

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION APPLICATIONS

670. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:

I refer to the Premier's claims that his government will strengthen governance, accountability and transparency across government and I note the 37 freedom of information requests lodged by the Nationals WA since May last year.

- (1) Does the Premier consider it acceptable that 10 out of the 37 requests took 100 days or longer to be finalised?
- (2) Does the Premier consider it acceptable that two of these requests on important issues such as his education minister's suite of education cuts and bullying concerns at Southern Ports Authority were overdue by more than three months?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

- (1)–(2) The government believes in transparency and accountability. We have done our upmost to approve systems in government to achieve that. Members might note that we have given the Auditor General access to cabinet documents, something that the Langouant report suggested should occur and had not occurred before, but we are allowing under this government. When it comes to freedom of information, of course a Labor achievement in government, it is true that in the 2017–18 financial year there have been 156 FOI applications to the government. Compare that with the 2016–17 financial year, when there were 79. In other words, it is roughly double the number of FOI applications.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr M. McGOWAN: There is roughly double the number of FOI applications —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Mr Speaker, I am giving a very reasonable answer to the question. Double the number of FOI applications and of course we are going to find that there is enormous pressure to deal with those FOI applications.

Tabling of Paper

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I believe the Premier was reading from an official document. I wondered whether you could ask the Premier if he would table it.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I did not quote from it and I was not reading from it.

The SPEAKER: Premier, were you just quoting from it or were you reading from it?

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is a document —

Dr M.D. Nahan: He was reading from it.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I am trying to answer a question here, Mr Speaker. It is a document prepared for Parliament on freedom of information. At the top it has the number of applications received in the latest financial year compared with the earlier financial year. I quoted the two figures, 2017–18 and 2016–17. But, Mr Speaker, I am happy to table it. I do not care; all it does is point out all the opposition's dysfunction and failures. That is all it does. If the opposition wants to know all about dysfunction and failures, I will point all this out. What is more, I will read it out to the house if they like.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr M. McGOWAN: Here we go; the whole thing. It states —

- The FOI unit within DPC is under enormous pressure.
- There were 156 Applications received in the 17/18 financial year.
- Compare that to the;
 - 2016/17 financial year—79 applications.

- 2015/16 financial year—94 applications.
- The largest number of FOI have come from the LOOP.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr M. McGOWAN: You wanted it and now you are going to get it.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! I want to hear the answer. You asked the Premier to read, and he is reading it. Listen.

Point of Order

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Mr Speaker, my request was for the Premier to table it and there was not an expectation for him to read it out. I am happy for him to table it. As I understand it, Mr Speaker, the Premier has acceded to that request.

The SPEAKER: Member, the Premier is going to table it, so you have got your point of order.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr M. McGOWAN: I want to be completely transparent and accountable. I want to give you everything.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr M. McGOWAN: The document continues —

- Many of these have been nuisance FOI applications with broad scope and imprecise requests for information.
 - They've put in FOI applications seeking every text message I've sent to ministers.
 - They've put in FOI application with just one board keyword as its search term

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members on my right!

Mr M. McGOWAN: The document continues —

- Examples of the broad and imprecise nature of the applications made by LOOP include —

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Vasse.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It continues, in quote —

... “information in the form of whole or part documents, emails, facsimiles, written notes, post-it notes, pictures and other visual and audio formats, presentations, electronic messages of any kind and any other form of written or electronic information or documentation communicated”:

- *to or from any Ministerial office, media outlet or Government Department, in relation to four staff members.*
- The significant increase of applications along with the broad and imprecise nature of many requests has directly contributed to FOI applications not being able to be completed within the 45-day legislated timeframe.
- This also means that applications from members of the public with a non-political interest are experiencing subsequent delays in responses to their applications.
- This means that journalists are experiencing delays in getting their FOIs processed

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup interjected.

The SPEAKER: I know you put a lot of FOIs in, member for Dawesville. But I also call you to order for the first time.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Mr Speaker, it gets a lot better now. The document continues —

- There was a case of both the Hon. Tjorn Sibma and the LOOP office putting exactly the same FOI application.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members on my right!

Mr M. McGOWAN: This is good. It continues —

- The FOI unit had to ask the LOOP office whether it wanted to align its application to that of Hon Tjorn Sibma.
- The LOOP office had no idea the Hon Tjorn Sibma had lodged the FOI and had to ask the FOI unit who the other application was from.
- Even when it found out the LOOP office refused to match its application to the LOOP office.

I think it means to Mr Sibma. The document continues —

- On 14 December 2017, the Hon Tjorn Sibma lodged an FOI application for all records relating to Barry Urban between November and December 2017
- On 26 February 2018—two months later—the Office of the Leader of the Opposition lodged exactly the same FOI application.
 - The LOOP office were informed the same application had been lodged and was currently being processed.
 - FOI Unit asked LOOP if they would agree to their application aligning with the Hon Tjorn Sibma's FOI application and being dealt with at the same time.
- The LOOP office—bizarrely—

I am only quoting here —

asked who the other applicant was and in doing so had to seek the consent of the Hon Tjorn Sibma.

- The FOI Unit informed the LOOP office that the other applicant was the Hon Tjorn Sibma.
- The LOOP maintained they still wanted their FOI application dealt with separately despite it being exactly the same as Hon Tjorn Sibma's.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members, you have had your fun, okay? Paper is tabled.

[See paper 1707.]