

PUBLIC WORKS CONTRACTS, NEWSPAPER REPORT

**963. Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON to the Minister for Housing and Works:**

- (1) Does the minister stand by his statement in the debate on the housing and construction contracts policy on Thursday, 8 May, that -

I was the exclusive architect of this policy. I articulated what I wanted to happen.

- (2) Did the minister receive a written question from Tony Barrass, a journalist with *The West Australian*, in these terms -

Is it true that the Department has been told that no company may have more than 5 contracts with the department over \$1.5 million, regardless of whether their tenders may be the cheapest by several million?

- (3) Did the minister provide a written reply in these terms -

The Department of Housing and Works together with the Minister's office have collaboratively formed a new policy which is designed at reducing the risk to government when contracting with the construction industry.

- (4) Why did the minister seek to mislead Mr Tony Barrass?

**Hon TOM STEPHENS replied:**

- (1)-(4) I understand the distinction the member is making between what is an architect and what is collaboration. I was trying to explain in the answer to the House and also in my response to the question asked by the journalist that I formulated the policy in response to complaints from industry. I ask the member to picture a Minister for Housing and Works who has received a constant series of complaints, which I understand was the pattern for a long period with previous ministers, that the market share in the industry is being distorted by one or two players. My advice about the past practice was that this was done informally by a phone call to the players who were starting to dominate. Staff of previous Governments, including the member's own, would ring them and say, "Get out; don't complain." By and large, they would get out, otherwise they would not get any more contracts. This Government, elected on a policy of transparency and openness, is not prepared to authorise that type of informal contact. I told the department in that memo of 24 April what it was to do -

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: You were the sole architect.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I was the architect, but the draftspeople helped provide the detail. The people in the department who were responsible for giving me guidance on what would be a reasonable percentage of contracts said 25 per cent, and a reasonable number would be five. Other people from the Building and Construction Advisory Committee objected to parts of the suggestions and helped change their final shape, but I am an activist minister and I make no apology for that. I believe in good government. I want policies that reflect the needs and interests of the community of Western Australia.

Hon Peter Foss: You told us earlier that your chief of staff wrote it.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I deal with issues across a whole series of areas. As procurement minister I battled with the issues of market dominance for Microsoft and telecommunications. Market policy dominance is an issue that ends up with procurement ministers. I have responsibility for procurement policy in this Government. Governments all over Australia deal with this issue. I must do so. I have indicated what should roughly happen. I have given an explanation of the word architect. Collaboration and fleshing out the detail have occurred on advice from others.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: Why did you tell Tony Barrass that you were the architect?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: If there is -

Hon Peter Foss: Were you running away from it at that time?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I run away from nothing.

Hon Norman Moore: You fly everywhere.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: What? Did the Leader of the Opposition say something about my fly?

Hon Norman Moore: Now that you mention it!

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: You avoided Mr Barrass's question just as you are avoiding the question now.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The minister knows that if he wants to cease questions he can sit down.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I am keen to ensure that we implement good policy.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: We know you are. You're also big on truth, and so is Tony Barrass.