

TAXI DRIVERS LICENSING BILL 2013

Second Reading

Resumed from 16 October.

MR C.D. HATTON (Balcatta) [10.47 am]: I rise to continue my support of the Taxi Drivers Licensing Bill 2013. As I previously said, this bill is very encouraging. It is a sensible bill with very good attention to detail. It is well overdue—not well overdue in the sense that there is disrepute in the public industry but there is the matter of public confidence. I believe this bill goes a long way towards reinstating public confidence in the taxi industry. The bill also goes a long way towards reinstating a professional standard of stakeholders, particularly taxidriver. I think this bill will benefit both the public and those stakeholders.

The bill is very well structured. The regulation of the taxi industry has been fragmented in the past with the Taxi Act 1994, Transport Co-ordination Act 1966, the Road Traffic Act 1974 and a number of subsidiary regulations that have all encompassed the stakeholders and taxi industry. In effect, they have pointed only towards road safety issues and not so much towards the code of conduct of taxidrivers and how the public can have confidence in those people.

As I said, there were contentious issues in the taxi industry in 2011. A rather large taxi forum at Ascot Racecourse, I think, proved that there was a necessity to move forward in a positive direction to make the industry more professional. In effect, it was recognised at the time that there could be bad apples in the industry. There are bad apples in all industries. For instance, when we have several thousand taxidrivers in Western Australia and the average taxidriver in Perth may be doing 2 000 trips a year, not everyone will necessarily behave in the most professional manner. Importantly, this bill deals with drivers behind the wheel rather than road safety issues, as in previous acts that have encompassed the industry.

Taxi driving is definitely a very difficult job. As previous speakers have said, taxidrivers may have to deal with people who have alcohol issues, people who are abusive and even people who show aggression and violence. I applaud this government's previous initiative of installing cameras in taxis, which has certainly given taxidrivers more confidence. However, this bill, as I said previously, deals with ensuring that the public has greater confidence in those in the taxi-driving profession and offers a code of conduct, so to speak, for best practice.

I am pleased to see that the bill is very well structured, particularly in the way in which offences will be dealt with. For instance, the commission of a serious offence by a taxidriver can lead to that taxidriver losing their licence. A serious offence might, for instance, be a sexual assault, which, of course, is very rare. The bill also allows for the disqualification of licences to be staged. There can be differing periods of disqualification for first offences and subsequent offences, and, as I said earlier, there may even be permanent disqualification of a licence, which would mean that that taxidriver who has not adhered to the code of conduct is no longer fit to drive a taxi. Again, it comes down to public confidence. From what I have resourced, I do not believe that the taxi industry has had a code of conduct. Practically all professions and industries have codes of conduct now. When this code of conduct is established—it is probably in draft form at the moment—after the stakeholders and the industry have been consulted, I would like it to be transparent and communicated to the public so that the public is fully aware of whether its expectations are being met. I am not sure how that would be done, but I do not think it would be a very difficult.

The bill deals with serious offences that can lead to disqualification of a licence, but it also deals with less serious offences. These are the irritating offences that we hear about quite often. I am referring to, for instance, those taxidrivers—again, it is probably the very small minority—who may refuse a fare, those taxidrivers who fail to take the shortest route to a destination, and even those who may refuse to allow a guide dog to enter the vehicle. These are common complaints. The expectation of members of the public is that these things will not occur and that they will have a safe and pleasant trip without those problems.

I am pleased to say that the operation of the penalty points system will be similar to the operation of the demerit points system for a normal driver's licence. Of course, more work is to be done on that, but it will also entail a probationary period for new drivers. I think it is an excellent system and I look forward to seeing how it is constructed.

I note that if a taxidriver's licence is suspended, a new application will have to be made, and there is a provision for remedial training. That is fantastic, because we do not want someone who in the past has shown a disregard for public safety to go back into the industry and to ignorantly carry on his business and not adhere to best practice. Therefore, I think the remedial training aspect is a very positive step. Apart from being a positive step, it is a type of deterrent, because taxidrivers are being told that if they do not comply with the code of conduct, there will be consequences. I think that is very fair and it is what the public expects.

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Essentially, this bill contains many positive measures. It is the first time that a taxidriver penalty points system, under which drivers will be held accountable for personal conduct, will be administered. It will also lead to a loss of income for that taxidriver if they pursue that path. In addition, it will be difficult for that driver to re-enter the system. It is a deterrent but also an incentive—a deterrent against engaging in that sort of conduct and an incentive to do better and not get caught out. This licensing bill will benefit the taxidrivering industry as the industry will become more respected. The bill will also make a great contribution to public transport in Western Australia. Training provisions will also be incorporated into this bill. I have already stated that this is a positive bill that demonstrates clear pathways. There will be a conceptual framework, which is in draft form at the moment. This conceptual framework will display and clearly identify the requirements, the consequences, the remedial training and the processes involved. I think that most industries have a conceptual framework that is important to the way they function.

I note that the introduction of this bill does not necessarily affect drivers greatly in its transitional stage. The transition will be over a six-month period. The drivers who are already out there and those people who intend to be drivers will still have to meet the same entry requirements. The current aptitude test will still apply, as will the two-week training course and the on-road registration test. It is very good that this new taxidriver licensing idea will be phased in. The process is intended to be streamlined without putting undue stress on those currently in the industry. However, I consider that this streamlining definitely needs to be given sensible parameters that will facilitate the adequate and, I guess, non-bureaucratic regulatory processes that will not deter well-intentioned and potentially good drivers from entering or continuing in this industry. We know that too much regulation can drive people away from an industry, but I do not think that that will be the case in this instance, because the professionalism of the drivers will be reinstated, and I believe that nearly all taxidrivers are professional in their approach.

Finally, I believe that the Taxi Drivers Licensing Bill will encourage best practice, elevate the profession and help create a transport network of taxis that will greatly benefit the growth of Perth and Western Australia. Western Australians and tourists will be able to travel in the future with the expectation that they will have a safe and pleasant journey, with no anxiety or fear. Once again, I strongly support this bill.

MR N.W. MORTON (Forrestfield) [10.58 am]: I rise today to make my contribution to the Taxi Drivers Licensing Bill 2013. I want to start by looking at the current legislation. The licensing and regulation of taxidrivers in Western Australia is currently rather fragmented between the Taxi Act 1994, the Transport Co-ordination Act 1966, and the Road Traffic Act 1974 and subsidiary legislation made under it—namely, the Road Traffic (Authorisation to Drive) Regulations 2008. As I have just said, it is quite fragmented, and this legislation is trying to condense all that under the Taxi Drivers Licensing Bill 2013.

I state from the outset that the overwhelming majority of taxidrivers in Perth do a fantastic job, so this legislation is not trying to be critical of drivers who go about their business in a professional manner; it is trying to remove those negative elements that have a detrimental effect on the industry. I will read an excerpt from the Minister for Transport's speech, because I think it succinctly summarises what the legislation aims to achieve. It reads —

The bad apples that I refer to are those taxidrivers who give the industry a bad name through dodgy practices, poor customer service or offensive personal conduct. The new bill will provide an objective, structured means whereby taxidrivers who persistently fail to provide honest and courteous service to their customers can be managed out of the industry.

I think that quite clearly summarises what this legislation is trying to achieve. The other element to this is, when one looks at the taxi industry in Western Australia, it is structured in such a way that the majority of taxidrivers operate in a manner similar to independent small businesses. They are not subject to the same direct supervision which is the norm in a direct employment situation. Obviously, without that supervision directly afforded to drivers, there is the possibility for some people to engage in dodgy practices.

The average taxidriver in Western Australia does 2 000 trips a year—a significant number of trips—and there are about 10 000 taxidrivers in Western Australia. For argument's sake, if we say that five per cent of taxidrivers in Western Australia are of a scurrilous nature or get up to some dodgy practices, then five per cent of 10 000 drivers is 500. If that is multiplied by the average 2 000 trips a year that equals one million trips a year. That means potentially one million customers per year have a negative interaction with a taxidriver in Western Australia and when that is given perspective across the sector, it is a significant number of trips. The number of people who are potentially affected by a negative encounter with a taxidriver could by all intents and purposes be quite significant. One bad taxidriver giving poor service can reflect negatively on the whole industry and a few drivers giving poor service could obviously bring the entire sector into disrepute and undermine the good work done by the majority of taxidrivers.

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On a local level, when I was doorknocking in my electorate, in particular the southern part of my electorate—namely, the suburb of Kenwick—I noticed a number of taxis parked in front yards. Upon having conversations with these residents, I realised that a number of them were themselves taxidrivers. Therefore, this legislation will directly impact on a number of my residents. It is important that this legislation, when it is enacted, will have a positive impact on the industry that they participate in and make a living from. I had a trip with a great taxidriver over the weekend who lives in Kenwick in my electorate. We had a great conversation—he certainly did not know who I was and I am not sure that it would have made any difference to be honest—and he provided a great service. Before we left, he negotiated the route that he wanted to take, he made sure that I was satisfied with the route and then we proceeded to have a fantastic conversation. We even lamented the Fremantle Dockers' loss in the grand final. Of course, we have 2014 to rectify that! I paid that fare with much satisfaction because I thought that these are the kinds of taxidrivers who we want in Western Australia and these are the kinds of impressions that we want customers to walk away with.

I come back to the point that I keep stressing: this is about ensuring that the majority of taxidrivers who do a good job are maintained and the ones who provide a substandard service are managed out of the industry. Customers need to know that when they book a taxi or use a taxi service in Western Australia that they are getting a quality and reliable service. Again, for me locally, Forrestfield is some distance from the central business district, which is invariably a destination for people wanting a taxi service, particularly over the weekend. They need to know that the routes are direct, the drivers are of a high quality and the services are reliable. Being stranded late at night or early in the morning, either in my electorate or far from home, is not something that I would like my constituents to have to deal with. As I have stated in this place before, a high number of fly in, fly out workers reside in my electorate and they often catch flights in the early hours of the morning. They need to be able to rely on a quality, reliable service, particularly if they are connecting to flights. They need to know that if they book a taxi, it will arrive on time and take the most direct route to the airport. Given the number of fly in, fly out workers who reside in my electorate, there is a high demand for this service.

The point system that will come into effect with this legislation—as the member for Balcatta stated—is similar to the demerit point system that applies to our drivers' licences for various offences. This will act in a similar manner, ranging from the most drastic of offences to some of the more minor ones, which although an irritant, still bring the taxi sector into disrepute. This system will allow the state to manage those drivers and remove them from the system if they are engaged in that kind of behaviour.

Following on from the member for North West Central's speech, I will now talk about tourists and visitors to this state. First impressions are quite lasting and obviously tourism is extremely important to the state's economy, and will continue to be. Therefore, it is important that when a tourist or visitor gets in a taxi, which is often the primary mode of transport from the airport, that they have a good, positive experience. To paraphrase the member for North West Central, they are ambassadors for Western Australia. It is a great city and one would hope that the drivers would have some local knowledge that they could pass on to our guests to ensure that their first encounter in Western Australia is a positive and informative experience. Earlier this year I was in London. As has already been mentioned during this debate, the cabbies there are world renowned for the level of service that they provide. They are very informative. London cabbies often know the large places and the tiny places; they know the city of London back to front. In fact, it forms part of their training and assessment to become a London cabbie. When I visited London, the Ashes was being played the following week, so if I could record just one complaint about London cabbies, it would be that every time I got in a London cab and the driver realised I was an Aussie, they started talking up their chances in the Ashes. So there was a downside to visiting when I did, but, of course, it was all in good humour and jest, and we all know the outcome of the Ashes. Onwards and upwards from there, I hope!

In finishing, this legislation that is before the house was born after extensive consultation that the Minister for Transport undertook with the industry at Ascot Racecourse. From all reports that I have heard from people involved and from the minister himself, it was a very fruitful engagement with the industry and the sector. This legislation aims to achieve what the industry has been calling for. With that in mind, I commend this legislation to the house and I am thankful for the opportunity to speak about it.

MR D.C. NALDER (Alfred Cove) [11.09 am]: I stand in support of the Taxi Drivers Licensing Bill 2013, which will create a better framework for the regulation of the behaviour and conduct of taxidrivers in this state. A person wishing to become a taxidriver is already required to meet exacting standards under the Road Traffic Act 1974, and this bill will not change that important legislation. Currently, the chief executive officer of the Department of Transport is empowered to suspend or cancel a taxidriver's licence if fair and reasonable grounds exist for believing that a person is no longer fit to carry out that important role in our community because of either their character or medical fitness. This bill will take things a step further, with the introduction of a number of measures designed to deter undesirable behaviour and better hold drivers to account for their actions

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while at work. Provisions will also be put in place to allow the timely removal of people from the industry who do not uphold the standards expected by our community.

I, like my colleagues, have experienced a number of taxi rides around the world and interstate and have had both positive and negative experiences. On the positive side, it is interesting that taxidriver who take pride in their job not only provide a fantastic service, but also look after their vehicles with a great deal of care. We need to positively reinforce that behaviour, but also take action against those who undermine the industry.

On the negative side, like everybody else I have queued at taxi ranks in every state in this wonderful country. I know what it is like to sit there for 45 minutes wondering which taxi is going to be mine, and starting to eye them from about 10 off. Once, on a 50-degree day, I hopped into a taxi in which the air conditioning did not work, the seats were vinyl, the driver's body odour was deplorable and there were no rubber seals on the doors. I was in a suit going to a meeting and spent 40 minutes in that taxi. It was a terrible experience.

Mr M.H. Taylor: Poor driver!

Mr D.C. NALDER: Poor driver—I will not go there! It was an ordinary experience.

When I first visited Melbourne I did not know how long it took to get to the city, but I later learned that I was taken on the Western Ring Road and over the Westgate Bridge—a journey of about one hour and 20 minutes. So I have experienced those situations that need to be stamped out. I reiterate what the member for Forrestfield said about the majority of taxidriver doing a fantastic job and providing a fantastic service. This bill will only apply to the minority, and it is an attempt to tighten things up so that we can all have a better experience.

The measures in this bill include a system of penalty points for minor infringements against fair and reasonable service. For example, this bill will make it an offence to refuse to carry a passenger's guide dog or refuse a fare unless the driver feels there is a threat to their safety, or to fail to take a passenger to his or her destination via the most economical route. Once a certain number of penalty points are recorded, periods of disqualification of a differing duration will apply. The types of offences that will lead to penalty points being issued are more minor in nature; however, they relate to conduct on the part of a taxidriver that may cause a passenger to suffer inconvenience, distress, a lack of service or just poor service. These are the kinds of low-level offences that undermine public confidence in the taxi sector. The introduction of a penalty points system alone will stamp out behaviour by some drivers that frustrates and inconveniences customers. More seriously, drivers may also face disqualification. Conviction for a disqualification offence will result in the immediate cancellation of a taxidriver's licence, or the imposition of a period of disqualification. Part 5, division 3 of the bill sets out provisions relating to disqualification offences, and will include prescription of offences such as driving a vehicle as a taxi when not authorised to do so, right through to assault offences.

Importantly, this bill will also implement a code of conduct for all taxidrivers. The code of conduct will describe the characteristics a taxi driver is expected to display when undertaking their occupation, the manner in which a taxidriver is expected to conduct themselves and behaviour that taxidrivers should not engage in. The code of conduct defines concretely, for a rapidly growing industry, the expectations the community has of a service in this state few people would not access across the course of any given year. Taxidrivers have a unique role within our community. They provide personal, on-demand transport throughout the state to people from all walks of life who require this service for business, private or social travel. Passengers require travel at all hours of the day and night on every day of the year, and often travel alone and in close quarters with the taxidriver. The community expects taxidrivers to be capable drivers, competent at their occupation, well presented, courteous, trustworthy, knowledgeable about our state and of good character. This bill takes important steps to tighten the regulation of this 24/7 industry, and to ensure that efficiency of service and safety of both passenger and driver is upheld at all times.

MR S.K. L'ESTRANGE (Churchlands) [11.15 am]: I rise in support of the Taxi Drivers Licensing Bill 2013, and commend the Minister for Transport for bringing it to the house.

We have heard a number of members on both sides support the need for the professionalisation of taxidrivers, but I start by highlighting the importance of this industry to the Western Australian economy. The chief executive officer of the Taxi Council of Western Australia advises that 2 200 taxis are licensed to operate in Perth, and that they transport just short of 26 million passengers a year, which I find to be an amazing statistic. The taxi industry is a critical element in the tourism supply chain, and in 2009-2010 visitors spent \$803 million on taxis. Clearly, I am not in the right game!

I will quote an extract about the Western Australian taxi industry from a report prepared for the Australian Taxi Industry Association Conference held in Adelaide from 28 April to 2 May 2013. The report reads —

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The service delivery remains high with 98.33% of jobs across the week being collected within 15 minutes of the call (3rd Quarter). Friday and Saturday night services remain strained with only 96.33% of Taxi Dispatch Service (TDS) jobs being picked up within 15 minutes.

So the industry clearly sets very high standards for itself. The report continues —

In 2012 Western Australia was the lone state to achieve an increase in service standards in Prof John Rose's (University of Sydney Business School) national survey. The industry KPIs require 99.5% or more of jobs more be collected within 15 minutes at off peak times and 99% at peak times.

Members can see that the industry is a key component of our economy, and sets high standards of service delivery.

For me, this bill has four key drivers for change: firstly, to reform the process for authorising who can be a taxidriver; secondly, to make clear the expectations of community members on the standard of service and behaviour of taxidrivers; thirdly, to introduce a process for managing unprofessional drivers out of the taxi industry; and, fourthly, to provide a professional standards framework to support the vast majority of taxidrivers who take great pride in their work.

I will now outline the significance of each of those points as they highlight the government's efforts to improve the taxi industry in Western Australia for the benefit of all Western Australians, and refer to the importance of the industry to Western Australia. My first point is the reform of the process of authorising who can be a taxidriver. As I understand it, the authority to become a taxidriver and how they should conduct themselves is currently spread across three Western Australian statutes: the Road Traffic Act 1974; the Taxi Act 1994; and the Transport Co-ordination Act 1966. Many persons regulated by these acts do not drive taxis as an occupation. This bill will create a better framework for the regulation of taxidrivers.

The second key driver is to make clear the expectations of community members for the standard of service and behaviour of taxidrivers. We have heard in this house that taxidrivers play an important and unique role in our community. We have also heard that, as a group, they operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week in the city and in the suburbs. They move passengers of all ages and cultural backgrounds. They provide a service that supports many different industries, be it for tourism, recreation, business or pleasure. A drop in the standards of our local taxi service would have a negative economic multiplier effect on our local economy and, significantly, it would also impact on community trust in that service. Unfortunately, the poor behaviour of one driver on one taxi journey impacts on the whole industry. I draw members' attention to two examples. The first was highlighted in an article in *The West Australian* of Friday, 19 April 2013 titled "Cabbie suspended" by Tayissa Barone. A driver was charged with two counts of indecent assault against a female passenger, and his licence was suspended until further notice. The second is in an article dated 14 August 2012 on Watoday.com.au titled "11 taxi drivers banned over sexual assaults" by Aleisha Orr. The points that Aleisha raised in her article included that 10 Perth taxidrivers had been convicted of sexual assault in 2012; 11 taxidrivers were convicted of sexual assault in 2011; in the nine months to March 2012, the Department of Transport received 52 complaints about sexually inappropriate behaviour by taxidrivers, 43 of which were about conversations of an inappropriate nature and nine of which were about incidents of inappropriate touching of a passenger; in 2011, 11 taxi licences were cancelled and seven were suspended due to taxidriver behaviour; and by August 2012, 10 taxi licences for Perth drivers had been cancelled following allegations of sexually assaulting a passenger. Our Minister for Transport, Hon Troy Buswell, is quoted in the article as noting that the high number of cancellations was evidence of the government's commitment to weeding out the bad apples in the taxi industry and that more taxi licences had been cancelled by August 2012 than the total for each of the previous three years. This is evidence of this government's attempts to make sure that we do the right thing by the taxi industry and the right thing by the community by lifting the standard across the board.

To safeguard the high standards that the vast majority of our taxidrivers uphold, this bill will help to deter undesirable behaviour. This government's effort is to safeguard the high standards of the vast majority, which align with community expectations.

This effort is linked to my third point, which is that the bill introduces a process for managing unprofessional drivers out of the taxi industry. This bill introduces two new measures. The first measure is penalty points; for example, as we have heard today, for refusing to carry a passenger's guide dog or for failing to take a passenger via the most economical route, as outlined by the member for Alfred Cove. Remember, this point system is to serve as a way of making taxidrivers understand the community expectation. It will do this through three clear measures: firstly, it will make them aware of what inappropriate actions are; secondly, it will get the drivers to accept the community expectation; and, thirdly, it will ensure that drivers act to change the way they behave so that they meet those community expectations if they were in doubt. The second new measure is the stipulation of disqualification offences; for example, a sexual assault committed against a passenger.

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My fourth and final point is that the bill will provide a professional standards framework that supports the vast majority of taxidriver who take great pride in their work. Remember, this bill supports the vast majority of taxidriver who provide an excellent service. I will highlight two examples. The first example is the 2009 taxidriver of the year, a gentleman by the name of John Kosick. His nomination reads —

In January this year John picked up a young man from Sir Charles Gardener Hospital who had left the hospital after treatment for a seizure. During the drive he ascertained that the young man suffered seizures regularly and was returning to his home where he lives alone. Unhappy with this he accompanied him to the pharmacy and told us of his plight. The young man then suffered a seizure whilst in the cab outside our store. John carried him from the car and placed him in the shade whilst we called an ambulance, and waited with us until they arrived. I believe the action that John took prevented the young man from seizing at home, alone. His actions were above and beyond the call of duty and he showed genuine concern for his fellow human beings. Not to mention the fact that the fare probably went unpaid.

The second example of outstanding taxidriver service is the 2011 taxidriver of the year, a gentleman by the name of Steve Carron. Steve was nominated by a female passenger who had used his services as a driver for the previous four years. The lady, Linda, wrote that she is totally blind and has severe hearing loss and it is therefore imperative that her taxidriver is reliable and efficient. She said that in the 20 years that she has been using taxis, Steve is the best driver she has ever had. She feels very safe with Steve and he knows where to go. He tells her what is happening as they are driving, and when they reach their destination, he helps her out of the taxi and helps her into the building. He does not have to do this, but he goes out of his way to do so. She said that he treats her as an equal, offering assistance only when it is necessary. Linda wrote that Steve has given her confidence in herself and has encouraged her to go places she would not usually have gone.

We can see that this bill is about making sure that the high standards set by drivers such as John and Steve and for the rest of their industry are acknowledged and applauded so that anybody who does not understand the basic community expectation does understand it and can act in an appropriate manner.

Although the point system is a deterrent for poor behaviour, this bill also introduces a code of conduct provision. I looked for an example of a code of conduct in a state taxi industry and I found the New South Wales taxi industry code of conduct. I would like to share it with members. It states —

1. Drivers must be polite, courteous and provide every reasonable assistance to their passengers.
2. In areas where electronic tolling exists, drivers must have access to and use an Etag or equivalent device at all times.
3. Drivers must wear uniforms at all times when driving taxis. They must always be neatly and cleanly dressed.
4. Drivers must make sure that the interior and exterior of the taxicab is kept clean and tidy.
5. Drivers must readily accept all hirings and not tout or solicit for business.
6. Drivers must comply with the rules and by-laws of their radio network, in particular, the provision of a prompt and reliable service.
7. Drivers must drive following all traffic rules, so guaranteeing their passengers a smooth, safe and comfortable journey.
8. Drivers must obey all Passenger Transport Laws, the Regulations and Standards.
9. Drivers must actively support and promote their network and do nothing that could be bad for its image or business.
10. Drivers must promptly hand lost property items to their authorised network.
11. Drivers must operate air conditioning as requested by the passenger.
12. Drivers must have an ABN and be registered for GST.
13. No taxi driver must offload or transfer to any other person, any request for hire from any intending passenger.

That is the New South Wales taxi industry's code of conduct. In essence, an industry code of conduct for taxidriver will set the standard to which drivers should operate and the manner in which the taxidriver conducts himself or herself.

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In conclusion, the Minister for Transport is to be applauded for his efforts to make clear the expectations of the Western Australian community and to deliver on the expectations for the provision of a highly effective, well-regarded and safe taxi service. I commend this bill to the house.

MS E. EVANGEL (Perth) [11:30 am]: I appreciate the opportunity to address the house on the Taxi Drivers Licensing Bill 2013. The bill will provide a single, comprehensive act covering the occupational licensing of all taxidriviers in Western Australia. It is a welcome relief to the otherwise outdated and fragmented current situation. Taxi driving is a profession of high importance and integrity and holds a position of great responsibility. It is more than just the operation of a vehicle for transporting people from A to B. I am pleased with the bill and I thank and congratulate the Minister for Transport for bringing this bill to the house, because we will now have a comprehensive framework for the regulation of taxidriviers in this state.

Before I continue, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the extraordinary good work of taxi-driving professionals. As a mother of three, I am proud to say that I am a non-professional taxidriver and see it as my other profession. As all parents know, we spend many hours a week taxi driving our children from school, to after-school sport, friends' houses and wherever it may be, and this is not an easy role. My children are now young adults and I am often called upon to exercise my second profession in the wee hours of the morning. I have indeed developed a strong respect for taxidriviers, who perform a critical role in delivering the night-time entertainment crowds home after their often big nights out. I take this opportunity to thank taxidriviers for their good work. They play an important role that is often undervalued and is not as respected as it should be.

[Quorum formed.]

Ms E. EVANGEL: It is unfortunate that a handful of drivers may not perform or behave in an appropriate manner expected by the taxi industry and the general community—and this is not restricted to the taxi-driving industry. It is unfortunate that their bad behaviour can damage the public image and perception of the taxi industry. Worse still, this reflection on the taxi industry may result in the public perceiving this form of transport as unsafe or one that they would rather not use. Customer service is the key to success in any business. Taxi driving is a small business, as is a deli, a cafe or a restaurant. The majority of taxidriviers operate within a small independent business structure and their behaviour, operations and customer service reflect on the industry as a whole. This is indeed a unique circumstance. If I visit an Italian restaurant and my experience is not the best because I was served a meal that I would rather not have been served, I walk away from that restaurant thinking that it is a terrible Italian restaurant and I may not come back again. However, I do not walk away thinking that all Italian restaurants are horrible. Unfortunately, this is not the case in the taxi industry. If a person has a particularly bad experience with a taxidriver, that person may then incorrectly consider the whole industry as not being the best. I believe that the majority of taxi professionals provide an outstanding service, but there may be one or two bad apples in the bunch who unfortunately bring the whole industry into an unsavoury category for users. It is important to refrain from generalising and categorising all taxidriviers as bad apples. This is not a way to reflect on the industry and it is not a fair judgement.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There are too many conversations occurring in the house. It is difficult for Hansard to record the member's comments. If members need to have conversations, go outside the chamber.

Ms E. EVANGEL: It is unjust and unfair to judge a whole industry on the behaviour of one or two not very good taxidriviers.

We should recognise and reflect upon the difficult circumstances that taxidriviers must endure on a day-to-day basis. It is a difficult and tedious job, with long hours, and can sometimes be dangerous. Members would be aware of the unacceptable number of taxidriver assaults and the sometimes unacceptable behaviour, rudeness or nastiness of passengers. Drivers have to endure this as well as carry intoxicated passengers who often struggle to even articulate where they want to go or, worse, may leave behind a horrible mess that taxidriviers have to clean up. It is not an easy job; it is not one that I would be able to do full time. We should applaud the unique and responsible role that taxidriviers play in the community and everything they do for the general public.

As I said, taxidriviers play an important role in the Western Australian transport system. In Perth alone, the taxi industry provides around 10 million door-to-door journeys a year. That is a significant number. A vast number of those journeys are late at night. Importantly, the magnitude of the service delivery of taxidriviers and the integrity, honesty and responsibility the public expects of them is recognised in this Taxi Drivers Licensing Bill presented by the Minister for Transport, which addresses many of the loopholes in the current legislation. The philosophy behind this bill is the recognition of the important role that taxidriviers play in our community and the expectation that taxidriviers in Western Australia should hold their licence in high esteem and demonstrate at all times the personal conduct and behaviours that the community expects of them, and applauds them for as well. If taxidriviers refuse to do that, they will indeed have their licences cancelled—they will—with the prospect that their return to the industry will be very difficult.

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Taxidriviers inadvertently wear many hats. I have heard many of my colleagues on both sides of this house refer to the role that taxidriviers play as ambassadors for this state. I concur 100 per cent with this view. Taxidriviers are often the first point of conversation that our tourists have upon arriving in this city and this state. I will never forget my first trip to Adelaide some 20 years ago when I jumped into a taxi to be taken to my hotel in the city.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, member for Girrawheen!

Ms E. EVANGEL: The taxidriver was extremely welcoming. He was a very happy chap. After he had greeted me politely and had put my luggage carefully into the boot of the car, he asked whether this was my first visit to Adelaide, and I said yes. We then began the journey from the airport to the city, and he enthusiastically pointed to all of the landmarks, telling me what this and that was, and discussing all the great restaurants that Adelaide had to offer, all the festivals I should visit and all the things I should do. This was a very welcome reception for me to a city that I had never been to before. My first experience of Adelaide was of this taxidriver and of how kind, generous and informative he was. Indeed, I must say that he was a wonderful ambassador for the city of Adelaide. This experience occurred 20 years ago, as I have said, and to this day I still remember and value it. It is important to remember that we live in a competitive economic environment, both globally and nationally. It is therefore imperative that our taxidriviers understand that they are ambassadors for this state and this city. They are the first port of call. The way in which taxidriviers treat people upon their arrival is an impression that will linger for years to come and may indeed reflect upon their desire to come back to this city. It is very important that taxidriviers keep that in mind and make the extra effort to be kind and generous and make their passengers feel welcome at all times.

As members know, I represent the electorate of Perth in this place. The electorate of Perth is home to this state's premier entertainment precinct, Northbridge. As members might imagine, Friday and Saturday nights can be quite hectic for taxidriviers. What we see often is the build-up of large queues at the taxi stands. I must admit I have often seen these queues while on my own pretty regular Saturday taxi run, most often while wearing my blue woolly robe, driving around at one o'clock in the morning to pick up my children.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Mandurah!

Ms E. EVANGEL: I cannot stress how important it is that there is a constant supply of taxis arriving in our entertainment precinct to collect people and take them home safely at the end of a night out. It is important that this turnover occurs as quickly as possible, for a number of reasons. First and foremost, I believe that the longer patrons wait in a taxi queue, particularly if they have had one or two drinks or have taken something, the more there will be a build-up of frustration, and that may, in turn, lead to feelings of aggression. The last thing we want to encourage is aggressive behaviour by people who are waiting in a taxi queue for that crucial lift home at one, two or three o'clock in the morning. Patrons need to be moved out of our entertainment areas and brought home safely as quickly as possible. This is an absolute must.

I need to highlight also that in the wee hours of the morning, there are few other options for patrons to get home safely. The fact is that our late-night trains cease at two o'clock. To be honest, if I was out at two o'clock or three o'clock—not that that has happened for quite a few years now—I would prefer to jump into a taxi to get home than take a train. The taxi industry plays a very important role in getting people home safely, because other than people getting their parents to come and pick them up late at night, or a friend who has not been drinking, taxidriviers play that critical role of picking up people from wherever they may be and delivering them home safely at any hour. That is a very commendable and important service, and often a very undervalued service. I therefore want at this point to again register my support for taxidriviers and the taxi industry. I urge taxidriviers to make themselves available to provide this service. It is difficult. Many taxidriviers do not want to be out at all hours of the night. But it is important that taxidriviers are available to provide this service, because we do not want young boys and girls, or any of our kids, to have to wait in a taxi queue and perhaps fall prey to incidents that we would rather not have to think about.

Unfortunately, I do need to speak about some instances in which the behaviour of taxidriviers has been unsavoury, particularly with people who are intoxicated, in many cases young women. This is not behaviour that we should condone in any way. I will at this point make reference to the comments made by my colleague sitting beside me, the member for Churchlands, who outlined a number of incidents of indecent assault that have been committed by taxidriviers. These are certainly behaviours that are completely and utterly disappointing and a complete violation of the authority and position that taxidriviers hold in our community.

[Member's time extended.]

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Several members interjected.

Ms E. EVANGEL: I am enjoying this, believe me! Where was I? How could I have forgotten? I was talking about the member sitting beside me, my buddy the member for Churchlands, who outlined a number of not too pleasant incidents involving taxidriver. It is utterly disappointing that these few—I stress few—incidents have occurred. It is completely unacceptable to take advantage of young women or men when they are intoxicated and in their most vulnerable state; they cannot defend themselves or think or act in a way they normally would. It disappoints me to have to refer to these specific instances. All passengers, regardless of their sex, age or culture have a democratic right to feel safe and secure in a cab. That is of utmost importance. Again, I applaud this bill as it sets out distinct and clear guidelines to distinguish acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours.

I applaud the minister for the inclusion of clause 29 in the Taxi Drivers Licensing Bill 2013 as it clearly provides legislative force for a taxidriver code of conduct. The code will outline not only the desired behaviours of taxidriver, but also those behaviours that are unacceptable.

On a final note, I thank the many taxidriver who make journeys for patrons an experience to be remembered. Just a couple of days ago, my 19-year-old daughter came home from work after having caught a taxi from the city—it is only a five-minute journey—and the first thing she said when she arrived home was, “Wow, I just had a great conversation with this really wonderful taxidriver; she was a really great chick.” A lovely female taxidriver really impressed my 19-year-old daughter. These are the kinds of comments that make us feel very proud and pleased. I acknowledge and thank that taxidriver.

I also take the time to acknowledge a taxidriver whom I have known personally for—I cannot say how many years, but I remember that I was quite little when I first met him. His name is Mr Steve Satchel. Other people in this place are probably familiar with the good work of Steve Satchel. He is a highly distinguished, respected and admired member of the Northbridge community. He is a man of integrity and he has offered his services to the taxi industry for more than 30 years. He has offered his knowledge to the Taxi Industry Board and worked with me in my previous capacity as the chairperson of the Perth City Liquor Accord. He has worked very closely with crime and safety groups with the City of Perth. People such as Mr Steve Satchel really elevate and define what a taxidriver ought to strive towards and how the taxi profession ought to be. People such as Steve Satchel provide that framework. I thank him once again for all the contributions he has made to the industry as a whole. People such as Steve provide the insight that local and state governments can work with to draw up the framework for where the industry should be. Again, I congratulate the minister for the bill before us. It will be a very valued contribution to the taxi industry and to Western Australia as a whole.

MR M.J. COWPER (Murray–Wellington) [11.54 am]: I rise to give a high-value contribution to the Taxi Drivers Licensing Bill 2013 and state that I will draw upon my experience in not only my electorate but also another lifetime to highlight the importance of taxi facilities in Western Australia. People in this house may not be aware that Pinjarra had a taxi service, but it is now gone. Twelve months ago it was taken over in a corporate raid by someone from Halls Head in the member for Dawesville’s electorate. The one and only taxidriver, Bill, who was frequently seen ferrying well-renowned business folk around Pinjarra from point A to point B because they had lost their licences, has now retired and sold his plate to someone in Halls Head. Now we have to rely on a service, albeit somewhat scant, from my neighbours up Pinjarra Road in Mandurah. We have a real need for the taxi service to be expanded in our neck of the woods. That very familiar white taxi, which did not go terribly fast around town, ferried people from point A to point B—usually from the wonderful Premier Hotel or the football club to their homes. It played a very important part in the community. As members are well aware, Bill is now retired and doing other things with his time.

Having said that, I realise that it is not until we leave Australia that we understand the importance of taxidriver as points of contact. Although I have not travelled extensively in my lifetime, when I was an Acting Speaker, I had the good fortune to go to Japan with Hon Fred Riebeling, a former Speaker of this house. When I arrived in Japan, I noticed that a lot of taxidriver, particularly those in Tokyo, drove the Toyota Corona, which I think well and truly left our shores many years ago. However, they still manufacture these cars in Japan. The taxidriver in Japan took great pride in their appearance and the presentation of their taxis. They had doilies on the back seat and they wore hats, gloves, coats and ties. As members probably realise, the culture of Japanese people is that they are highly disciplined and they present very well. I came back thinking about how they compare with the taxidriver in Australia and particularly Western Australia. I arrived at Perth Airport and my colleagues and I shuffled our bags to the taxi rank with a view to catching a taxi home. I got to the head of the line at the taxi rank and a car pulled up. I leant in and he asked me where I was going. I told him that I was going to Pinjarra. He said, “Sorry, I’m knocking off in five minutes” and he drove off. I was the shadow Minister for Transport in the state of Western Australia when this taxidriver took off and I was a bit indignant about being left high and dry. Eventually, I was able to convince a taxidriver to drive me some distance to my home address down south and in doing so my faith in taxidriver was restored. When I compare the standard of vehicle and the way in which

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taxidriv­ers present in Australia with taxis and taxidriv­ers in Japan, I think that there is room for improve­ment. I will touch upon the areas that we can improve on in a moment.

Some years ago, after the trip to Japan, I accom­panied some col­leagues from this place to India. Those members who have trav­elled to the subcontinent would know that it is a real life-changing and mem­orable experience. We arrived at Indira Gandhi International Airport at six o'clock on a Sunday morning and were bundled into a small bus—I took the front seat—that shuffled us from there to Agra, some 200-odd kilometres away, to look at the Taj Mahal. Having been a police officer in another life, my col­leagues had a great deal of fun jiving me about the many indiscretions and traffic violations that we saw on the road from Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi through to Agra. About three cows had been hit and were dead on the side of the road. About five trucks had rolled over and had broken springs. Of course, the road rule in India is that there are no road rules. Taxidriv­ers in India have an extraordinary talent. I never saw one incident of road rage, notwith­standing they had great cause for grievance about the driving behav­iour. The worst reaction I saw from these taxidriv­ers was a quick glance sideways before they focused forward again. I suppose that comes with experience and trying to avoid the next crash, which can be moments away. I am pleased to report that we managed a safe return trip from Delhi to Agra that day. I had never seen so many people in all my life on any given day, and I was probably very fortunate to have survived that trip. I am sure anyone who has ever done that journey would em­pathise with me. When I compare taxidriv­ers in India with those in Western Australia, ours provide an absolutely Rolls Royce experience! My experiences of taxidriv­ers while travelling overseas were varied. In Japan, the taxidriv­ers were very disciplined, precise, polite, prompt and efficient, which contrasted markedly with my experience in India.

A couple of years ago, the government invited comments on the service provided by Western Australian taxidriv­ers. A number of people made submissions. I recall a submission from the WA Tourism Commission. Members will understand that the commission has an important part to play in how Western Australia presents itself. The taxi industry is a critical element in the tourism supply chain and its role cannot be underestimated. In 2009–10, \$803 million was spent on taxi travel in Western Australia, contributing \$379 million directly to tourism on a gross value-added figure. Taxis are an important component of both the leisure and business sectors and are critical in moving passengers from point A to point B. The taxi industry may be many people's first experience in Western Australia. As has been mentioned by many members in this place, people will often base their opinions of a country, state or city on how they are received when they first arrive at their destination. That view often stays with them for many years, as it did with me when I travelled elsewhere. Airports are a core place where people engage with the taxi industry. With the redevelopment of Perth Airport and potentially in the future the development of another secondary airport for Western Australia, it is important that we consider how people use taxi services and other transport services when accessing and egressing airports in Western Australia.

People wishing to become taxidriv­ers should meet certain criteria. The taxi industry is a mixture of businesses ranging from large dispatch service providers to a multitude of individual sole traders, such as my good friend Bill down in Pinjarra. Given that the public is the customer and the community expects government to provide customer protection, the criteria should also meet the goal of adequately protecting the customer. As has been mentioned in this place, there have been a number of high-profile incidents in which offences have been committed upon taxidriv­ers and also customers. I do not want to go over them, but they do occur. The incidence of these offences is small compared with the total number of journeys that occur every day. We should recognise that the majority of taxidriv­ers in Western Australia are wonderful people who provide a great service to the state.

A couple of prime issues need to be spelt out and taken into consideration. First, we need taxidriv­ers who are mentally and physically fit to drive a motor vehicle for the purpose of carrying passengers for reward. Medical fitness tests are a common part of becoming a taxidriver. It should go without saying that testing for drugs—prescribed drugs and recreational drugs—is included in the criteria for assessing fitness to drive a motor vehicle. Also, there should be a basic test to show someone has a reasonable grasp of English. Applicants from non-English speaking backgrounds should demonstrate fluency in speaking and understanding English through a recognised certification or assessment process. There is nothing more frustrating than trying to explain to a taxidriver your destination. I experienced a classic example of that in India, where it seems to be the culture for taxidriv­ers to nod their head and answer “Yes, yes” when they are asked whether they know where such-and-such a place is, when they have no idea!

Ms M.M. Quirk: That is a bit of a generalisation.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I am giving my experience and not a generalisation. It is reasonable to expect that taxidriv­ers would have a reasonable grasp of English.

What is required to produce a competent taxidriver training and induction program? Some work has been done in this area in recent times, given the context of the national standards that need to be considered. The Tourism

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Commission proposed a number of different elements for a training and induction program. It said that customer training services were of utmost importance because taxidriver were the initial touch point for visitors to Western Australia from both domestic and international locations. Customer service is clearly an area that needs greater focus and emphasis, with both initial and ongoing training. People may have been in the industry for some time, but it is an evolving business and they need to change with it.

General cultural awareness training is included in our taxidriver training and induction program. This is important because we have not only a multicultural resident population but also many customers who arrive in Western Australia from a variety of backgrounds. Taxidrivers are expected to interact with a variety of customers.

Taxidrivers should have good geographic knowledge of both metropolitan and outer metropolitan areas. Those of us who live in the peri-urban areas of the city and major cities such as Mandurah and Bunbury know that it does not take very long for new suburbs, freeways and roads to be built, particularly under this government. Taxidrivers should have a good knowledge of those changes. There is technology to assist them, and people have Google Earth maps and TomTom navigational devices—some are already in the vehicle and some are purchased separately. They are sometimes very helpful and sometimes not so helpful, particularly for those who are technically challenged. Considering the various new attractions in the state, there will be a range of new tourist destinations. I think that Victoria Quay will become a focal point. It will be important, when wonderful facilities like Victoria Quay are rolled out and the roads have been reconfigured, to have taxidrivers who are aware of these new and evolving destinations. Taxidrivers will need to be cognisant of the changing environment.

Obviously, I am aware of the need to have an understanding of the rules and regulations of the road and of the industry. It is also essential that taxidrivers are well versed in the rules and regulations that govern fares. Nothing sticks more in the craw of people, than if they think they have been taken advantage. The taxidriver may have taken a different route or the passenger is traveling at a different time of day than on a previous occasion. When I go to Melbourne, it costs about \$50 to be taken from Tullamarine to the city, although that varies from time to time. Being aware of the various fees that are charged is also very helpful.

I turn to advanced driver training. Those of us who have been driving for many years probably consider ourselves to be very good drivers. In the time I have been driving, I do not know exactly how many more cars are on our roads but there are a great deal. In recent years, with the population growth in Western Australia, we are seeing an increased number of vehicles coming into our city in particular. That is evident on any given morning when we get stuck driving into the city. The state government is aware of that and it has taken steps to deal with it. As far as driver training is concerned, the taxidriver's primary responsibility is safe carriage of his or her customer from one point to another. I believe that satisfactory completion of advanced driver training should be required in both the training phase and upon licence renewal to ensure that the driver is able to handle the vehicle in all conditions that may be encountered whilst driving a taxi.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr M.J. COWPER: A reasonable probation period should be considered for new taxidrivers. At the completion of the probationary period, the driver should be assessed on any feedback provided by passengers as well as any infringements that may have been received. It may also be reasonable for a taxidriver to display their probationary status in plain view of customers, which may encourage them to provide feedback on their experience and could be taken into account as part of the assessment.

Who is responsible for assessing driver competency? Obviously, a number of bodies fall into this category, including the Department of Transport, the industry itself and the state government. What are the attributes of a competent taxidriver? I believe they should be polite, sociable and friendly. They should have local geographic knowledge, a willingness to assist passengers and the ability to deal with difficult passengers. They should be competent in the handling of money, be a safe and experienced driver, be willing to impart information and local knowledge, be of neat appearance and have good personal hygiene, the ability to ensure that their vehicle is kept clean and presentable and in good working order and a willingness to complete additional training to gain skills as required. I believe a competency-based assessment should take place on two levels—proactive and reactive. Proactive monitoring should include periodic assessment of performance, and at the reactive level, complaint processes form the main activity. Periodic assessments should include reassessment of driving skills as well as medical and drug tests. As the end-user, the passenger should also have the opportunity to play a role in ongoing performance monitoring of taxidriver competency. This could take the form of a mystery shopper-type program, as occurs in the retail sector. Perhaps a mystery person could travel in taxis and make some assessments. Maybe the member for Girrawheen could be our mystery shopper.

Ms M.M. Quirk: If they can put up with a grumpy old bitch like me.

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Mr M.J. COWPER: It would be a challenge for them. If they can pass that test, they can pass anything. Results could be given to individuals as well as the industry and would serve to identify areas of improvement for individuals and also for the system overall.

Information should be more clearly displayed. I think people should feel confident that the person next to them or in front of them resembles the person who is driving. Some members in this place might put up posters during elections that sometimes do not resemble them.

Mr J.E. McGrath: What about the photos on the wall out there?

Mr M.J. COWPER: They are a bit of a worry.

Displaying information that can be clearly seen by the customers would be helpful. The use of in-car cameras is also very valuable. I believe cameras in taxis act two ways: to protect the driver and also to protect the customers. That is something that should be incorporated, not only inside the vehicle but also outside. Taxidriviers travel many kilometres and from time to time come across incidents on the road that may be questionable. To have some sort of evidence to demonstrate that they were in the right is often very helpful. Of course it works both ways.

I turn to driver competency. The Tourism Council WA has a view that maintaining driver competency and enforcing minimum service standards is the responsibility of government. However, the industry should play a major role. I believe that the minister is bringing a balance to this place in the form of this new legislation. The provision of market intelligence and input will continually review and raise industry standards. As I mentioned from the outset, we all have experiences of various kinds. We heard the member for Perth explain how her daughter had a pleasant experience in a taxi. I suppose this goes to the confidence of people using the taxi service. I also have a 19-year-old daughter who sometimes returns home late from nightclubs and the like. Because we do not have a great many taxis in our neck of the woods anymore, mum's taxi gets the job of getting our daughter home at three o'clock in the morning. Had a taxi been available, the question arises of whether we feel it is safe to use it. The nub of this legislation is to ensure that the people of Western Australia and those people visiting Western Australia have the confidence to enter a taxi knowing that they will be treated well, be given good service and be transported in a safe and expeditious manner. I thank the house for the opportunity to contribute to this debate.

DR G.G. JACOBS (Eyre) [12.17 pm]: There has been much discouragement towards me speaking today. There have been a few barriers. One of them came from the deputy leader. When I spoke to him about making a speech on the Taxi Drivers Licensing Bill 2013, he asked why I would want to talk about taxis as I would not have any taxis where I live. That was the first comment. The second comment was from the member for Mandurah, who asked about the best time to holiday in Esperance. I said that April or May, around Easter, is a great time. He said, "We will be there." I asked who he meant by "we", and he said that his family is coming to stay. I asked who they were going to stay with and he said, "We're going to stay with you." I wanted to reinforce with him that we do have a taxi service in Esperance and I will not be his taxi service. He can use the very good taxi service that we have when he does visit my town over Easter.

We heard a lot today and yesterday and it is really difficult to bring in new material. I wanted to draw the attention of the house to the eight Cs in good taxi driving and what we are looking for in a taxi service. If I use all these Cs, let us talk about a taxidriver being capable, competent, courteous and having concern for the geography. A very common issue that we have heard and an experience we often have is whether the taxidriver knows the geography, the shortest distance between two points and the relevant fare. They obviously have to be credible—trustworthy, if you like. We want them to be charming and we like them to be clear of drugs and alcohol. This one is a little bit of a cheek—we like them to be cognisant of the primary language of the area. So they are my eight Cs in a good taxidriver—he or she—and what makes a great service.

Mr P. Abetz: What's the language in Esperance?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Esperanto!

Members have recounted their experiences of taxi rides, but I have probably only used the taxi service in my town once. It was to take me to the airport, which is quite a trip—23 kilometres out of town. Why the planners ever put the airport 23 kilometres out of Esperance, I do not know. They must have been very optimistic —

Mr T.R. Buswell: They owned the tavern across the road! What's it called? The Gibson Soak. You get a nice counter dinner there!

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The Gibson Soak Hotel, minister. The Gibson Soak Hotel has been quite a saviour for me and a lot of people. If the scheduled flight is delayed, late or cancelled, there is somewhere to retire to while waiting for alternative arrangements to be made.

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Similar to the member for Murray–Wellington, I am not a really well-travelled person, but I wanted to tell members of my experiences in London, Melbourne and Perth. I was very pleased to visit London just after the election, with the permission of the Premier and government, to see my son for three weeks, and I want to tell members about London taxis. I congratulate the minister for introducing London taxi-style cabs in Perth, but I also encourage him to go a little further in ensuring the taxi industry services provided garner the same great reputation as those in London. I managed to very quickly get a taxi from Hyde Park Corner at the west end of Piccadilly Road, up to Piccadilly Circus, which is at the eastern end. Hyde Park Corner is where people, a bit like us, stand on soapboxes and give speeches in a park setting—I did not give any speeches while I was there! The taxidriver explained the accreditation process for becoming a taxidriver in London. The accreditation process and testing takes place every three months, and significant tests and examinations need to be taken and passed to become a taxidriver. Part of the test is actually the driver's knowledge of the geography; they must have intimate, minute knowledge of the geography of London. The service is not GPS-driven; there is no GPS. The taxis accommodate five people and their luggage; it is a very good service. As I said, I look forward to riding in a London-style taxi in Perth as that service expands. One of the tests that particular taxidriver had taken had been to go to a point around Piccadilly Circus called Solomon's fashion shop. That sounded pretty easy, except Solomon's fashion shop started in the 1930s, and in 1999 it was actually a Waterstones bookshop. The test was whether the driver could take someone to Solomon's fashion shop that had become a Waterstones bookshop. That is the sort of detail, stringency and knowledge required by a London cabbie.

I visited Melbourne when I was fortunate enough to be asked to be master of ceremonies at my niece's wedding a couple of years ago. We were staying at a hotel, the name of which skips my mind—I am glad I am not a taxidriver!—in the CBD of Melbourne. We had to go—as it turned out, fairly urgently after my dear wife had finally finished her preparations—to the University of Melbourne. I am not talking about a long distance here; I am talking about probably three or four blocks. We hopped into the taxi and said to the driver, "Could you please take us to the University of Melbourne?" I kid members not, he said, "Where is that? Where is the University of Melbourne?" That very much contrasted with the London service. The Melbourne driver spent most of the time transfixed on the GPS on the dash, pushing buttons to find out where to go, and what was a 10-minute journey became a half-hour absolute nightmare in Melbourne traffic. Fortunately, I was not too late to MC the wedding reception, but that demonstrates the contrast in services.

When I do not have my electorate car in Perth because it is somewhere in the big electorate I serve, I fly into Perth from either Boulder or Esperance. I usually get a taxi to Parliament House, but it might be to my place in Lathlain, and the service is very much GPS-dependent.

I will talk more about the provisions of the Taxi Drivers Licensing Bill 2013. I have talked to my local taxi business proprietor—he will not mind me saying his name—Mr Spencer, who, with his good son Cameron, runs a fleet of eight taxis and employs taxidrivers. I just wanted to give members a little, if you like, regional perspective. Among the things Bill raised with me was the nature of the industry and unlawful taxis and unlawful taxidrivers, which has indeed occurred in my town. There was criticism of the present arrangements around unlawful taxi services and drivers, which will now be covered by clause 8, "Driving taxi while not authorised by licence". Bill's comment was that when it was actually discovered, the offender received a mere tap on the wrist and nothing much occurred. Clause 8 reads —

- (1) A person commits an offence if —
 - (a) the person drives a vehicle as a taxi; and
 - (b) the person does not hold a licence that is in force.
- Penalty:
- (a) for a first offence, a fine of \$10 000;
 - (b) for a subsequent offence, a fine of \$10 000, but the minimum penalty is a fine of \$2 000.

I think that would satisfy Mr Spencer's concern. Even in my little old country town there are rogues who actually try it on, and Bill will be reassured that there will now be a designated offence with a significant pecuniary penalty to actually give this thing some, if you like, grunt. Bill talked about the application process. He thought that was obviously pretty standard.

There is also concern about who is a fit and proper person to be a taxidriver, as indicated on page 8 of the bill. I think clause 6, "Fit and proper person to hold a licence", is fairly crucial. It is important that we have certain criteria and certain standards, as apply to doctors and lawyers and to other areas. I face registration standards and lawyers and people in the trades area face registration standards. It is important that we not have an industry in

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which someone's driver's licence can just be extended with a "T" component and they can just go for it. The clause states —

(1) Without limiting the matters to which the CEO may have regard in determining, —

I think it is important that he have regard —

for the purposes of this Act, whether the CEO is satisfied that a person is a fit and proper person to hold a licence, ...

The clause then refers to this legislation, the regulations and the code of conduct, which many members have spoken about today so I will not introduce any more information in and around that.

I asked one of the minister's advisers—I thank him for that—how a previous criminal record impacts on a person's ability to gain and keep a taxi licence. Obviously, there is a case-by-case assessment of the fit and proper nature of a person to hold a licence. Obviously, if a person has a history of being an axe murderer, it is very unlikely that that person will be able to gain a licence. However, if a young man of 18 years of age—we all have children—committed on New Year's Eve an offence of a nuisance nature, that should not necessarily exclude that young man from holding a taxi licence for the rest of his life, if that were his wont.

I think this point is really important, but it is not directly related to the bill.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Yes; it did not stop anybody else!

It is about the price structures and the appropriateness of the price structures in regional Western Australia. Bill is a steady and reliable person. He is a man I went to school with and know well. He is a second-generation Esperance-ite, if you like. His point was about setting the fares. Bill tells me that the fares are up for review now. In that review, they should be cognisant of the consumer price index and other factors. He drew my attention to the fact that the price structures in regional Western Australia should be cognisant of fuel prices. The price of fuel is reflected in the cost of running a taxi, because fuel is a significant component of running that business.

[Member's time extended.]

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I want to finish with the concept of the Country Age Pension Fuel Card and a couple of issues that impact on my constituents when they hire a taxi in regional areas. It is a fantastic program. The \$500 threshold has been extended to \$550. A lot of my seniors use that facility. They can use the card to pay a taxi fare. A couple of issues have been brought to me by constituents, and I spoke to the taxi proprietors about this matter. One issue was an allegation that once the taxidriver knows that the passenger will pay the fare with a fuel card, he might, in my father's terminology, "see you coming". By "see you coming", I mean that the driver ramps up the fare and skims a little extra from the fare for that person. A couple of people have talked to me about that, and I have not yet formed a view about what is happening there. I spoke to my local taxidriver about the mechanics of using a fuel card in my area of regional Western Australia. My understanding of the way that the fuel card is used to pay a taxi fare is that it is not an electronic system; it is not a matter of putting the card in an electronic machine. Another issue is that some cards are, unbeknownst to the person, overdrawn. It is not a purely electronic system in the taxi service provided in my region; it is a manual system. Normally, if a person's credit card is overdrawn, the machine will decline it, but that does not happen with the fuel card as it is a manual system. People may inadvertently—I am being very gracious—not know that their card is overdrawn. Then, of course, when the taxidriver tries to recoup the fare, which is a manual process done later on, there is no ability for him or her to recoup the fare. There are a few mechanical issues in and around this very good concept and facility. I am investigating some of those issues with my constituents and with other people to try to make this system work. Generally, it has been very well received. It is a bit like the Cabcharge facility; this is very much a manual system. I believe there are some taxi proprietors who say that they add an extra \$5 to the fare as a facility charge. They call it a facility charge. What is it for? Because it is a manual process, they have to do some work later on to recoup the fare. In that manual process, it is an issue of time, so therefore some proprietors add a facility charge to the fare. That is just some information.

I support this bill as it will provide for a capable service and capable, competent and courteous taxidrivers who have concern for the geography and are charming, clear of drugs and alcohol and certainly cognisant of the primary language. Of course, we are not perfect in some of the services that we provide. I often say that I expect my kids to be absolutely perfect kids. I want them to be polite, intelligent, competent and good at sport. I want them to be everything that I am not. We have these ideals. We want our taxidrivers to be all that, and I think they can be. But, obviously, everybody has a bad day. Everybody has had an experience of a taxidriver who was rude. Everybody has had an experience of a taxidriver who has just unlocked the boot, stayed in the taxi and expected them to load the taxi. How frustrating is it when people are trying to load the taxi and there is a big gas bottle or

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a tyre in the boot and they cannot get their gear in the boot? My experience has been varied. We know that nothing is necessarily perfect and none of us is perfect; however, there is an ideal to achieve, and this bill will provide a benchmark to try and improve what is a really good service, but a service that could be even better. I commend the bill to the house.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore) [12.40 pm]: I think the Taxi Drivers Licensing Bill 2013 that we are speaking on today is one of the most important pieces of legislation we have had for some time. It has obviously struck a chord with many here because many members have sought to speak on it. Many have reported to the house on their varied experiences as taxi passengers. It concerns me a bit that our taxi industry has received such mixed reviews in the house today and in the course of this debate. I put it on record that on occasions that I have had to use taxis, especially in my own electorate, I have received a very good service from taxidrivrs who have come to my call. I note that in preparing the bill, the Department of Transport consulted widely with the industry, and the industry is generally supportive of the introduction of the bill. That is probably because it is aware of the need to be able to point to a standard to be upheld by taxidrivrs themselves so that they are not subject to this urban mythology of the many failings of the taxi industry.

Generally, taxidrivrs are by nature people who are at the entry level of a small business. Often they may be newcomers to our country, and it has been a traditional starting business for many people and a traditional start to employment for many people coming to Western Australia. For that reason, it tends to attract people who may not have the greatest knowledge of local geography. It is good that we will have the ability to ensure that people who come into the Perth area will get taxidrivrs who have knowledge of the Perth metropolitan area as well as knowledge of what is expected of members of their industry.

In my own regional setting, only a handful of towns have taxis operating—although in the Toodyay area and other areas close to Perth, they play a significant role in getting fly in, fly out workers to the Perth airport. That means that taxis have to achieve a degree of reliability to enable people to make their flights. Those people will no doubt be very happy to hear that taxidrivrs will be regulated to ensure that they are meeting performance standards. I understand that at the moment, a code of conduct is voluntarily entered into by the industry to bring together what is considered to be important in good conduct in the industry. This new bill will see the codification of that voluntary code of conduct, it will see its redrafting, and it will see its enforcement as part of the regulation of the industry.

Hand in hand with that will be a system of point penalties. I understand that if a person accumulates more than 11 points in a 12-month period or a six-month period in the case of new drivers, their licence will be suspended. That is a good example—along with the AFL's tribunal system—of a point system that demonstrates some degree of certainty for drivers as to what they can expect if they transgress the code of conduct or other rules. Being small business people themselves, I am quite certain that taxidrivrs will be quite happy to see the bad eggs removed from the industry and to see the industry generally viewed as a professional organisation.

One important provision of this bill will remove a degree of ageism in the medical tests that are required for drivers. Drivers over the age of 45 years are currently expected to front up for a medical exam every two years. Under this new legislation, those drivers will have a medical examination at the same regular interval as other drivers—five years—provided of course that there are no problems with their examinations. The provisions make quite clear the range of penalties that apply to people who are not registered as drivers, and this means that unfair competition from “cowboys” who are not properly trained or regulated is taken out of the industry.

The member for Eyre pointed to the importance of people's access to the Country Age Pension Fuel Card granted under royalties for regions, which has been well received by people in my electorate; this is used to pay for taxi fares by people who do not have access to their own vehicle. I was greatly concerned to learn of the situation, as pointed out by the member for Eyre, of some sort of fare gouging occurring amongst some drivers. That is a situation that needs to be addressed so we ensure that aged persons who are using taxis, especially in regional areas or when they come to the metropolitan area, are not being treated unfairly by taxidrivrs. That this may be occurring is a matter of great concern to me personally. I will certainly follow that up with the Minister for Transport and the Department of Transport to ensure that this is not commonplace.

The training that will be required under this bill will lead to a much greater level of professionalism in the industry. For people coming to Perth, one of the first impressions they have when leaving the airport is the taxi ride into the city. It is very important that the trip is a positive experience and that the driver actually knows where the centre of Perth is, where the various hotels are, and does not take the passenger on a merry dance around the suburbs, and then charge an extraordinarily high fare upon eventual arrival at their destination. These sorts of allegations have been made in the past; that sort of behaviour does occur. As distressing as it may be to hear that these types of things happen to visitors to our city, it is encouraging that this type of behaviour may be

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stamped out by both the industry regulation and the training that taxidriver will be required to undertake in the future.

As a longstanding professional driver myself, but in a different industry as a bus driver and not a taxidriver—yes, along with the Minister for Transport who is also an old bus driver, I believe —

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Steady on the old.

Mr R.S. LOVE: They are coming out from everywhere, the old bus drivers. Professionals never get old do they? We are experienced perhaps rather than old.

We are very aware of how important it is for this industry to have a positive image. As members with experience in that field, we do not look upon drivers in the taxi industry as unimportant or treat the profession in any way as one that is not worthy. It is very much a worthy profession and we would like to see them get the opportunity to expand their knowledge and improve their industry. It is therefore essential that we embrace all measures in this bill that will lead to those very good outcomes.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 5191.]