

State Netball Centre — Adjournment Debate

HON BARRY HOUSE (South West — Parliamentary Secretary) [10.05 pm]: Hon Ken Travers seems to have developed a fascination for what I may or may not have said—in my previous capacity as the shadow Liberal spokesperson for sport and recreation—at a netball awards night last year. I want to clarify the situation so that there is no misunderstanding.

Members will be aware that on 18 January last year, with the tragic passing of our colleague Trevor Sprigg, I became the Liberal Party spokesperson for sport and recreation. Since that time I have met with netball representatives twice, as I recall. The first time was early in the piece, in about March last year, and the second time was during the election campaign. I met initially with Robert Shaw, the chairman of Netball WA, and Lisa Bradock, the then chief executive officer. During the election campaign I met again with Robert Shaw, and with Scott Henderson, who had taken over as CEO. I became aware at those meetings of Netball WA's proposal for a \$36 million state netball centre. That centre was to be based at Challenge Stadium, and it was to provide a four-court facility, training facilities, a home for Netball WA, a home for West Coast Fever to secure its place in the trans-Tasman league, and upgraded facilities in general, such as parking facilities in association with Challenge Stadium and complementary facilities that Netball WA could share with the other tenants at Challenge Stadium.

I also checked out with the Department of Sport and Recreation the situation with Netball WA facilities, and the situation with many other facilities that were being sought by various sporting bodies. I must admit that it was quite a tortuous process to even get a meeting with Ron Alexander, the Director General of the Department of Sport and Recreation, even though I have known Ron quite closely for many, many years. I had to go through the minister's office, and probably a couple of other political filters, before I could actually get permission even to talk to a man whom I know very well. Of course there is a limit to what people can tell us when we are in opposition. However, I did get an overall idea of the issues, and particularly of infrastructure that the department of Sport and Recreation is involved in considering and proposing. I was alerted to the fact that a state sporting and recreation facilities master plan had been drawn up and that it existed, but it was locked away in a vault somewhere, and I certainly was not privy to seeing it. I do not know what the situation was with the proposal for a \$36 million state netball centre. I know that within sport and recreation circles there was considerable reticence about the scale of the development. I know also that some other counterproposals had been made about upgrading the facilities at the Matthews Netball Centre and so on for netball. Nevertheless, netball clearly had put up a case and a need for improved facilities.

I attended a few other netball functions in my capacity as the shadow spokesperson for sport and recreation. I attended the launch of West Coast Fever, for instance, at Subiaco Oval. I also attended a West Coast Fever game at Challenge Stadium, which actually was not completed and had to be abandoned because the roof leaked halfway through the game. That was a very embarrassing situation for Western Australian sport. I also attended the awards night last year, which I had been invited to attend. That award night happened to be on Friday, 5 September, the night before the election, at Burswood. I actually arrived after the event had started, because I had had to combine that function with another function that I had to attend at the WA Trotting Association at Gloucester Park. I was trying to juggle things as best we can when we have limited time to attend to all sorts of commitments. The other members of Parliament in attendance on the night were Hon John Kobelke, the Minister for Sport and Recreation at the time, and Hon Ray Halligan, who has been a long-time strong supporter of netball in Western Australia. I was made aware that during the earlier part of the night, Hon John Kobelke had indicated Labor's support for netball facilities. I do not know the exact nature of that support. I am not sure about that. I understand there was no written commitment for that either. I was asked to present some awards later in the evening and was invited to say a few words if I wanted to. I took that opportunity to present the awards, and I thanked Netball WA for its hospitality, and I congratulated the award winners, and in fact all netball participants and administrators, on a successful and productive season. I addressed the facilities issues by acknowledging Netball WA's need for upgraded and improved facilities and its need for a home for the sport, and by acknowledging West Coast Fevers' need for a permanent facility to secure its place in the trans-Tasman League, which is important. I pledged to work towards that end over the four-year term of a Liberal government, if the Liberal Party were to be elected the next day. There was no written commitment; I can assure members that I tried very hard to get approval from the Liberal Party campaign to give a written commitment to Netball WA, but I could not get approval. However, I was happy to provide a general statement of support along those lines. I could not make a commitment to fund the specific proposal for a \$36 million state netball centre.

After the election, I recall receiving two phone calls from Robert Shaw. One was just a couple of weeks after the election. Robert asked, "Where do we go now?" I told him that unfortunately I was not the Minister for Sport and Recreation, but that I would give him Hon Terry Waldron's details. About a month ago, I received another phone call from Robert Shaw on my mobile. I clarified what I have already previously explained in this chamber. I regret to say that he concluded that phone call in a rather threatening manner. This is obviously the

result of what we have seen over the past couple of days, delivered by Hon Ken Travers, who has politicised the whole event.

I have discussed the situation several times with the Minister for Sport and Recreation, immediately after the election and several times since, including straight after the second phone call from Robert Shaw. My latest discussion with Hon Terry Waldron was tonight after question time, during the dinner break. The minister informed me that he had had numerous discussions and constant contact with Netball WA through its president, Mick Pember. He recently spoke at the Netball WA conference. He was totally upfront with them and indicated that although he could not include the state netball facilities in this year's sport and recreation budget—principally due to the deteriorating financial situation—he would work closely with the sport to secure some progress, hopefully within the next few years.

I will continue to support netball; I have the highest regard for the sport. I have the highest regard for the netball participation rates, which are the highest of all female sports in Australia. I acknowledge and accept the need for upgraded netball facilities. I will continue to work with the minister to try to achieve that outcome. Hon Ken Travers, it seems, is only interested in the politics of this situation, and I suggest that he would be much better advised to actually work with Netball WA to improve its facilities and not to politicise the exercise.