

GERALDTON JUNIOR AND SENIOR MOTOCROSS CLUB

Grievance

MR J.P.D. EDWARDS (Greenough) [9.06 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage. The minister is aware of some of the background to this issue. In my electorate the Shire of Greenough is having great difficulty relocating the Geraldton Junior and Senior Motocross Club to an appropriate and acceptable site. The club has been working with the Shire of Greenough for approximately five years; certainly it was during my time as a councillor and that was at least four years ago. I am advised that the Geraldton motocross club has a membership of between 100 to 200, which is a significant number. Many of them are young people who are not allowed to ride motorbikes on public roads. The club also participates in national and state events, and sometimes there are more than 200 people using the area. The club has been in existence for about 20 years.

The question I raise is part of a social issue. Where do these young people ride their bikes if they do not have a legal track on which to ride? Of course, they ride on road verges, public parks, bridlepaths and quite often on rural residential roads, which is a safety factor in itself. Those of us in a position of power have some level of responsibility to help the younger members in the community to ride their bikes in a legal and designated area.

The Shire of Greenough owns reserve No 43236. It is almost 44 hectares and is located on the north side of the Geraldton-Mt Magnet Road, opposite the former Wicherina Dam catchment area, approximately 40 kilometres east of Geraldton and four kilometres south west of the Eradu town site. The reserve has previously been used by the council and Main Roads Western Australia as a source of gravel for road maintenance and construction. The quarry has not been used since the mid 1990s but will again be required when other sources of higher grade gravel are exhausted. I was told by the shire only yesterday that if it wishes to remove gravel from the site as of today, it can do so. The council met with the relevant departments on site; that is, the Department of Conservation and Land Management and the Department of Environmental Protection. Both departments objected to the proposed development of a proportion of reserve No 43236 for use as a motocross track. I understand that the officers were only doing their job and that is accepted. However, the stupidity and the silliness of this situation is that the shire can quite legally rip loads of gravel out of this reserve any time it wants.

The irony of this, and it was referred to on the radio this morning, is that the Bill recently passed provides for fines to be imposed and a parameter shift with regard to environmental damage and the like. However, I understand the shire can still use that site. In fact, if the shire had been a little underhanded, it could have ripped the gravel out of the site prior to the motocross people asking to use it. Perhaps the council might have said that it knew the club wanted to use the site and then ripped the place apart before a motocross track was installed. I have just thrown that in for what it is worth. Indeed, I probably would not be on my feet making a grievance if that were the case. The decision shows very little flexibility and understanding of an issue that requires resolution, and, as a result, I am speaking on the matter today. As I understand the matter, reserve No 43236 is the only parcel of crown land or freehold land owned by the shire that is likely to meet the requirement of not being too close to existing residences to comply with the noise regulations. Members will understand that motorbikes are very noisy, and that was the original issue. The club did have a site of sufficient size but because of the noise problems it had to be closed down, and it had to look for a location that is not overly sensitive, such as one close to a river or foreshore. As stated in a letter I received from the Shire of Greenough -

Council has unfortunately reached a position where should Reserve 43236 be unavailable for the development of a Motocross Facility then it is very unlikely that another alternative venue can be found. As has been mentioned, this is the only suitable site upon Crown Land or land owned by the Shire, and Private landowners have understandably been very reluctant to offer suitable areas for lease for the establishment of a track given the current uncertainty and escalating expense over public liability and third party insurance.

I draw the minister's attention to the fact that in that area there is a 22 000 -acre reserve on Burma Road, which is very similar country. There are, of course, hundreds of thousands of acres in the Kalbarri National Park, which is about an hour and a half drive north. There are vast tracks of reserves. Social responsibility must come into this matter. I believe there is an inflexibility and an imbalance between the community's needs and what must be preserved. It is necessary to use discretion when decisions such as these are made. I ask the minister to reassess a decision that has probably already been made. I ask the minister to use her discretion, commonsense and wisdom.

I am told that on the site there is a locally known plant, which might be a kerosene bush. However, this reserve has already been damaged by gravel extraction and it can continue to be used for gravel extraction. The club is merely asking to be able to use an area that has already been damaged by that gravel extraction. Spurious

arguments have been put forward by the Department of Conservation and Land Management and the Department of Environmental Protection. One is that travellers from other parts of the State will bring dirt and earth from other areas. That is a spurious argument, because people who drive through the Kalbarri National Park probably come from places such as Queensland and New South Wales. I do not see that as an argument. I ask the minister to use her discretion and reassess the situation.

DR J.M. EDWARDS (Maylands - Minister for the Environment and Heritage) [9.13 am]: I thank the member for Greenough for his grievance. There is no doubt that everyone wants young people to be able to ride their motocross bikes in way that is legal and in areas that provide a certain measure of safety. I also acknowledge that the shire is being very responsible about this issue, by having a lot of communication with all the relevant departments and, indeed, with me. I will meet with the shire councillors shortly. I am aware of the issue because it has also been raised by the member for Geraldton and by some of the member for Greenough's parliamentary colleagues.

The heart of the issue is that the site chosen by the Shire of Greenough and the Geraldton Junior and Senior Motocross Club has some critically endangered grevillea species. This species is one of only four known populations, and there are less than 20 plants in total. This is a serious issue, and one that must be sorted out before any action destroys the plants.

Mr M.G. House interjected.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: There is quite a lot.

The SPEAKER: There are none on the Burrup!

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Mr Speaker, I again refer to the site of the grevillea, which is a long way south of your electorate! In addition, another plant species has been recorded on reserve No 43236 that is also likely to be impacted by the proposal. It, too, is a priority species.

Secondary land-use considerations have also arisen. Apparently the Department of Conservation and Land Management and the Water Corporation have discussed the notion of vesting in the Conservation Commission of Western Australia the Wicherina water reserve, which is reserve No 17711. CALM is concerned that if that reserve, which has a very high conservation value, is vested in the Conservation Commission, discussions must take place about the activities that might occur on an adjacent reserve and the impact that would have upon the reserve and those who want to use it. These issues are quite difficult, and, as the member pointed out, the problem has arisen as a result of a noise issue that meant that the original site was unacceptable. The Department of Environmental Protection has been working through this issue in a more general sense and is proposing to develop noise management plans. There are a number of areas, particularly in rural communities, in which people undertake this activity and, as a result, the department is now receiving complaints about the level of noise. The Government is considering asking the Department of Environmental Protection to develop noise management plans that include factors such as the number, times and duration of race meetings; information about the public-address system, how it is installed and the controls that will limit noise emissions; and the identification of people responsible for compliance with the noise management plan. We are considering various other aspects of noise management plans that will be part of a sensible document and one that the community can live with.

The Department of Environmental Protection will work with the Geraldton motocross club to develop a noise management plan in an attempt to locate other suitable sites. I understand that the department has done quite a lot of work searching for alternative sites and that it will continue to do so. The member has used the time allotted for grievances for exactly the right reason. However, an environmental issue does exist, as was correctly pointed out by departmental people who have established certain barriers. The member for Greenough pointed out that there are social issues in his community and issues for young people who are severely impacted upon by the decision as it stands. I look forward to meeting with representatives of the shire in the near future; a date is definitely set in my diary. I want to hear more detail about the exact local ramifications. The member's grievance has given me the opportunity to ask more questions of the department. I thank the member for Greenough for his grievance. I will follow it up and report back to the member on the outcome of my deliberations.