, to be released over seven hours on 40 canoeing days, plus 15 additional days for training and national events, if sufficient notice was given. Therefore, although no licence was issued, an informal arrangement was put in place to establish a program for release of that water by the Water and Rivers Commission. It was estimated that the sport would require about 14 gigalitres of water a season. However, the Water and Rivers Commission indicated that the allocation of water for whitewater canoeing was, as with all allocations, "subject to review through an open and public process if there is a substantial unanticipated change in the future circumstances." The Water and Rivers Commission made it clear at that time that although that was a beneficial use, it was opportunistic, and things could change in the future; therefore, it could give no guarantee that water would continue to be released, or released in the timely way that was required, for the slalom course. The Water Corporation's licence to take

water from Stirling Dam was conditional upon the Water Corporation's providing a reasonable amount of water for whitewater canoeing. In other words, that condition was noted on the Water Corporation's licence.

When the Water Corporation proposed the construction of Harvey Dam in 1999, Canoeing WA offered to temporarily forgo its water provision to enable construction of the dam. To meet its obligation under the water allocation licence, the Water Corporation then committed to ensure the ongoing viability of the slalom course, or a suitable alternative. That accords with what some members have indicated in respect of the undertakings that were given by the Water Corporation. I will say more about that later, because there is still doubt on both sides about the extent of that commitment.

In 2000, however, as a result of a High Court injunction from a landowner concerned about scouring and erosion of the banks of the Harvey River, part of which ran through his property, whitewater rafting activities ceased on the Harvey River. Therefore, this further matter - a legal challenge - was injected into this issue. An agreement was reached between Canoeing WA and the Water Corporation to forgo the release of water while investigations into the establishment of alternative whitewater canoeing facilities proceeded.

I have outlined the gist of what happened. I have outlined also that although a licence had not been issued to Canoeing WA to use that water, the Water Corporation's licence contained a commitment that it would seek to look after the interests of Canoeing WA, and particularly the slalom course. As a result of that, and in light of the understanding that a change was to take place in the release of water, it became more difficult to continue to provide that slalom course on the Harvey River.

In April 2000, the Water Corporation's internal capital program included \$10.85 million for a whitewater park. I emphasise that this was in the Water Corporation's internal capital program. I have not been able to find any record - members opposite may be able to help me, because that was during the period of the Court government - that that was ever part of the budget of that government. When we came into government in 2001, that proposal for a whitewater park was not put to us, and we never approved it as a government. However, as I have said, it was part of the internal capital program of the Water Corporation. As members have pointed out, I am the Minister for Water Resources, and have responsibility for the Water Corporation. I am well aware that the Water Corporation plans 10 years out. The Water Corporation will often put out figures. However, governments of both persuasions have not necessarily accepted those figures. One example, which is contentious, is the infill sewerage program. The Water Corporation's infill sewerage program goes for 10 years. However, in the state budget, that commitment goes for only four years. Beyond that four years, it is up to the government each year to determine whether to extend that program by providing the borrowing capacity for the Water Corporation to take forward that internal capital plan, for which it needs government support.

The Water Corporation undertook to support feasibility studies into whether a whitewater park would be commercially viable. The initial feasibility study indicated that it would not be commercially viable. The Water Corporation then removed that \$10.8 million from its internal documents. The Water Corporation spent some money on working up those proposals. I am not sure how much it spent. It would have been some hundreds of thousands of dollars; it certainly did not go into the millions. Therefore, the Water Corporation backed its commitment at that stage by saying it would work with Canoeing WA and get in consultants to plan how it could find a replacement facility. However, when the data and studies, and the report from the consultants, indicated that the proposal would not be commercially viable, it was not an option that the Water Corporation could carry forward. That is not to say that the Water Corporation did not want to continue to work with Canoeing WA. Although the relationship between the Water Corporation and Canoeing WA has not been as smooth as Canoeing WA, and I, would like, the Water Corporation has at various times been in consultation with Canoeing WA. Canoeing WA has certainly put forward its view, very strongly and correctly, that the Water Corporation still has an obligation, and it is looking to the Water Corporation to assist in making sure that it can find a replacement facility for that Harvey slalom course.

I turn now to the concept of an artificial whitewater park, which Canoeing WA has been promoting. Canoeing WA has been looking at whether the whitewater park model that is used in Penrith, New South Wales could be developed in this state. Water is pumped through that artificial whitewater park, and that allows it to be used as a recreation facility, and also for the sport of canoeing and the training of elite canoeists. I have been presented with the data about how that model works. The problem is whether we can find a developer in Western Australia that is willing to go forward with a similar proposal. The problem is that because of the drying climate in this state, it is difficult to release enough water from our dams to maintain such a course. Currently, no water is available for release. In the future, perhaps Wellington Dam, on the Collie River, will provide the potential for that. Wellington Dam is the largest reservoir in the south west of Western Australia. Because of the high level of salinity, a flushing program is taking place. In order to provide a slalom course, water needs to be released in a way that fits in with the times at which competitors want to compete or train. There is no guarantee that a sufficiently large volume of water will be available to be released for that purpose. However, one never knows.

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It is possible that, in the future, enough water could be released from Wellington Dam to provide such an opportunity.

Mr T.K. Waldron: You mentioned the drying climate. How much water is needed for the slalom course, or a course such as the one at Penrith? I do not know whether a great deal of water is needed.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The Penrith course is totally artificial. The water is simply pumped around and around, so the consumption of water is moderately low, because water is lost only through evaporation and spillage. I am talking about a course similar to the one on the Harvey River, which uses irrigation water that is released for that purpose. That is highly prospective, and there are a lot of problems. However, we should not rule it out totally, because at some time in the future it may be possible to release water from a dam. The only dam that would have any prospect of success is Wellington Dam. We are releasing the saline water at the bottom of that dam as part of our salinity program. However, I believe we need to release more water. We probably need to build a dam downstream to capture that water so that it can be used for irrigation. Those sorts of potentialities exist. However, they are still fairly long shots, and I am not offering them as a solution to this problem.

The best solution to this problem is an artificial whitewater park similar to the one at Penrith. However, the earlier studies that were paid for by the Water Corporation showed that that was not commercially viable. Therefore, it backed off from that proposal. The issue now is finding a proponent who has the expertise and is willing to put in the capital to make that proposal possible. If that proposal is just short of being economic, the issue then is what sort of subsidy should come from the Water Corporation, or whatever, to make that proposal possible. That is where the proposal is at now.

I turn now to some of the issues that lead into that. As I have said, the concept of an artificial whitewater park is being promoted by Canoeing WA. It certainly provides the best prospect for a slalom course, and obviously also a recreation centre for people who do not want to go canoeing, but want to have some adventure and fun, whether it be going down the river on a rubber mattress, or whatever. That could be one good use for such a whitewater park, although it is clearly not one dedicated to the sport of canoeing and the high-performance athletes who engage in canoeing.

The Water Corporation provided assistance to the Department of Sport and Recreation to facilitate private sector investment with the development of an alternative whitewater canoeing facility. That involved the preparation of a feasibility study for a Perth whitewater park in 2001, to which I have already alluded. The Water Corporation produced several studies into the feasibility of a commercial development of an artificial whitewater canoeing course that would possibly house Canoeing WA. The potential existed for a Canoeing WA headquarters at that course. The Department of Sport and Recreation has assisted other organisations with finding headquarters from which to operate. A headquarters would certainly strengthen an organisation such as Canoeing WA. The studies indicated that a totally commercial development was unlikely. In 2003-04, a request for a proposals process confirmed this to be the case; only one complying proponent emerged for the development at Champion Lakes, because it was not seen as commercially viable. The Department of Sport and Recreation's limited capital - it would come back to government; I am explaining the process by which government agencies have sought to determine how they could help - and the position of the Water Corporation have meant that it would have to be highly subsidised and, on that basis, proponents have simply backed off. We might reach a situation in which a whitewater park has to be highly subsidised. However, we have been working on the basis of securing a commercial proponent. If a commercial proponent were a percentage short, we would determine how much money the Water Corporation or the Department of Sport and Recreation would need to contribute - the money could come from a direct government grant - to make the whole thing work. We have not reached that threshold, because the development has been well short of being commercially viable.

The Armadale Redevelopment Authority expressed concern about the provision of financial support for the ongoing operation and maintenance of the common areas at the Champion Lakes development. It viewed a whitewater park as part of that proposal. As members have already stated, the Champion Lakes area is a fantastic area at which land is available. The area would be suitable to host a range of canoeing events. If Canoeing WA's headquarters were located at that site, it could use the rowing course for its events, as it did on the opening day. I think it held a 10-kilometre event, with the course being two kilometres in length. That is an ideal facility at which to hold long distance events. A slalom course at that development would fit together with the headquarters for Canoeing WA.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: Are you talking about something I am interested in?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I think I am. I congratulate the minister on what she has been able to achieve so far with Champion Lakes.

In 2006 the Armadale Redevelopment Authority again sponsored an expression of interest to try to provide commercial opportunities or incentives. It did want someone to thump up all the money and to run the whole

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thing independently. It was looking for incentives, in terms of the land that was available, to make it happen. I understand that it is continuing to negotiate with proponents. I am not privy to those negotiations. Clearly, there will be commercial issues depending on what gets off the ground. However, the issue is not dead. The Armadale Redevelopment Authority is seeking to pursue that opportunity to determine whether a proponent will come to the party and to determine the possibility of people investing funds in a whitewater park, with support from the Armadale Redevelopment Authority to make the park happen.

Mr T.R. Sprigg: Are you suggesting that in 2004 the Armadale Redevelopment Authority suggested that this was not commercially viable and that in 2006 it suggested that it was?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: No. I think that in 2004 there was only one proponent and it simply did not look commercially viable because the project required too large a subsidy to make it work.

Mr T.R. Sprigg: It changed its thinking, obviously.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It did not give up. It came back and suggested that it could hand over some land. To get the proposal up, it looked at incentives, such as free land, with perhaps a bit more land so that there could be an extra development and the developer could capture land next to it also. It was willing to talk to proponents on that basis. It is my understanding that it is still talking to proponents to determine whether it can get someone to come forward. If a proposal is put forward, I will be quite interested to see whether I can help, through the Water Corporation, to ensure that it happens. Canoeing WA may view that as letting the Water Corporation off, because it believes that after partnering it and working with it, it has now backed off in terms of what it believes is commercially viable. It does not currently have money in its budget to do it. The issue is that the corporation is potentially a partner in this if a proposal comes forward that does not require ongoing subsidies of any substantial amount. It might be a matter of a capital contribution that might be partly in land for the site and additional land. It might be part of the construction costs. I am wary of building something that costs between \$10 million and \$20 million if in five years that development has to be closed down because it is a white elephant that no-one wants to subsidise. Swimming pool operators across the state are knocking on my door all the time because they cannot afford to keep their swimming pools open. Many swimming pools in regional WA are coming to the end of their normal life and are facing huge maintenance costs. It is a major problem to which I admit I do not have a solution. However, I am concerned for those regional towns and the users of those pools. We must try to find a solution.

Mr T.K. Waldron: I reckon I could help you with that.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Perhaps we could have that discussion later. It is a real issue. In light of that situation, we are very concerned that we do not launch into a project that does not have a commercial basis, because the operators will continually ask the government for assistance, with the alternative being that the development will be closed down. That is part of the problem when there is a commercial operator that puts in money and then thinks it can squeeze more and more money out of the government because the project has not been established on a commercial basis.

Mr T.R. Sprigg: You mentioned that the Armadale Redevelopment Authority was talking to proponents and that DSR has some sort of role to play. Surely the Water Corporation has a greater role to play because of its commitments and promises to Canoeing WA. It should not be sitting back and jumping in only when something happens. Surely it should be being more proactive.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I will take that interjection, because it relates to the next point I was going to make. Canoeing WA has put the argument - and put it forcibly - that the commitment made by the Water Corporation has not been honoured. I have outlined some of the background of how that view was formed. On the other hand, the Water Corporation believes that it has fulfilled its obligation. It said that it would work with Canoeing WA to establish the project if it were commercially viable. It contributed money to the feasibility study, but the project did not stack up. It then stated that it was not its job to take it forward. The Water Corporation has backed off. I think we could have a meeting about this issue. However, if a whitewater park requires ongoing maintenance, we must come up with a model that works. Once we have a model that works, it would be appropriate to determine what funding comes from the Water Corporation, although the Water Corporation has said that it has made its contribution and that the wider public should make a contribution, which would then fall back to the government. That is for us to sort out internally in government. However, first we must have a proposal that is viable.

Mr T.K. Waldron: How much has it spent? It says that it has fulfilled its commitment. However, it committed \$10.85 million. Has it spent that?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: No. The thing is that it never had that money to spend. That is what I have been trying to explain.

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Mr T.K. Waldron: I know it is not your problem, but Canoeing WA has raised a fair issue. The Water Corporation - no matter who is in government - should take that into account. Canoeing WA has waited nine years and has been pretty patient.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: In 2000, when that money went into its indicative internal budget, the Court government never approved it; therefore, the Water Corporation never had the money. When we came to government, we never approved it. The Water Corporation has never had the money. It had it in its indicative internal budget. That is the difficulty. Someone must find the money. As with all water bills, someone will end up paying. It is appropriate that we find money for it, but the point I am getting at is that we will not contribute money if we do not have a high degree of certainty that the centre can run on a commercial basis. If subsidies are required, they must be clearly identified.

Mr T.K. Waldron: We must progress that as quickly as possible.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The Armadale Redevelopment Authority has made quite a contribution. It is trying to assist. I have left the matter with it. It may be appropriate that I take a closer interest in this issue.

Mr T.K. Waldron: Rather than drag this on, maybe at some stage we could have a chat informally about this.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Okay. As I have said, the state has made no capital commitment to this project, but there was clearly an understanding between the Water Corporation and Canoeing WA. We need to work through that, because Canoeing WA needs a facility so that people are able to compete and train on a slalom course. However, this also needs to be put in the context of what we have done since we came to government. We made the commitment to provide a rectangular stadium for soccer and for rugby. We have done that. We made a commitment to provide a new athletics stadium for basketball and rugby training to replace the facility at Perry Lakes, and that is underway. We have put in place a state baseball park, which we did not have previously. In looking after all the sports, the whitewater park at Champion Lakes is underway, and it will provide a facility for rowing. Clearly, canoeing is lined up, along with netball and a number of other sports. We have made clear undertakings on which we will deliver. We must find the money to do that also. That needs to be stacked up against the viability of this slalom course. I am sure that with the commitment of people such as Colin Thorpe, it can be made viable. However, we must be able to get a proponent and the figures on the page to show us that it is doable for the government, through the Water Corporation or whatever, to come to the party on that.

I will go to the actual wording of the motion. It refers to the Water Corporation honouring its commitment. As I have indicated, the Water Corporation believes it has done that. It is a matter that we need to continue to pursue, so that the Water Corporation is still a party to this, and we can ascertain what it can provide. However, the Water Corporation's commitment to provide \$10.85 million is one that was never approved by any government. Therefore, I cannot accept the current wording.

Amendment to Motion

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Accordingly, I move -

To delete all words after "house" and substitute -

supports Canoeing WA in its efforts to find a replacement course for the Harvey international slalom course, which it was forced to relinquish in 1998.

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine) [4.51 pm]: I will make a few brief comments. I note that Colin Thorpe is at the back of the chamber today. As a previous sports minister, I had a great deal to do with Canoeing WA.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson): Is the member talking to the amendment?

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I am speaking to the amendment, and I agree with it, obviously. I agree with everything the minister has put forward. In fact, he has given a very clear chronology of what took place. My clear understanding, as a previous minister, is identical to his. However, I will speak briefly on another aspect of this matter; that is, funding for sport generally in Western Australia and the disgraceful state of affairs that has existed now since 1962 with the federal government and its attitude towards Western Australian sportspeople generally. You, Mr Acting Speaker, in your previous role as an athlete - although, indeed, I am told that nowadays you are still an athlete - would know what I am talking about. This came up in some of the discussions I had. I have with me a draft of a letter I sent to Minister Kemp on this issue. In fact, it was after the discussions I had had with Canoeing WA and a number of others. I will read the draft of the letter that I sent to Minister Kemp some 18 months to two years ago. It highlights the position we are in with federal funding for sport in this state.

This matter could be dealt with in one fell swoop if there were an understanding by the federal government of how much it is disadvantaging the young sportswomen and sportsmen of this state. About three months ago the Prime Minister, on a whim, announced, I think, a further \$8 million of funding for the Sydney Cricket Ground because he was uncomfortable in the seat that he happened to be sitting in on that day when he was at the cricket.

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The last time this state received any major funding from the federal government was in 1962, and that was for the British Empire and Commonwealth Games, as they were then known. Since that time, the only money that has come to Western Australia in any decent sum was when the Keating government gave about \$8 million to the Australian Football League for the establishment of the two AFL teams in this state. In fact, most of that money was spent on the improvements to Subiaco Oval.

Mr C.J. Barnett: What about the hockey stadium at Curtin University? Didn't the commonwealth contribute to the hockey stadium at Curtin?

Mr R.C. KUCERA: It did, but in a very minor way, I must say. We have just had an enormous fight with the hockey association. I must compliment the minister on the stance he took on keeping hockey based in this state. I must give credit where it is due. We were in fact supported by the Prime Minister in that regard. He did not give us any money for it, but he said that that particular Olympic sport should stay in this state. For goodness sake, why should it not, when we look back at the gold medals that Australia has won for hockey in the past four or five Olympic Games? However, I go back to the letter. The draft that I wrote to Minister Kemp states -

The West Australian Government has watched with growing concern the concentration of Olympic and international level sporting facilities on the eastern seaboard of Australia, to the detriment of national competition, and the disadvantage of a growing number of young west Australian athletes, administrators, sports scientists and the general West Australian community, who revere sport as a way of life.

The slalom course at Penrith is one of the best in the world. It was funded as part of the Olympic movement when the Olympic Games went to Sydney. This is something we need to understand. All the major games that have taken place in Brisbane and Sydney, and in particular the Melbourne games just recently, highlight the disadvantage that our young sportspeople are suffering. I applaud the efforts of people such as Colin Thorpe and his organisation. I will not enter into the argument they have with the Water Corporation. I believe they have some very good, legitimate points to make, and the minister certainly pointed that out. However, I go back to the letter, which I wrote two years ago. It continues -

The State Government in the past two years . . .

I am talking about the end of the last term of government and the beginning of this term of government. I should say that the previous government also had a great commitment to sport; there is no doubt about that. However, we cannot keep doing it on our own. In this state, we cannot keep standing, budget after budget, and committing enormous amounts of money to something that should be legitimately shared with the national government of this country. I notice that the Prime Minister was only too willing to race back and turn up the other morning when our cricket team returned home. Good on him for supporting the team. However, what has he done to support the young cricketers of Western Australia? What has he done to support the people from this state who have gone on to become world champion rowers? Indeed, what has the federal government done since 1962 to support any sportsperson from this state?

Mr J.E. McGrath: What about Clontarf? How much has been given to Clontarf?

Mr R.C. KUCERA: The Clontarf Foundation has been well supported by this state government.

Mr J.E. McGrath interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Because it is a successful program. That was done as a political move, not as support for Clontarf. I say to the member for South Perth that he should be walking hand-in-hand with Colin Thorpe and the sports minister and going to see the people in Canberra and saying, "Well, you're not supporting them in terms of the people who could actually be contributing." That is what I am saying.

Mr J.E. McGrath interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: The member for South Perth will have an opportunity to speak on this matter, if he wishes to, but he should let the member who has the courage to stand and speak be heard.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: We are currently taking steps to redevelop the premier athletic stadium in this state. We have a comprehensive, totally integrated plan, which was started under the Gallop government, for sporting facilities in this state. John Coates from the Olympic movement came over to Perth 18 months ago - it was the very first time he had visited this state - to look at our facilities. Yes, some of them are lacking; there is no doubt about it. An amount of \$8 million was provided for the rugby oval at Penrith two years ago. The Prime Minister went to Whitten Oval just after the previous election and, on a whim, he provided \$6 million to \$8 million for development costs. What have we got? Absolutely nothing. We are building the house for Australia at the moment, and the federal government is taking the bloody rent, quite frankly. What is it doing for the young sportspeople in this state? Two years ago, we put together a magnificent bid, as the minister quite rightly

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pointed out, to bring the very first international competition to this state on a regular basis with our Super 14s team. In that whole issue, not a penny has come from the federal government - not a penny. This is the real issue.

In the past few years, the state has established an absolutely formidable reputation for sports administration, governance and grassroots development of community sports. In fact, in conjunction with the Australian Sports Commission, we are now seen as the leaders in that area. However, it has been all off our own bat. We have done it ourselves. Successive Western Australian governments have stood up and funded the likes of Colin Thorpe and his organisation, often to the detriment of other programs within the state. Everybody complains and asks, "Why is money being put into footy when it should go into health; why is money being put into the racing industry when it should go into education?" We do it because it is about the quality of life. I could not find anything in the federal budget about national sports programs - not a penny. No doubt it is hidden in there somewhere. Perhaps as we head towards the next election and the Prime Minister happens to walk into Bassendean Oval, or maybe Subiaco - maybe when he goes to Leederville, onto the Cardinals' home turf; I was there last week - we might get \$8 million for Subiaco Oval. Who knows?

Mr G. Snook: Come on the Cardies!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Yes. And he can come and put some money into Joondalup, because we have provided all that. Members opposite when they were in government helped build that oval, but where is the money from the east coast of Australia to support the people we have been talking about? Talk about east coast-centric! Just three weeks ago we had to fight to keep the only Olympic program in the state, the hockey program, because yet again the eastern states want it back. How many members on a daily basis have kids coming into their offices and saying, "I am in the national team; can you give us 10 bucks?" or "Will you give us two bottles of wine so we can raffle -

Ms J.A. Radisich: Ten dollars! You've got to be kidding. And the rest!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I am a cheapskate; I cannot help it!

This is beyond a joke. There is an obligation on the Water Corporation to examine what has happened with Canoeing WA. We all acknowledge that. It must be done within the confines of normal, sensible fiscal operations. It has to be done in the way the minister is doing it. We have some of the best sporting facilities in the world. I was amazed when I went out to Whiteman Park and found that we have one of the best shooting ranges in the world, not just in this state. Brigadoon is one of the finest equestrian centres I have seen. We have some fantastic facilities, but we cannot keep on building them on our own.

Ms J.A. Radisich: The State Equestrian Centre could do with some state funding.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Of course it could. I have visited it on a number of occasions. I am sure the minister was listening when the member said that.

Let us take the jokes out of this matter. I have never met a person more dedicated to his organisation than Colin Thorpe. For four years while I was minister he harangued me unmercifully, but he does it for the right reasons. We will look at this matter as a state government, but it is about time that members opposite - indeed, all of us - made sure we say to our federal representatives, "Fair go." How is it that the Prime Minister could walk into Kogarah Oval and hand out \$5 million or \$6 million a month or so ago? He went to the Ted Whitten Oval last year and gave out \$8 million on a whim. There was nothing about it in the budget; nothing was accounted for. "Yeah, we'll give it to you." And the seats are uncomfortable in Sydney! Perhaps we should get him to come over -

Mr T.K. Waldron: Bob Hawke gave us a day off.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: He did, too, mate. It was a great day too, was it not? It took me three days to get over that one.

Mr C.J. Barnett: You should have supported my canal. That would have been a helluva slalom course!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Yes. Let us return to the debate. Given the demand for international standard competition, when we see the kids on their surfboards and kayaks in the ocean here it is little wonder we produce some of the best canoeists in the world. When it comes to canoeing, kayaking, ironman competition and those types of sports, we excel. There is no reason our canoeists cannot do the same.

I applaud Colin Thorpe for coming here to push his programs, whether he does so through the National Party or whether he continues to harangue the current minister as he did with me. Let us be fair. It is about time we all said to our federal representatives that sport is not something on which we waste money. It is a way of life. How much money was wasted in the past two years on the Active After-school Communities program that was

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put up by the federal government supposedly to counter obesity? Millions of dollars of taxpayers' money have been spent on employing people to run programs that simply are not working. We lost over \$14 million of funding -

Mr T.R. Sprigg: Are you knocking the after-school activities program? You're kidding!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: We lost \$14 million worth of program money from the AFL, cricket, basketball and netball, because after we decided to have a joint program with all those major sports to reintroduce after-hours programs in schools, the federal government reneged on the program. Minister Kemp reneged on the program and set up another program, which may be good for a few, but we have not got what the major sports wanted.

Mr T.R. Sprigg: That's for non-sporting kids. You don't know what the program is about.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: We have not got what the major sporting codes wanted and we have missed out on \$14 million worth of funding because of that. That is the point I am making.

Mr T.R. Sprigg: Don't knock the after-hours schools program.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I am not knocking the program; I am knocking the thinking behind giving away the opportunity to involve all the major sports in reintroducing major competition in the school system right across this state.

To conclude, the federal government could fix this problem tomorrow on a whim, but it will not because we are too far away. I must say I am dreadfully disappointed in our federal representatives generally in terms of supporting sportspeople in this state.

Mr T.K. Waldron: So am I.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: We are silent on those issues. I do not think members opposite can knock us for what we are doing. Ours is the only Institute of Sport that gives a four-year commitment for the Olympiads. It funds our coaches and athletes on a four-year basis so that it can hang onto the coaches and the programs. What do we get from the federal government in return? Absolutely nothing in that regard. It is about time the federal government stood up and was counted on all the major sporting issues in this state. We will never be able to compete with the eastern seaboard if the federal government continually ignores the needs of our kids and our sportspeople.

I will not take it further. I commend the amendment and I commend the minister for continuing negotiations with one of the most dedicated sports administrators I have met since I have been involved in sporting issues in this state.

MR T.R. SPRIGG (Murdoch) [5.06 pm]: The opposition will support this amendment. We said we wanted to be bipartisan on this and we will be, notwithstanding the fact that Canoeing WA and the Liberal opposition believe the Water Corporation made a commitment in the past. One of the reasons we support this amendment is that the minister has said he is bringing the Water Corporation back into the fold. That is partly because he wears two hats - Sport and Recreation and Water Resources. I hope that will continue for a while. We accept the amendment in good faith.

The minister referred to the commercial viability clause in his discussions about a proposed whitewater park. All the correspondence we were thumbing through while the minister was speaking does not mention commercial viability at all. It seems to have been brought in later. That is the view of Canoeing WA as well. We understand that any commitment made by government has to have commercial viability and that ongoing maintenance must be covered, but we take issue with the fact that no commercial viability clause was put into the memorandum of understanding that was drawn up by the parties some time ago.

I refer to a question without notice asked in the upper house on 29 April 2004 by Hon Derek Tomlinson to Hon Nick Griffiths. The question was -

Did the Water Corporation ever make a provision in its budget, forward estimates, business plan, statement of corporate intent or strategic development plan for -

- (a) part funding; or
- (b) full funding; or
- (c) other forms of financial assistance to support the development of a whitewater park with artificial rapids?

Hon Nick Griffiths replied, "Yes." There certainly was not a budgeted figure, but the minister will understand that Canoeing WA would interpret that as some sort of commitment. Certainly we have done that as well.

Extract from *Hansard*
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We will support the amendment on the basis of working with the minister to make sure this happens. We believe that these commitments were made a long time ago. If things start to fall over, the minister should not be surprised if his name is dragged through the mud. That has happened before. It will probably be the mud of Champion Lakes, because there will be no whitewater facility there.

Amendment put and passed.

Motion, as Amended

Question put and passed.