

Beeliar Wetlands — Roe Highway Stage 8 — Adjournment Debate

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [10.23 pm]: Recently in this place at question time we put a series of questions to the Minister for Environment about the proposal by the minority Liberal government to build Roe Highway stage 8. As honourable members would know, Roe Highway stage 8 is slated to go right through the middle of the Beeliar wetlands. The questions that we put to the minister reflected the degree of concern that is felt on this side of the house and the history that many members on this side of the house have with protecting that area and opposing the building of Roe Highway stage 8. Those questions were not very complicated. Hon Sue Ellery asked the Minister for Environment whether she had been briefed by the Department of Environment and Conservation regarding the likely environmental damage to the Beeliar wetlands if the construction of Roe Highway stage 8 proceeds. She also asked the minister whether she had sought any advice or briefings from the Minister for Transport regarding the construction of Roe Highway stage 8. Hon Kate Doust asked the Minister for Environment why the government was intending to build Roe Highway stage 8 and destroy the Beeliar wetlands. Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich asked the Minister for Environment whether she was aware that 11 community and environment groups were fighting to prevent the building of Roe Highway stage 8. She asked also whether the minister had met with any of those groups; and, if so, what she had advised them.

In my question to the Minister for Environment, I referred to the Environmental Protection Authority advice about Roe Highway stage 8, which states in part that every effort should be made to avoid the building of that road through the Beeliar wetlands. Hon Sheila Mills, in her question to the Minister for Environment, referred to the study being conducted by the Department for Planning and Infrastructure and Main Roads, and asked the minister whether she had been asked to provide advice about the environmental effects of building Roe Highway stage 8. Hon Carolyn Burton asked the Minister for Environment what action she was prepared to take to protect the Beeliar wetlands.

Finally, Hon Jon Ford asked the Minister for Environment whether she had been briefed on the possibility that building Roe Highway stage 8 between Bibra Lake and North Lake would be in breach of any international agreements. The minister asked that one of those questions be put on notice, which I find utterly extraordinary. She has been the minister now for some six or seven months. It can have come as no surprise to her, and must have been mentioned in one of her initial briefings, that the proposal to build the final stage of Roe Highway was extremely contentious. The Labor government had in fact built Roe Highway stage 7 in such a way that Roe Highway stage 8 was not needed because we have moved far beyond the need for Roe Highway stage 8. For the Liberal Party to say during the election that it would do it left us quite stunned. It cannot have been any surprise to the minister when this was raised as a contentious issue. However, when she was asked whether she had provided advice to the study being conducted by Main Roads and the Department for Planning and Infrastructure into the transport needs of the southern corridor, she asked that the question be put on notice.

I thought I might help the minister to form an opinion about how the question might have been better answered by drawing her attention to a piece of correspondence that was sent to the member for Cockburn from Eric Lumsden, the Director General of the Department for Planning and Infrastructure, in which the relevant paragraphs read —

The Department for Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) recently completed a road network analysis study for the South West Metropolitan Sector (Fremantle to Rockingham). A conclusion of this draft study report was that a road network that included Roe Highway from Kwinana Freeway to Stock Road appears to perform better in terms of traffic flow than several alternative networks tested.

However, given the extensive development proposals in the South West and South East Metropolitan and Peel regions (e.g. Murdoch Activity Centre, Jandakot Airport land, Coogee Coast, Latitude 32, Kwinana Quay and Keralup), it is considered necessary to broaden the investigation of future traffic demand to the wider Southern Metropolitan Area including Peel.

This study is to commence shortly —

The letter is dated October 2008 —

and it is estimated that DPI will complete the work around mid 2009. The study will involve complex transport modelling by DPI and Main Roads.

For the Minister for Environment to obviously not know about this study and not be able to understand what sort of impact she might have on that kind of study, considering that such an iconic piece of wetlands is at stake, is incomprehensible.

The other aspect of that day's questioning to which I wanted to briefly draw attention tonight was international treaties. The minister was asked whether she had received advice on the possibility that building the proposed Roe Highway stage 8 between Bibra Lake and North Lake in the Beeliar wetlands would be in breach of any

international agreements. She was asked whether she would table the advice; and, if not, whether she would seek the advice. Her answer was —

As I said, the proposal is being considered and is with Main Roads and the Minister for Transport. She deferred to the Minister for Transport on at least half these answers.

Hon Ken Travers: Soon she will be deferring to the Minister for Mines and Petroleum on nearly everything.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: As Hon Ken Travers says, it is becoming something of a pattern in the minister's responses. She then says —

With regard to international conventions, no, I have not sought that advice.

That was another frankly incomprehensible response. I thought I would help the minister by pointing her in the right direction and, at the same time as doing that, pay tribute to some of the people who have been leading the campaign to have Roe Highway stage 8 deleted. On 28 October last year a letter was sent to Hon Kelvin Thomson, MP, in his role as chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties. The letter is from Joe Branco, who has acted in this campaign for several years. Mr Branco wrote to Mr Thomson bringing to his notice —

... a possible impending breach of international agreements to which Australia is a signatory arising from the flagged construction by the new WA State Government of a freeway extension known as Roe Highway Stage 8 ...

In this letter, which is extremely comprehensive and very eloquent, Mr Branco draws attention to the three agreements that protect the migratory birds that inhabit the Beeliar wetlands. They are the Japan-Australia agreement for the protection of migratory birds in danger of extinction and their environment, the China-Australia agreement for the protection of migratory birds, and the Republic of Korea-Australia agreement for the protection of migratory birds. Reference is made in the letter to the Minister for the Environment, and it states —

You may in the exercise of your discretion wish also to bring this matter to the notice of the Minister for Environment ... Hon Peter Garrett MP.

Hon Peter Garrett then wrote to Mr Thomson, indicating that under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, there are provisions that he was considering applying to any application he got from the state government. The letter states —

As you are aware, the Australian Government's responsibilities under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* ... in relation to proposals such as this focus on the protection of certain matters of national environmental significance.

This is a big breakthrough in the battle to save these wetlands. It is due to the work of people like Joe Branco, Phil Jennings, Graeme McEwen, Felicity McGeorge and Melinda Stephen that we now have this issue well and truly back on the agenda—the issue being the deletion of Roe Highway stage 8. The Labor Party stands shoulder to shoulder with the conservation groups and the community in the Beeliar wetlands area to protect that land.

Point of Order

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I ask the member to table the letters that she has identified. I think specifically they were the one from Mr Branco, and I think the other one was from the member for Cockburn.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon George Cash): The Minister for Transport has sought, under the standing orders, that Hon Sally Talbot table the letters from which she quoted. Hon Sally Talbot will be aware of the letters that she was referring to.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes. I am very happy to table them. Anything I can do to add to the knowledge store of members opposite, I am happy to do.

[See paper 637.]

Debate Resumed

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan — Minister for Transport) [10.32 pm]: I will take advantage of what is left of the remaining 45 seconds. I thank members for their advice, even though it is offered in a very gratuitous manner.

Hon Ken Travers interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Hon Ken Travers is proving my point. We are seeing a severe element of nastiness being exhibited by the opposition benches today.

Hon Ken Travers: Since the minister stood up and started his words with "gratuitous".

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: It does not reflect very well on him. Get over it!

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! I am trying to indicate that the time for the adjournment debate has expired.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 10.34 pm
