

**RURAL AND REGIONAL WESTERN AUSTRALIA - FAILURE OF STATE GOVERNMENT**

*Amendment to Motion*

Resumed from 8 November on the following motion moved by Hon Tom Stephens (Leader of the Opposition) -

That this House -

- (1) Condemns the State Government for its failure to safeguard and improve the interests of rural and regional Western Australia and its misplaced priorities.
- (2) Calls on the Government to amend its policies and give priority to the delivery of core government services to all Western Australians, especially in the areas of health, education, community safety and public transport.

to which Hon E.R.J. Dermer had moved the following amendment -

After paragraph (1), to insert a new paragraph as follows -

- (2) Condemns the State Government for its failure to safeguard the interests of all Western Australians, most especially regional Western Australians, by its failure to endorse and implement the findings of the report of the Select Committee on Petroleum Products Pricing in Western Australia.

**HON BARRY HOUSE** (South West – Parliamentary Secretary) [10.24 am]: Yesterday I commenced my comments on the core areas of government that were being said to be neglected by the coalition Government. I will round that off by saying that I used transport, particularly the main transport corridor to the south west, as an illustration of why that contention can be refuted totally.

There is a stark contrast between the amount of work carried out on the main transport corridor to the south west in the years that the Labor Party was in government, and that carried out in the coalition years.

Hon Ken Travers: Tell us about the train line.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Barry House has the call. I am trying to listen. If members do not want to listen they have the option to leave the Chamber or to do something else.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Tremendous advances have been made in that transport corridor. As an illustration, it has shortened my trip to Perth to attend Parliament House by about one hour, and it has made the trip much safer in the process. It is most important to the south west industries that it services - agriculture, tourism and so on. I leave that as an illustration. Nevertheless, I am proud of the coalition Government's record in core government areas in the south west. I will now put on record details about a government initiative - the development over the past six years of the recreational trails network in this State.

Hon Ken Travers: If you are not going to talk about health, I will take up the President's offer. I thought you would want to talk about health.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Ken Travers, come to order. Hon Barry House has the call.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: By the sound of it, the member needs to take his medication.

Hon Bob Thomas: Very funny.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: That is really cruel.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon N.F. Moore: A Valium would be appropriate in your case.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Members should not push me to the point at which someone gets a holiday. There is no need for it.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The development of a recreational trails network in this State has had a major impact on rural areas in Western Australia in particular, and has not neglected city areas either. This has been more a quiet revolution than a high profile exercise over the past six years. In most respects, it has not been controversial. It has not been political. It is not focused on big buildings. Various people in this Chamber have commented on the Government's apparent focus on big buildings and icons. This project is not focused on a belltower or a convention centre, about which there has been constant negativity. People will eat their words on those projects as well, but that is not the subject I want to talk about. This project has not been subject to emotion, like the debate about forest products. It has not produced mass protest. It has simply been positive, efficient, effective and important for the sustainability of rural communities. It has had a great impact on rural communities in a host of different areas - recreation, the promotion of healthy lifestyles, safety, the improvement of tourism,

conservation, social interaction, cooperation, volunteerism and a host of economic benefits. I will briefly outline the background of that development, the cooperation across government lines that produced this result, some examples of achievements over the past three years, how this project has attracted national and international interest, and what people can look forward to in the future.

The recreational trails movement has been around for a long time. In a formal sense, it started in December 1994 when the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Hon Norman Moore, appointed a task force to report on a recreational trails network in Western Australia. We are focusing on walking trails, bike riding trails and bridle paths or equestrian trails. I was privileged to chair that task force and it is worth noting some of the members who made an enormous contribution at that time, and many of them still do. The first member to note is Mike Stidwell, regional manager in Albany, in the great southern, for the Ministry of Sport and Recreation. I will say more about Mike later. Unfortunately he is no longer with us, but he made a fantastic contribution over the years. The next member is Wayne Schmidt, program coordinator, Department of Conservation and Land Management; Rod Evans, manager, Bikewest; Pat Clohessy, district engineer, Westrail; Win Rose, manager, regional operations branch, Department of Land Administration; Jesse Brampton, who at that stage was coordinator of the Bibbulmun Track project; Ricky Coates, who was running a private venture called Leaps and Bounds Adventures; Jennifer Edmonds from Edith Cowan University; and Ian Purse, who at that stage was President of the Boyup Brook Shire Council. Other people made valuable input, such as Mike Maher, who at that stage was involved with Bikewest; and Peter Lagerwey, on exchange to Bikewest, was an American, based in Seattle, but who spent 12 months in Western Australia and provided some valuable input into the process. The administration staff was headed by Ken Burton from the Ministry of Sport and Recreation.

It is worth reading the terms of reference for the task force -

Explore the possibility of using disused railway reserves and other such appropriate facilities in Western Australia so as to maximise their potential use for sport and recreation purposes.

Develop a plan to serve as a guide in the acquisition, planning, development, maintenance and operation of these selected reserves and facilities for the purpose of conservation, sport and recreation while retaining these valuable linear corridors for possible future use as transportation/service routes.

Examine the organisational structure required to establish a State-wide Trails Network, taking into account questions of identification, ownership, management, development, funding, research and legislative requirements.

Any other matter considered relevant to maximising the use of the State's assets for a trails network.

The task force was focused, in a sense, but it was also as broad ranging as we wanted to make it. The task force produced a report which was presented to the minister in October 1995. The report contained 11 recommendations, and I am pleased to say that all of them have been implemented. That is a little unusual in this place, where a lot of reports are presented by committees of various sorts and are left to gather dust. We deliberately focused on producing a realistic report and achievable recommendations. That was one of our motivating themes. We also identified recreation as the lead activity in this exercise and focused our efforts on using the government agency that already existed, the Ministry of Sport and Recreation, as the lead agency in the process.

Another motivating theme was to maintain community involvement and direct community input into the process. As I said, we wanted to keep our recommendations achievable. One of our recommendations revolved around the establishment of a unit called Trailswest within the Ministry of Sport and Recreation. I will say more about that later. There was talk about the creation of statutory authorities and various other processes, but this would have been complicated, and I am convinced that we came up with the best model.

Another motivating theme was to maintain community involvement and direct community input into the process. We wanted to keep the recommendations achievable. One recommendation was to establish a unit called Trailswest within the Ministry of Sport and Recreation. There was discussion about the establishment of statutory authorities but it was considered too complicated. I am convinced that we came up with the right model.

Another motivating theme was the need for coordination and the development of a facilitation process that had some autonomy, so that it could work across government agencies and in the wider community and have the advantages of the public sector through its attachment to a government agency. The major motivating theme was the many benefits of trails that have been identified and that are available for use by individuals, communities, corporations and other bodies.

The establishment of Trailswest was a major recommendation. Trailswest is now established as a unit within the Ministry of Sport and Recreation. As a coordinating agency it has responsibility for policy, planning and design

guidelines, advice, community liaison support and education, coordination, promotion and information. The ministry was convinced that the model would work and it has proven to be correct. We wanted a model that would guarantee public input and coordination and facilitation between all relevant government departments because, in many of the exercises, numerous government departments are involved. The ministry wanted a structure that would provide channelling for funds from state, commonwealth and other funding agencies.

Two other important bodies are attached to Trailswest. One is an advisory committee. The advisory committee is designed to ensure consistent and meaningful public participation in the overall direction of trail development in Western Australia. It is a policy agency that has input into Trailswest. The other body is the interagency coordination panel. It has been included to provide Trailswest with the expertise and advice required to resolve issues relevant to a range of government departments as they arise. That is the background to the establishment of Trailswest in October 1997. It was established only three years ago. Three years is not a long time in the scheme of things but it has been a period of positive achievement.

The officers appointed to Trailswest in 1997 were Ken Ashman and Ewen MacGregor. They are still with Trailswest. They have taken on their roles with enthusiasm and vigour. Without being offensive to public servants, I must say they did not approach their roles like typical public servants. They regard their roles as being semiautonomous and they are very committed. They perform their roles above and beyond the call of duty. That has been proven by what has been achieved over the past three years. The membership of the Trailswest advisory committee has changed over the past three years but the chairman, David Forster, has remained. He has provided outstanding leadership in that role and in providing policy direction. He is a great organiser and a man of innovative ideas. More importantly, he knows how to get things done and how to network.

The interagency panel was headed by Mike Stidwell, the regional manager of the Ministry of Sport and Recreation's great southern region. Mike Stidwell was on the original task force and I regard him as a visionary about the recreational value of trails. Unfortunately, Mike passed away earlier this year, after battling a severe illness for several years. I am pleased to acknowledge his contribution. Before he passed away a bridle path in Albany was named the Mike Stidwell Equestrian Trail in his honour. He, his family and the many people he worked with over the years were very proud of that achievement. The Mike Stidwell Equestrian Trail will recognise in perpetuity his contribution to trails and to recreation throughout the great southern, and also his love of horses.

Trailswest has been a great success story in its first three years of operation. I will try to categorise some of the things it has done to produce a positive impact throughout Western Australia, particularly in rural areas. Most obviously, Trailswest has organised and coordinated the funding of the trails movement. This funding program has enjoyed the generous assistance of the Lotteries Commission, which has contributed \$500 000 a year over three years, a total of \$1.5m, and recently has made a commitment to extend that funding on the same basis for another three years. This is seed money, because as a result of large community involvement every dollar spent produces manyfold benefits in the local community. Some details of this funding are relevant to this debate. The allocation of funds to the metropolitan area over the three years of operation has been \$391 930, or 26.08 per cent of the total funds. Therefore, 74 per cent of the funds have gone into country Western Australia. That is almost the direct reversal of the population distribution of Western Australia, and the reason this program is of such value to areas outside of Perth. The south west is quite prominent in the scheme of things, having attracted 22.57 per cent of the available funds. That is easy to explain, because most of the areas suitable for trail development and trail use are in the south west, but other areas have not been excluded. The Gascoyne, the Pilbara, the Peel region, the midlands, the mid west, the Kimberley, great southern, goldfields and central south have all received significant allocations over the three years. I seek leave to table a document containing a summary of the projects that have received funding over the past three years.

Leave granted. [See paper No 483.]

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That illustrates a wide range of projects and activities throughout the State that have received direct benefit from this program. One of the other major activities of Trailswest has been to take over the carriage and organisation of the state trails conference. This has been held annually since June 1994 when the first trails conference was held in Margaret River - right in my backyard. That conference provided the stimulus for much of what has occurred subsequently. It generated interest and allowed for a coordinated and unified approach in this State. For various reasons, this year's state trails conference will be held in April next year. The state conferences are valuable networking exercises, and have attracted significant attention from all over this State, as well as nationally and internationally. Trails conferences have extended worldwide. This is an international movement. It is not a mass movement like the save the whales protest movement; it is a movement that has generated interest among normal, everyday people to become involved in their local communities. Western Australia has played a significant role in at least two international conferences. I have

attended two conferences held overseas. The first was in February 1998 in San Diego in the United States. It was billed as the first international trails and greenways conference. Although the Americans' definition of international sometimes does not extend beyond their borders, we knew what they meant.

The Western Australian delegation comprised five people and they made a significant impact. I also attended that conference, as did other Western Australians - David Forster, Ken Ashman and Mike Maher. Other delegates came from Europe, New Zealand, and South Africa and from all over the world. That conference was followed up in 1999 by the second international trails and greenways conference held in Pittsburg in America. The second conference was attended by Ewan MacGregor and Jim Krynen from Bikewest, which is attached to the Department of Transport, and Annie Keating from the Friends of the Bibbulmun Track. The Western Australian delegates were given a central role at those two conferences. The Trailswest representatives presented outstanding papers. People from other parts of the world came to view the Western Australian structure and process as a successful model. That is a great credit to the Minister for Sport and Recreation, who has facilitated that process. Most importantly, it is a great credit to the people who made it work. Western Australia is not big in the scheme of things on the world stage, so it was a great achievement that a State of just under two million people could make a major presentation to a world conference. People from around the world agreed that the Western Australian process and structure was a success, and that they needed a better system.

A national conference was held in Mansfield, Victoria, this year. I was not able to attend, but 12 Western Australians attended, including Trailswest representatives. Once again, Trailswest was invited to play a major role in that conference and we as a State have been given the carriage of the national conference in 2002.

It is very satisfying to say that Trailswest has successfully implemented all 11 recommendations in the task force report. Trailswest has become a central point for a range of information on risk management, standards and guidelines, the intellectual property generated by the work in the past few years and background information from all over the world.

Through its structure, Trailswest has become involved in many other ventures. It has become a partner with the Department of Conservation and Land Management, particularly in the management of the Bibbulmun Track, which is an outstanding story in its own right. Whenever Western Australians go elsewhere in the world to promote the features of this area, the Bibbulmun Track is an icon that stands out as one of the best on world standards. Trailswest has played a major role in that partnership with CALM. We must pay credit to the Lotteries Commission for recognising the health and other benefits of trails, and for coming to the party and supporting Trailswest with funding.

Another major partnership has been emerging for several years between Bikewest and the Department of Transport. Bikewest has done a terrific job, mostly around Perth, by providing sealed cycle tracks and dual-use pathways. In response to increasing research around the world - Western Australia is no exception - more and more people are taking to cycling as a recreational activity rather than merely an activity that takes them to work or another destination. Bikewest, through the Transport ministry, is refocussing its attention towards recreational cycling and some funds will follow for that, which will be particularly important for areas outside Perth. Perth is developing the Perth bike plan that is the envy of many other cities in the world. Rural areas are looking not so much at sealed paths but, rather, dual-use paths that are useful for mountain bikes as well as walking and, in some cases, equestrian activities.

One of the icons currently being developed by Trailswest - the leader in this activity with CALM - is the Hardwood Trail, a long distance mountain bike trail in Western Australia using parts of the old Bibbulmun Track alignment. Significant funds have now been allocated to that trail, which will become a major attraction in Western Australia, along with the Bibbulmun Track and other outstanding tracks such as the Cape to Cape Walk Track, with which I am personally involved as the patron of the friends group.

Before my time runs out I should mention that the initial motivating force was to maintain community involvement. This has been done successfully and beyond my expectations. The Bibbulmun Track was initially kicked off and funded by CALM. The track is now organised virtually solely by the Friends of the Bibbulmun Track in conjunction with the Department of Conservation and Land Management. This organisation is an outstanding success. People from all walks of life, of all ages and with all sorts of interests have become members of the Friends of the Bibbulmun Track and are prepared, through voluntary efforts, to make a contribution towards looking after sections of it. The same model has been implemented by the Friends of the Cape to Cape Walk Track, which runs from Cape Naturaliste to Cape Leeuwin. Some of the coastal scenery along that track is outstanding, just like that in the lower reaches of the Bibbulmun Track. The support of these trails by these "friends of" community organisations has been a great success.

The future is very rosy, because the community is not demanding in the way that a lot of other issues we confront as legislators are. Members get letters protesting about issues and saying that we must do this or that. Either that or somebody will make an appointment with us or there is a protest at the front of Parliament House.

It is not that sort of movement. The community demand is quiet and solid. We owe it to the community to deliver more of the facilities that can be used by people of all ages and backgrounds.

Trailswest is the glue in the whole process. It is putting together a state trails network. That might sound a bit ambitious, but the task force originally looked at the disused railway lines around the State. The report contains a Westrail map of railway reserves from 1938. It is literally a spider's web network throughout the south west of the State. An enormous advantage for the State is that most of that land is still in public ownership. The reserves are great assets for the State. The state trails network is slowly coming together, and a state trails master plan is currently being worked on by Jesse Brampton and Mike Maher. There is closer cooperation with Bikewest and the Department of Transport, and we will hear a lot more about that in the future. That is an exciting prospect. The funds that have been committed through the Lotteries Commission and organised through the Trailswest program will now be supplemented by funds that will become available through Bikewest and the Department of Transport. Other funding sources can be tapped into as well. That is seed money that can be multiplied manyfold in the community.

I know that there will be more concentration on promotion and marketing of the product. A good example of that is in Victoria. It has linked its trail development to its tourism ministry and has produced some outstanding tourism documentation to promote what it has in the State.

Individually, the Bibbulmun Track documentation is good and Bikewest has produced some outstanding products. I am happy to distribute a series of Bikewest mountain bike maps for the information of members.

Another major challenge is to involve the Federal Government. As a result of the international conferences in America, a movement has been developing over a couple of years. It was locally based, but it was able to tap into federal funding, and of course that is where the big dollars are. At the last conference I attended in Pittsburgh, the US Department of Transportation accepted it as a mainstream role for transport. It was using terms such as "non-motorised transport" and "soft transport". That sort of terminology is being used in Western Australia as well. Therefore, it is being acknowledged as a transport medium as well as a recreational medium, with all the other associated benefits.

Hon Peter Foss: I see that this map was prepared by the mapping section of the Department of Conservation and Land Management, which does a fantastic job.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes. Over the past couple of years I have meant to put on record some of those achievements.

Hon N.F. Moore: Don't be bashful about your own contributions. You have made a magnificent contribution.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I was pleased to play a role in chairing the original task force and to have followed the matter through since then. It is one of the most satisfying things I have done during my parliamentary career, and it has been of great benefit to Western Australia.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.