

BUNBURY BACK BEACH GROYPNE FIELD

Urgency Motion

THE PRESIDENT (Hon George Cash): I received the following letter this morning -

Dear Mr President:

At today's sitting it is my intention to move under SO72 that the House at its rising adjourn until 9am on 25 December 2000 for the purpose of discussing the Government's decision to spend a further \$250 000 to investigate and promote a "Groyne field" on Bunbury's Back Beach even though the public is overwhelmingly opposed to the construction of Groynes on that beach.

Yours sincerely

Hon Bob Thomas MLC

Member for South West Region

The member will require the support of at least four members in order to move the motion.

[At least four members rose in their places.]

HON BOB THOMAS (South West) [3.35 pm]: I move -

That the House at its rising adjourn until 9.00 am on 25 December.

The erosion of Bunbury's Back Beach and what can be done about it have been polemic issues for decades. I remember my mother telling me as a youth growing up in the wheatbelt that as a child growing up in Collie after the Second World War, she went swimming at the Back Beach and erosion was a problem even then. The erosion is essentially a product of the strong northerly littoral sand drift running along the coast. Erosion occurs mainly during winter, and is accentuated by storms. It is not uncommon for parts of the Back Beach to disappear during storms, particularly in the Hungry Hollow area. That process is quickly reversed and the beach often returns within days. The City of Bunbury supplements the natural secretion of sand with a sand renourishment program, which costs about \$8 000 a year.

The problems are the need to reduce erosion on the beach and to retain a sandy beach all year round; the need to rationalise the road and car parking layout in that area, and to improve the amenity of the area; and the environmental need to protect the dunes. These are problems for the people of Bunbury. It is a problem for the Government, and it is a problem of its own making. In 1996, this Government hijacked Bunbury City Council's Coastal Care Committee and replaced it with the Back Beach Enhancement Steering Committee, chaired by the local Liberal member, Mr Ian Osborne. Earlier this year, Mr Osborne's committee recommended that groynes be built as part of the concept design for the enhancement of the Back Beach. It would be an understatement to say that the community is overwhelmingly opposed to such groynes. It wants the Government to investigate alternatives to groynes so that the objectives I outlined earlier - particularly the issue of preventing erosion - can be achieved. The community has suggested that the Government investigate offshore reefs and the narrow neck concept trialled on the Gold Coast, etc. It overwhelmingly opposes groynes on the Back Beach.

After the concept design was announced in March this year a very strong local campaign was run against the groynes by two groups: The South West Environment Centre and the concerned citizens group. The concerned citizens group comprises people of the ilk of Eddy Gobby, Ross Ranson, Mike Smith and Errol Barrett. These people are highly respected members of the community. They are solid members of the business community and are not the sort of people who talk through their hats. They have researched the issue and have made an informed decision. They are lobbying strongly on behalf of the community. They are opposed to groynes on the Bunbury Back Beach. They held a number of meetings earlier this year at which they made it patently clear to the Government that they would not tolerate groynes being built on the beach. They ran a very strong campaign in the Bunbury area that dominated the media for several weeks.

As a result of the campaign the Government decided to review the material produced by the consultants to the Osborne committee. The consultants were Gutteridge Haskins and Davey Pty Ltd, Port and Harbour Consultants and SmeC Australia Pty Ltd. The Government agreed to get an independent expert to review the material and to reconsider the issue. The Government appointed Mr Nielsen from the University of New South Wales' water resources laboratory to undertake the review. Mr Nielsen reported at the end of last month. His report was damning of all the consultants' work that had gone into the recommendations of groynes on the back beach. The Nielsen report stated that the proposed groynes were poorly designed and would not work. It stated that they were too short, too far apart and would require significant maintenance. The report recommended further reassessment and investigation of three variations of the concept design: The existing proposal; longer groynes with continued sand renourishment; and no groynes with periodic sand nourishment.

I find it unbelievable that the Minister for Commerce and Trade, Hon Hendy Cowan, said he would undertake a further study of the concept and the three options. As I said earlier, the public has made it absolutely clear that it will not tolerate groynes on the back beach. The Government has said it will spend more taxpayers' money looking at the issue of groynes on the Back Beach. The Government says it knows best and it will arrogantly push ahead with its interest of building groynes on the Bunbury Back Beach. I am concerned that the decision by the Government will cost as much as \$250 000 on top of the \$500 000 that has already been spent on the project. I was initially told that this further study would cost about \$45 000. When I went to my office in Bunbury yesterday I was given a copy of an update of the proposal prepared by the executive manager, city development, of the City of Bunbury, Mr Tony Brun. It includes a summary of the Bunbury Back Beach proposal. Under the heading "The Next Step" it states -

Council is now awaiting a formal response from the South West Development Commission on how they propose to progress with the Bunbury Coastal Enhancement Project. The letter from the Deputy Premier, whilst stating he supports undertaking further studies, it is not clearly stated how these will be done and who will manage them. It is estimated that such a study as proposed could be in the order of \$100,000. Given the perceived community credibility problem faced by the South West Development Commission on the issue of the Bunbury Coastal Enhancement Project, it would be preferred that the funds to undertake the study are passed onto the City and that it manages the study and undertakes the community consultation. It would also be expected a more appropriate public consultation and education campaign be developed costing approximately \$150,000 will be required.

The report alarmed me because we are now talking about another \$100 000 being spent for further studies into this issue - an issue on which the public has made its intentions clear - and a further \$150 000 to try to sell the concept to the people of Bunbury. The people of Bunbury have made it clear that they do not want it. When the extra money is added to the money already spent it means that about \$750 000 will be spent on the project before the enhancement work has commenced.

The public has made its views clear in a number of ways. The concerned citizens group has organised a number of public meetings to which hundreds of people have attended. Professor Pattiaratchi from the University of Western Australia addressed one of the meetings. I have presented the House with a petition containing over 1 000 signatures on this issue. In particular, the petitioners want the landscape work done but they are opposed to the groynes. They are concerned about the poor sample of aerial photographs that are being used to substantiate beach stability and vegetation; the modelling used to simulate beach revetment and accretion; the spacing and alignment of the proposed groynes; and the threat to the natural features of the basalt from the northern groyne. The petitioners asked that Parliament be aware of the research findings of other scientists who were critical of the groynes.

The Nielsen report confirms those concerns. The most damning part of the report states -

These structures will only achieve these objectives provided that their scaling is commensurate with the scales of the pertinent coastal processes. The appropriate scales can be derived only from the acquisition of adequate and relevant field data along with appropriate and verified analytical computations.

This report is saying that the basic modelling and research has not been done. The consultants that proposed the groynes did not have the empirical evidence before them. The report continues -

Specific issues requiring further investigation include:

. . .

the groynes appear to be too short, terminating in relatively shallow water; and

the groyne spacing appears to be too large.

There is likely to be, therefore, a requirement for ongoing artificial beach replenishment.

The structural designs for the groynes are not presented to accepted coastal engineering practice standards . . .

on two groynes the core surface is not protected and the core material would be washed out with wave overtopping;

the core surface of the remaining groyne has insufficient rock protection - two layers of rock are required;

at the base of the groynes the rock armourstone is sitting directly on sand without any bedding/filter layer;

the groynes are subject to depth-limited wave breaking but there is no toe protection for the structures; the armourstone for the groynes appears to be under-designed and much larger rock sizes are required to obviate maintenance.

The structures, therefore, are likely to warrant maintenance throughout their serviceable life. Maintenance requirements would be reduced if the design were altered to conform to practice standards.

. . . it is unlikely that there would be much improvement in beach width.

I speak to people in the Bunbury area regularly regarding this issue. They tell me the Government is not listening to them and is thumbing its nose at them. They believe that if the Government and the local Liberal member are not listening to them, it is time to change the member.

Other members of the community are telling me that we need to go one step further and replace the Government. One of my friends has told me that he is aware of Liberal Party polling which informs him that the next Parliament will be a hung Parliament and that the Government's research reveals that it will lose the seat of Bunbury. Members on the government side can sit back, when they are on this side, and reflect on this issue and wonder why they lost a seat that needs a 5 per cent swing. I can tell them that one of the reasons they will lose it is because they are not listening to the people of Bunbury.

HON BARRY HOUSE (South West – Parliamentary Secretary) [3.50 pm]: The motion moved by Hon Bob Thomas is his latest attempt to bring issues from Bunbury into this Chamber on behalf of the Labor candidates for Bunbury and Mitchell, who are both Bunbury City Councillors. He is desperately trying to drum up publicity for them in their own town because they are not managing to do very well on their own. I can only assume that it is for the Labor candidates for Bunbury and Mitchell; it certainly would not be for the Labor candidate who has been put forward to replace Hon Bob Thomas on the south-west ticket, because she is a Bayswater City Councillor and does not know where Bunbury is.

Hon Bob Thomas: We have 1 000 signatures, Sunshine.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! As much as there may be some sunshine outside, no-one by that name is a member of the Legislative Council. Please use the member's proper name.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: As the member said, he has presented a petition which has been referred to the relevant parliamentary committee. I am concerned that he has indulged in a little reinventing and rewriting of history to try to make the point for his Labor Party candidates in Bunbury.

Let me run through the stages of the Bunbury Back Beach situation. First, there has been an acknowledgment for many years that the soft coast in Bunbury continually erodes, replenishes and erodes. At times there are enormous problems, particularly when north-westerly gales rip the sand out of that area, as happens in other parts of the State. It reached a very dangerous stage about two years ago when a lot of sand was ripped away from the soft coastline, threatening the infrastructure of the surf club and the "Extensions" restaurant. There is no argument that something needs to be done.

Secondly, there was an approach by the Bunbury City Council, representing the Bunbury community, to the State Government for assistance to do something on two counts: First, coastal management of the soft coastline at Bunbury; and, secondly, land-based enhancement and development of some of the areas that looked a little tired. The State Government took up that challenge and in February this year the Premier and the Minister for Regional Development announced that the State Government would come to the party and support the Back Beach development to the tune of \$7.5m - not an insignificant amount. A lot of other communities around the State looked at that with a degree of envy - here was a coastal enhancement and land-based development project that would get direct government assistance.

Hon Ken Travers: Why did they get it in Bunbury and not in other communities?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: It is a very worthy project.

Hon Bob Thomas: Do you support the groynes?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: We will come to that.

Hon Bob Thomas: You won't come to that; you will avoid that.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: There were two components to that project announced by the State Government and supported by the Bunbury City Council. The first component was the land-based developments, and the other was the coastal enhancement which included the groyne development. At the time, in February this year, the Bunbury City Council agreed and endorsed that announcement. I might add that that proposal had been worked on over a number of years after extensive consultation between local authorities, local organisations, individuals, state government agencies and so on. There then followed legitimate community concern about the groyne

aspect of the development. It was felt that not many people had been involved in that specific part of the development. A citizens group consisting of extremely respected citizens in Bunbury raised that concern. Hon Bob Thomas has mentioned some members of that group, including Ross Ranson, Errol Barrett, Eddy Gobby, Dr Val Leishman and others. They were certainly not radicals; they were people who would give a topic a lot of thought before going into print. Their concerns were taken on board by the Government and not ignored, and a consultant was appointed to be an independent arbiter. That consultant was Mr Nielsen.

The next step in the process - according to my reckoning this is up to stage 6 - was that on 17 August this year, the Bunbury City Council passed a resolution rejecting the groynes. That effectively reversed its previous decision of endorsing the full project, including the groynes.

Hon Bob Thomas: This year?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: This year. Mr Nielsen's report was released a few days later on 25 August. I will paraphrase Mr Nielsen's report because I do not have time to go into the full detail. It stated that there were some structural design problems with the proposed groynes.

Hon Bob Thomas: Some.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: He said there were only two alternatives to the erosion problem on the soft coast at Bunbury: One is a groyne field of some sort and the other is sand replenishment. He dismissed the other options, which included seawalls, offshore reefs, offshore hemispherical pods and other erosion structures. I think everybody agrees that a lot more information is required before any of those alternatives are implemented. He advocated that more information was required, and my recollection is that the two Bunbury City councillors who will be candidates at the next election were most vocal in saying, "We need more information." Well, the Government is delivering more information. It is investigating various aspects, including additional hydrographic surveys of the seabed to a depth of 15 metres involving extraction of sand samples and analysis, additional modelling of the effects of the summer sea breeze pattern, and a north-south survey of the project area that extends to the harbour spur groyne to improve the data concerning the sediment transport regime. A host of other modelling work needs to be done to arrive at the best solution for that coastal enhancement. All of that information will then be made available to the Bunbury City Council, and it will be the council's call, as it was in the first place, when it came to the State Government for assistance. The council will now be provided with all the technical information available from the existing studies plus whatever is being done now by the Department of Transport and other government agencies and consultants.

That information will be made available to the Bunbury City Council which will then make the decision about coastal enhancement. The Government in the meantime has said that the part of the \$7.5m that is required for the land-backed enhancement of the area that is not affected by the annual coastal erosion - the area behind the basalt spur including the Bunbury recreation ground, from Symmons Street to Clifton Street - can go ahead. A memorandum of understanding is being drafted between the South West Development Commission and the City of Bunbury so that part of that enhancement can go ahead.

In conclusion, much has been made of the \$250 000. My understanding is that that is a gross exaggeration. The consultant's estimate was in the order of \$50 000 rather than \$250 000. Some concerns exist about the future of what is required of the Bunbury Back Beach project. However, the project is a fantastic opportunity for Bunbury to move into the next century with modern facilities.

HON BOB THOMAS (South West) [4.01 pm]: Members always know when Hon Barry House has no argument because he resorts to personal abuse. The member's primary argument against this motion is that I am working on behalf of the two Labor candidates, Tony Dean and Margaret Lane - people who will soon be in another Chamber and colleagues of Hon Barry House. The member then sunk the slipper into a future colleague of his in this chamber Adele Farina. In my view, she will be an excellent member and will represent the area well. I hope that she makes many good speeches on this issue as a member.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! During the adjournment debate tonight all members can talk about the candidates from wherever. In the meantime, Hon Bob Thomas has got the floor.

Hon BOB THOMAS: It is no secret that Adele Farina has the same political alliance as I do. Hon Barry House raised some issues including consultation. On 2 May this year I placed a question on notice to the Leader of the House about the amount of consultation and asked -

Can the Minister provide the House with details of public consultation on the current proposal prior to its announcement?

I will inform members who was consulted. Hon Barry House says that extensive consultation took place, as does the preface of the answer, which states -

Prior to the release of the final project design confidential briefings were held with Western Power, Main Roads, Agwest, the Bunbury City Council Councillors and staff, the Convenor of the South West Environment Centre and the Regional Coastal Facilitator.

That is not extensive consultation. Members of the public, particularly those who had expressed an interest through their membership of the concerned citizens' group, the people associated with the south west environment centre and others should have been able to look at the project's concept designs -

Hon Barry House: That concerned citizen group was not formed at that stage.

Hon BOB THOMAS: Those people who expressed an interest in this issue should have been publicly consulted. The concept design should have been taken to the shopping centres so that the public could see the proposal. The Government fronted up and said it had \$7.5m and that the public would have to cop groynes. The Government tried to pork-barrel the seats of Bunbury and Mitchell in its typical monument mentality. By giving the City of Bunbury \$7.5m to build another monument to the Government, it thought that the people of Bunbury would be so glad that they would re-elect the two Liberal members.

The people of Bunbury have made their feelings well known. The Government knows that the public will not cop groynes. The issue is having an impact on the membership of the Liberal Party in that area. I have been told that the Liberal Party branch in Bunbury had to call its annual general meeting a second time because the numbers have depleted to the point that it cannot form a quorum for its AGM. This issue is one of the reasons members have left that Liberal Party branch. They believe that the Government is thumbing its nose at the public and is not listening to what the public is saying. The public is saying that it will not cop groynes on the Back Beach in Bunbury.

Like me, most people in Bunbury think that the landscaping aspects of this project are good. People would like to see more parking, shelters and barbeques for families to use on the Back Beach. They would also like to see the Bunbury Back Beach developed to showcase its tourism potential.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.