

BEDINGFELD PARK AGED CARE FACILITY

Grievance

MR BRADSHAW (Murray-Wellington) [9.37 am]: I also grieve to the Minister for Health. Yesterday during question time the Minister for Health talked a little about aged care, although he went off the track when answering his question. An aged-care facility known as Bedingfeld Park in Pinjarra in my electorate is ably led by Mr Don McClements, who chairs the Bedingfeld Park Incorporated board. Deborah McLeod is the manager of that facility. Bedingfeld Park is a great facility that looks after 30 or 40 permanent frail-aged residents. It is a fantastic community-based facility. The people who run it have the task of making sure that it runs at a profit and that its residents are well looked after, and that is being done. Due to federal guidelines, the facility must be upgraded. The board wishes to expand the facility and provide more accommodation for its residents. As part of that process they applied to the federal Government for a grant and received \$760 000. The trouble is that \$3 million is needed. Therefore, Bedingfeld Park is about to go on a fundraising mission to raise just over \$2 million, which would bring the total to \$3 million for the upgrade and expansion of the facility. One problem that has arisen is that it needs a bit more land for that expansion. Murray District Hospital adjoins Bedingfeld Park. All Bedingfeld Park needs is 2 000 square metres of land from that hospital site. It started negotiating with the Government for that last year. A valuation of the land was carried out by the Valuer General and a price of \$20 000 was placed on it. What must be recognised is that no-one else will be able to buy that land, so the land basically has no value to the hospital or the Government. However, previous guidelines say that government agencies must sell land at the price placed on the property by the Valuer General. I wrote to the former Minister for Health last year and did not receive a reply, because at that stage members were in election mode. I probably did not expect a response under those conditions. The reply received from the current Minister for Health was -

I have reviewed the former Government's position on this matter when considering your latest request for the release of this land. Regrettably, I am unable to approve an ex gratia release of this land as Government Property Disposal Guidelines require the Health Department of Western Australia to dispose of surplus land and property at Valuer Generals Office current market valuation.

I can understand that the minister is locked into that. However, I believe he could go to Cabinet and ask for an ex gratia payment of that \$20 000 to cover the cost of the land. In the big picture of \$3 million, \$20 000 is not a lot. However, it is that little bit extra that will help Bedingfeld Park start its fundraising.

I received an invitation the other day to a cocktail party, at which the exciting new plans for Bedingfeld Park will be introduced. The lodge hopes to form a fundraising committee during that cocktail party. Bedingfeld Park must raise just over \$2 million, which is a lot of money for a community-based organisation. In anybody's language, \$2 million is a big problem. Fortunately, Alcoa World Alumina Australia is based in the area and I am sure it will come to the party. Mr Geoffrey Hayward, the Executive Director of the WA operations of Alcoa, is a joint host of the cocktail party. I assume that Alcoa will be a generous contributor to this cause; however, I am sure it will not come up with the \$2.2 million required.

The minister indicated that he cannot provide an ex gratia payment under the guidelines; I say that he can. Where there is a will, there is a way. In this case, the minister does not seem to have the will to provide the land free of charge to Bedingfeld Park. It is an indictment of this Government that it does not have a caring attitude towards people who are working voluntarily to get this money together. To raise \$2 million is a major task - it is a huge amount to raise - and it is being undertaken by a voluntary organisation.

Bedingfeld Park is a fantastic facility and has caring people who look after those residents. The facility is located beside the Murray River and there are facilities for people to do woodwork in an underground section, which was built on a hill. All sorts of people come and entertain the residents. It is a fantastic situation. The \$20 000 may be small in a sense, but it will be big to the fundraising efforts of those people. I do not want to take the credit for it. I am happy for the Minister for Health to go to the cocktail party on Wednesday, 27 July and make the announcement, or to get one of his colleagues, either Hon John Cowdell or Hon Adele Farina, who are the upper House members for that area, to do that. I do not want the credit for it; I just want the people to get some benefit from the Government. Twenty thousand dollars is a miserable sum to the Government. This is also a situation in which the land is valueless to anybody else, even the Health Department, because no-one else will be able to buy it. It will not be sold for someone to build a house on it. It will remain a part of the hospital grounds. I plead with the minister to do something to provide this land on an ex gratia basis.

MR KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Health) [9.45 am]: I thank the member for Murray-Wellington for his concern about aged care in that area. I am well aware of his efforts. I have also spoken to Hon John Cowdell about this matter and I have received correspondence from the member for Murray-Wellington and from the Murray District Hospital Board and the Bedingfeld Park Board. I am aware that Pinjarra's Bedingfeld Park will

be expanded and redeveloped following a decision by its management to purchase Health Department land at market price. This issue was raised with the previous Government and the previous Minister for Health. I am advised that the position has not changed from that of the previous Government. Deborah McLeod, the manager of Bedingfeld Park, has been advised of that. She wrote to my office on 21 May and to the Peel and Rockingham-Kwinana Health Services advising that the board of management of Bedingfeld Park was willing to purchase the land at its current value, and asking for the necessary action to be taken.

Mr Bradshaw: They would still like it *ex gratia*.

Mr KUCERA: I am sure that the Government would like to give everyone what they want; however, in this day and age rules, requirements and regulations apply. This money, like all proceeds from Health Department asset sales, will go towards building new health infrastructure where it is most required. No doubt there are requirements in the Pinjarra and Peel areas, which will use that \$20 000 very quickly. While nursing homes are a recognised commonwealth responsibility, the Health Department will cover the surveying and administration costs incurred by any subdivision of the land. The Government has made that concession to Bedingfeld Park. However, in terms of the land not being of value, the general issue of hospital land must be taken into consideration. I am sure that the previous Government would have been quite happy to give away the land it received from the Mount Henry Hospital! In fact, it did not. It applied the same guidelines that this Government must apply to this issue. At the end of the day, the money will go into all parts of the health system, including frail aged homes. I am well aware of the pressures that are currently being brought to bear. I mentioned yesterday in this House during the point of order raised by the member for Murray-Wellington that the issue of aged care is a vexing one right across Australia. The way the federal Government is applying its rules and regulations may be part of the reason Bedingfeld Park is currently struggling to raise the money it needs to make that kind of home viable. That problem applies right across the board; it does not just apply to Bedingfeld Park.

I sent a group of people to Collie last week to deal with the member's issues down there. The Health Department is happy to sit down with representatives of Bedingfeld Park to work out ways to ensure that they can adequately service issues within their area. Unfortunately, this does not include giving away government land. The precedent that that would set across the board would be unacceptable. It is not the way that I suggest a Government would do business in this day and age and neither would the member for Murray-Wellington's party if it were still in government. In accordance with the state property disposal guidelines, the cost of the land was independently set by the Valuer General at a fair market price of \$20 000. It is not inconceivable that modifications will be required at the hospital site in due course. If that were the case, the land would be used. As it is now, Bedingfeld Park is obviously the priority. The Government has agreed to sell the land to Bedingfeld Park at cost price. The Department of Land Administration has advised Bedingfeld Park that given the status of the land - it was acquired at market price in 1945 - it is assumed that any investigation of possible disposal would be carried out under the state asset disposal guidelines. That is exactly what is happening.

Twenty years ago Bedingfeld Park purchased the land upon which the lodge currently stands from the Murray District Hospital board, using commonwealth subsidies. The Minister for Health at that time was a Liberal member, Ray Young, an excellent Minister for Health. He went through the same process as I am being asked to go through now, 40 or 50 years later. Nothing has changed. When money has to be made to go around, it is an unfortunate fact of life that there is a cost involved in setting up any facility. The Government is committed to improving health care in regional areas, and will assist in any way it can to see that the frail aged are cared for, but I do not believe that the Government should be setting a precedent. I reject the assertions of the member for Murray-Wellington that this is not a caring Government, and that I am not a caring minister. I am well aware of the care that is needed in this area. The only farms left to sell are those owned by some members of the National Party; the Government has no farms left to sell, other than those that have to be sold under the state guidelines. The Government is prepared to talk to Bedingfeld Park about helping with future expansion, but that organisation has already indicated its willingness to purchase the land.

Mr Bradshaw: They do not want talk, they want action.

Mr KUCERA: The land is there to be purchased.