

APACHE ENERGY GAS PLANT EXPLOSION — ACTION BY GOVERNMENT

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mr F. Riebeling): Members, I have received today within the prescribed time a letter from the Leader of the Opposition in the following terms —

Please be advised that today I seek to debate as a matter of public interest the following motion —

This House calls upon the Government to undertake the following five urgent actions to address the gas crisis:

1. Release the DOIR and NOPSA inspection reports (and follow-up actions) of Apache's Varanus Island operations.
2. Publish the daily gas supply allocations for WA businesses.
3. Publish weekly updates on progress restoring gas supplies with a critical project timeline.
4. Appoint a Government Minister to take accountability and lead the Gas Supply Coordination Committee and the Employment Working Group.
5. Act immediately to address the potential risk of price gouging by writing to every WA business and providing them with clear advice about what to do if they feel they are the victim of profiteering.

If sufficient members agree to this motion, I will allow it.

[At least five members rose in their places.]

MR T. BUSWELL (Vasse — Leader of the Opposition) [2.59 pm]: I move —

This House calls upon the Government to undertake the following five urgent actions to address the gas crisis:

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3. Publish weekly updates on progress restoring gas supplies with a critical project timeline.
4. Appoint a Government Minister to take accountability and lead the Gas Supply Coordination Committee and the Employment Working Group.
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This is the second week that we have raised in this chamber as a matter of public importance the gas supply crisis. It is clearly a matter of major public importance in Western Australia. In the brief time that I have this afternoon, I will reflect upon some of the issues that have arisen in the past couple of weeks and explain why we feel that the five steps we have outlined are five steps that the government should embrace. Last night the Premier appeared on television in Western Australia for one minute and 58 seconds—or however long he was on. I watched that footage four times today.

Mr A.D. McRae: What did you learn?

Mr T. BUSWELL: I will tell the member for Riverton what I learnt. I learnt nothing from watching it. That is no reflection of my cranial capacity; it is a reflection of the lack of content in what was said. Two weeks after descending into this crisis, the Premier said on television that there is a gas shortage and that I should dim my lights, take shorter showers and turn off the gas space heaters in my home to conserve energy. For heaven's sake! It was a well-crafted message with no substance that provided no meaningful information to the people of this state about the gas crisis. The fact is that the people of Western Australia want some answers to some serious questions. Opposition members have been out and about visiting businesses in the south west of the state and in the city. We have talked to people who are trying to manage businesses and to employees who are worried about their short and long-term job security. The picture on the ground is not rosy. The picture on the ground is one of concern. I have a very strong view that the people of Western Australia want substance in the information that they are being provided with. Businesses want to know why they are facing the threat of having to close. Workers in this state want to know why they are facing the threat of being stood down. Householders want to know why they are being asked to take shorter showers and to turn off their gas space heaters.

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Mr A.D. McRae: That's the wrong set of questions.

Mr T. BUSWELL: The member for Riverton should come with me and visit the workplaces that we have visited and sit with employers and ask them how they are planning for the continuity of their businesses. They will say to him, "It's damn difficult, bordering on impossible, when the best information I can get is a nightly phone call from Alinta letting me know how much energy I'll have access to tomorrow." They have concerns. I categorise those concerns into three key areas: planning, response and accountability. I will quickly step through those key areas. I was very pleased to see on television last night the member for Yokine voice those very concerns. How can it be that, in a modern, advanced economy in the twenty-first century, we do not have in place contingency plans to deal with this sort of crisis? How can it be that, in a modern, advanced economy such as ours, the businesses in the north west can develop contingency plans for the threat of a terrorist attack on a gas installation, but we do not take the next logical step? That next logical step is that if we have to deal with a terrorist attack, on the balance of probabilities, no gas will be produced by the facility.

Mr T.G. Stephens: Did you go to Varanus when you were up there?

Mr T. BUSWELL: No; I went to Barrow Island. I just did not have time.

How can it be that we do not have these plans in place in this state in this day and age? It is a very serious question. I will quickly make the point that I made last week. A very clear warning bell was sounded to the Minister for Energy in January this year when the North West Shelf domestic gas facility suffered an interruption to its supplies for a couple of days. We asked the minister then what his plans were, and he said that we did not need contingency plans in Western Australia because there is enough gas in the pipeline to get us by and that these sorts of things happen only once every 25 years. That is a very sad reflection of the quality of planning and vision of certain ministers in the government. There are no contingency supplies. We will keep asking questions about the Department of Industry and Resources. We are concerned about its capacity to fulfil its legal obligations to oversee the integrity of the gas resources on Varanus Island. The minister admitted today that the people with expertise in gas and pipeline issues left DOIR some time ago. Some of them went to the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection and some went to the federal bureaucracy; however, DOIR was stripped of its expertise. We have had an opportunity, as has everybody in Parliament, to look at the way in which the people of Esperance were let down by the poor oversight of government regulations. We will pursue this matter for as long as it takes us to feel confident that that did not happen in this case and until we are confident that the Minister for Energy and this government have fulfilled every one of their obligations to ensure that the facilities and pipelines on Varanus Island were maintained to the level that they should have been maintained. I do not think that is being extremist or immature. I think that is what an opposition is supposed to do: hold the government to account. We will do that every time we are presented with that opportunity in this house. It is our contention that, in the first instance, the government's inability to plan has meant that this event on Varanus Island has had a larger impact on the people of Western Australia than should otherwise have been the case.

Let me move on and look at the response. There are some very interesting comments in today's newspaper. This is what businesses tell us when we park in their parking lots, roll up our sleeves and walk in and talk to them. Businesses tell us that they are having a lot of trouble understanding how the gas allocation mechanism works in Western Australia. It is a process that has not been explained to them and they do not understand it. As I have said, they get a phone call at 5.30 in the evening telling them their energy allocation for the next day. People cannot run businesses like that. They all know that their gas supply will be impacted on. They are asking for a guaranteed reduced supply for a certain period so that they can at least plan and operate their businesses in an effective manner. However, it is not happening. The system lacks transparency and is confusing. We saw the report of a situation in which businesses are being allocated power and energy on days that they are closed, while other businesses that wish to open on those days do not have access to power and energy. It is a system that is confusing, and businesses are finding it completely unworkable.

We have mentioned the way in which the government is operating in attempting to place style over substance on this issue. I have commented on the minister's visit to Varanus Island on the first Friday after the crisis began. I stand by those comments. He should have been talking to businesses and workers in this state who are suffering. We saw it reflected again last night in the Premier's address to the nation. It is style over substance. I also think there has been a lack of understanding by the government about the prospective concern of price gouging. We discussed it yesterday. We have written to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, and I suspect that the Premier has written to the ACCC, or at least had someone mention it to the ACCC. However, the fact is that, on the balance of probabilities, businesses in corporate Western Australia will not know that the ACCC is the watchdog to which they should make complaints. I think that more needs to be done to help them.

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Another interesting aspect of this crisis is that, at the high point of the most significant energy crisis in the history of this state, Collie A, one of Verve Energy's main coal-fired power-generating units, started to vibrate because of a problem with a turbine fan and was shut down. That is another reflection of the Minister for Energy's inability to manage that portfolio. The minister has made Verve a cot case. It is a cot case that is losing \$150 million a year.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

Mr T. BUSWELL: The minister has responsibility for Verve. He spends his whole life in this chamber, but he does not stand and answer questions.

Mr F.M. Logan: How old is Collie A?

Mr T. BUSWELL: I do not care how old it is; it is not working. It is broken down. It is reflective of the sad state of Verve in Western Australia—an organisation that the minister has driven to the point of complete and absolute bankruptcy.

I want to talk about accountability, because it is our view that the government has been very quick to attempt to distance itself from any potential political fallout from this crisis. Information on safety inspections and recommendations has not been provided. Let us understand this. The responsibility for those safety inspections rests with the Department of Industry and Resources, which is the government agency that has responsibility for Varanus Island. We have already established, and the minister confirmed today, that the department has no expertise. That expertise left the department years ago and migrated either to the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection or the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority. We also know that DOIR contracts inspection services to NOPSA, but the department still has overarching responsibility in Western Australia for the integrity of the infrastructure on Varanus Island. DOIR needs to be carefully examined as part of this process.

Despite the fact that the minister has claimed that he has no knowledge of this, we know that when the Department of Industry and Resources received some of the additional funding that the minister talked about earlier, it tried to recruit a pipeline engineer but could not obtain one. Why would DOIR be trying to recruit a pipeline engineer if it did not need one? Obviously, it was unable to fill the vacancy. I cannot believe that the minister does not know about that. I believe that the minister has been fully briefed on the situation within DOIR.

Mr F.M. Logan: How do you know that?

Mr T. BUSWELL: I just suspect it. I suspect that the minister would have been fully briefed on the situation within the department, and the relationship between the department and NOPSA. If he has not, he is incompetent, but I think he has been fully briefed, and he is manoeuvring politically to mitigate any exposure of DOIR and, by extension, of him as minister. As I said earlier, the opposition will pursue the oversight role of DOIR for as long as it takes. I only hope that, for the sake of the minister and the department, it has ticked all the boxes. I am not suggesting that it has not, but I want to make sure that it has.

This brings me to the next point. Maybe if the minister gets a chance to speak this week, he might provide us with some information about the justification behind the advice he referred to earlier that he cannot release details of the recommendations made to Apache Energy as a result of the safety inspections carried out by NOPSA in recent years. I cannot understand the logic of it, and I wait with some interest for the minister to explain it to us. Surely the minister understands that while he maintains his veil of secrecy over the release of that information —

Mr A.J. Carpenter interjected.

Mr T. BUSWELL: All I am saying is that the government will not provide any justification other than that which was given previously, which is inadequate. While the government maintains this veil of secrecy, people will form views that the government is attempting to hide something. I am not saying that that is the case; I am giving the minister an opportunity to justify his position.

When we asked the minister last week whether the final report into the causes of the explosion will be published, he got up and mumbled his way through the answer and effectively said no. The next day the Premier, as he has done repeatedly, corrected the minister and fixed up that embarrassing situation.

Mr F.M. Logan: I corrected it.

Mr T. BUSWELL: The answer the minister provided to the Parliament was that the government would not be providing the information.

The other issue is just how long this situation will last. What commitments have been given to the state by Apache, and what requirements has the state placed on Apache to report on its fulfilment of those commitments?

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This is a big issue because people who look as though they are about to be stood down from their jobs need to make a rational decision. Do they hang around and wait for their jobs to start up again, or do they go and seek alternative employment? A big issue facing businesses in this state is a genuine concern that, if they have to lay off or stand down their employees, those workers will be swallowed up by other players in the Western Australian labour market, and the workforce may effectively evaporate. We have visited businesses in which hundreds of workers in contract firms associated with the business have been laid off, and the businesses are working extremely hard in a difficult situation to retain their base workforce. It is a huge issue, and these workers are trying to make decisions without access to information.

The last point I will make is that the Minister for Energy does not lead the gas supply coordination committee, and no minister is responsible for leading the employment working group. In my view, that is an attempt at political risk management.

The opposition has today suggested five actions that the Premier may like to consider. He may choose not to consider them. The first one, which the Premier has already indicated will not happen, is the release of the DOIR and NOPSAs inspection reports. The Minister for Energy had better have a better explanation than the one he just gave for not releasing those reports. Secondly, it is my view and that of the people I have spoken to in industry, that the government should publish daily information about how much gas is available in Western Australia and who is getting access to that gas. One of the questions that businesses seek an answer to is why they are in this predicament, and what predicament other businesses are in. That would be a fair thing to do, if it were possible. The third suggestion we have made is that the government publish a critical time line, on advice from Apache, on when it expects to get things up and running. Included in that time line, as would be the case in any jobbing flow, would be the critical points at which we know we are moving forward. It might not be a bad thing to engage in dialogue with the public of Western Australia, so that the people know where Apache is trying to get to and how it is going in achieving that goal. I cannot see that that would be a negative. The fourth point, which I have already discussed, is that government ministers should take direct responsibility for the gas supply coordination committee and the employment working group. The last suggestion is a very simple proposition; that is, that the government write to businesses—not all businesses, but certainly those that can be reasonably expected to be impacted upon by the gas crisis—and let them know about avenues available to them to seek protection by a regulator or watchdog in the event of being subjected to profiteering in what I am sure is a tight market. We understand that there may be some price adjustments in this matter, but, as Don Voelte from Woodside identified yesterday, there is clearly capacity in the market—he suspected it was actually happening—for people to take advantage of the situation.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: Did he say that?

Mr T. BUSWELL: He gave a very clear indication that he was of the view that it may well be happening.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: Don't put words in his mouth.

Mr T. BUSWELL: I will get the quotes for the Premier. He definitely expressed concerns about price gouging and profiteering. I am not putting words in his mouth; I will go and get the exact words he said. He clearly indicated that Woodside had taken steps to prevent that from happening. The Premier knows as well as I do that the temptation clearly exists for people to on-sell at a higher level in a market that has been significantly distorted by a dramatic reduction in supply. All I am saying is that the government should give businesses an opportunity to know where to turn if they require assistance.

The opposition will persist in pursuing the government on gas supplies. I suspect that we will have this conversation many times. It is nothing but appropriate for the opposition to pursue the government wherever possible on every single aspect of this crisis, because that is what the people of Western Australia expect of us. At a time of crisis, that expectation is higher than ever.

MR J.H.D. DAY (Darling Range) [3.18 pm]: We had a debate on this issue last week, and I am sorry to say that the situation has not improved much since then. The gas supply has certainly not improved, but neither has the provision of meaningful information to the public. All we get from this government is an exercise in media management much more than in industry management. The government is much more concerned about how it looks on television on the nightly news bulletins, especially on a Sunday, when Sunday meetings are held. We do not criticise them being held, of course, but I suspect the driving motivation is much more about getting television coverage than about dealing with the substance of the problem. Contrary to the picture that has been painted by the Premier and, to a lesser extent when we hear from him on rare occasions, the Minister for Energy, many people in the business community of Western Australia are far from happy with the current situation. One thing they are not happy about is who in the government is really managing this situation; who is really driving the responses that need to be put in place. The Premier is out there with plenty of media appearances and so on. We certainly would not expect the Premier, with his role, to be there on an hourly basis or on a daily basis

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dealing with the detailed management that needs to occur. However, where is the Minister for Energy? We barely see him. He has clearly been sidelined because he is something of an embarrassment to the government, and he certainly does not suit the media image that this government wants to create.

I have just been informed by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that the Australian Hotels Association, for example, is very concerned about the current situation. He was due to have a meeting about now, I gather, but that has been cancelled because discussions need to be held with Alinta on major concerns about getting sufficient gas for all AHA members to be able to operate properly, bearing in mind that the tourism sector is a major component of the economy of Western Australia. A major tourism event is taking place in Perth at the moment—the Australian Tourism Exchange 2008. Once that is concluded, I understand that there is concern about whether sufficient gas will continue to be made available to the major hotels in the Perth central business district and elsewhere to enable them to operate as they normally do, and for the laundry that the hotels generate to be dealt with. Therefore, there are major concerns and major issues to be faced by this government that are not being adequately addressed at the moment, contrary to the impression that the Premier and the government seek to create.

Late last week I had a meeting with senior people from the resources sector in this state about the mineral sands industry. There was major concern in that industry about whether gas would be available for its facilities to be able to continue to operate, bearing in mind that with its processes, it is not possible to operate at half capacity or quarter capacity. In essence, it needs to operate either fully or not at all. Once it shuts down its processing facilities, it is a very major undertaking to get them going at full speed again. They need to be kept going, as I said, either fully or not at all. There are major concerns in that industry, not the least of which is getting information about how gas is being allocated and whether it is going to be available the next day. At the moment, the transparency that should be provided by this government is not being provided to enable industry to be confident about how the allocation decisions are being made. Therefore, many people in the business community are certainly not happy at the moment.

This incident will need a full investigation; there is no question about that. I believe that it will most likely need a royal commission. It is normal with these sorts of incidents that not just one factor is involved. Quite clearly, an explosion happened on Varanus Island. That is the simple explanation. However, why did that explosion occur? It is quite likely that there was corrosion in the pipe work in some way, but how was that allowed to occur? Was there a chain of events that led to the disaster on Varanus Island two weeks ago?

I recall a presentation that I attended on the major incident at Longford in Victoria several years ago at which it was explained that although, on the face of it, the cause was fairly obvious, there was in fact a major chain of events that led up to that explosion occurring. Quite likely that was the case in this situation, and that sort of —

Mr P. Papalia: How long did the investigation take?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Some time. There is no question about that. We would expect a full and thorough investigation to take quite some time, and I expect that the comprehensive answers that need to be provided will be provided only through a full royal commission, in which the role of the private sector and the role of the respective state and federal government agencies would need to be thoroughly investigated. Many questions need to be answered on a short-term and a long-term basis. They are not being adequately answered by this government at the moment.

MR A.J. CARPENTER (Willagee — Premier) [3.24 pm]: Madam Deputy Speaker —

Dr K.D. Hames: I hope you get some time this time.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I noted the member's very worthwhile contribution.

Dr K.D. Hames: I am shadow Minister for Health. What do you expect?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The member is remarkable for his ineffectiveness.

I take the issues at face value. Some interesting issues have been raised. They are issues that deserve a response, and I think in broad terms most of them have been responded to. Let me make a few general comments first of all. I suppose it is a function of opposition that it has to keep government accountable, and that is good. However, I am disappointed by the approach and the attitude that what I think is a completely immature and irresponsible opposition is taking.

Mr J.H.D. Day interjected.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: No. It is obvious, I think, that the current leadership of the opposition does not have the level of maturity to address what is a very —

Mr J.H.D. Day interjected.

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Mr A.J. CARPENTER: That sort of commentary, I am afraid, reinforces my view.

The leadership of the opposition does not have the maturity to deal with this issue properly. I trace that back, in this issue, to the criticism that the Leader of the Opposition levelled at the Minister for Energy for visiting Varanus Island to personally inspect the site. The minister was condemned ridiculously by the Leader of the Opposition for visiting the site to look firsthand, at the first available opportunity, at what had happened. He was accused of going there unnecessarily, and only for the purposes of a picture opportunity. The Leader of the Opposition, by way of nodding his head now, reaffirms that criticism today. We just heard that the Leader of the Opposition has never been to Varanus Island. I have been there, and I think it was entirely appropriate that the Minister for Energy visit Varanus Island at the earliest available opportunity that was afforded to him by Apache Energy to make a firsthand observation. Can members imagine the situation that we would have on our hands now if he had not been there? We would have these immature people barking wildly that the minister had not even been there. The minister has been in attendance at every pivotal point along the time line, and we are taking our responsibilities very seriously. We are not in a situation, and I have absolutely no intention of getting into a situation, in which we feed the opposition's daily attempts to whip up hysteria. We are not in that mode, and I am not going to be. I believe that the general population of Western Australia appreciates the fact that we are trying to deal with a very serious issue maturely and appropriately, and it does not want to see its Premier, its minister and its government being thrown about by the irresponsible, ill-informed allegations and assertions that are emanating from the opposition, principally the Leader of the Opposition, almost every day. Effectively, what he is trying to do is build a scenario that says that the state government is responsible for what has happened.

Mr T. Buswell: No.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Yes, the Leader of the Opposition is. He is asserting it at every available opportunity, against the background of at one stage, in the midst of criticising the minister for even going to the site, picking a line up that his own, if I can use the Leader of the Opposition's phrase, spin doctors must have advised him to use —

Mr T. Buswell interjected.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The Leader of the Opposition must have been told by his own advisers to offer bipartisan support. Somebody must have mentioned to the Leader of the Opposition the phrase "offer bipartisan support". The Leader of the Opposition retained it in his mind long enough to repeat it publicly, and then it disappeared completely out of his lexicon. Instead, he has reverted to type, compounded in that reversion to type by his complete inability to act as a mature person in any circumstance. The Leader of the Opposition is a completely immature, inadequate person. We have a very significant issue on our hands that requires a proper, considered, mature, methodical response. As part of that response we have engaged the umbrella organisations of business in Western Australia—the Chamber of Minerals and Energy and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. They are informed, as we are informed, about these matters. Broadly, they have responded very well. They understand that this is a major challenge and that the situation is serious.

Mr J.H.D. Day: They have said that they are not very impressed.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Let them say that to me. It is certainly not what the Property Council of Australia, the Master Builders Association of Western Australia or individual businesses are saying to me. They are not commenting on the opposition and they are not repeating the opposition's commentary. The opposition has not played a constructive part in this or any other issue.

Dr K.D. Hames interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, member for Dawesville!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Even the behaviour in this Parliament is truly appalling.

Dr K.D. Hames: You act as though you were not here in opposition and were all innocent. You were worse than us.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The opposition's behaviour is appalling.

The government's priorities are to ensure that the infrastructure remains robust. We must ensure the integrity of the infrastructure. The government must maximise additional gas resources. I thank the Woodside-operated North West Shelf for what it is doing in that regard and also the smaller players in the Dongara basin who have responded to the challenge. I appreciate that and thank them. The government must encourage demand management; that is, reducing use.

Mr J.H.D. Day interjected.

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Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I heard what the member for Darling Range said. It hardly warrants comment, but it is so typical of his immature drivelling response.

Dr K.D. Hames: You are so arrogant in your dismissal of anybody other than yourself.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Dawesville, I call you to order for the third time.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I did not utter those words; the member for Dawesville did.

Bearing in mind the position I have and the situation before us, last night I was offered the opportunity to make a community service announcement to inform the people of Western Australia of the gravity of the situation.

Mr J.H.D. Day: Who offered that opportunity?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Channels Seven, Nine and 10, just in case the member for Darling Range did not notice. I was offered the opportunity to inform the people of Western Australia of the situation. It was impossible in the time available to go into detail. Anybody would tell members opposite that. Basically, what I did was to make a pitch, an appeal, to ordinary Western Australians to help out by playing their small but vital part. The evidence we have from last night and today is that they did. The evidence that I have firsthand from when I was in Forrest Place today is that every person I saw now understands that we have this issue. They listened to what I said to them last night on television and responded in the affirmative.

Dr S.C. Thomas: Are you saying that every person in Forrest Chase saw your presentation on TV?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: There is an old American actor by the name of Jimmy Cagney. The member for Capel reminds me so much of him. He plays the little characters who are full of energy, often not that bright, and they run about making silly comments. The member reminds me of him. Did I say that every person in Forrest Place or Forrest Chase said that? In a split second the member for Capel leapt to that strange but compelling conclusion. Every single person I spoke to down there today was aware of the issue and they wanted to be involved in playing a part. All the people I spoke to were aware of it and they were aware of what happened last night. They responded and I detailed that response today.

I refer now to the Department of Industry and Resources and the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority. It is our belief that the independent body, NOPSA—not the extremely deficient opposition, but NOPSA —

Mr T. Buswell: Who has responsibility for Varanus Island's safety? You have been in negotiations with them for years.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, Leader of the Opposition!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: NOPSA has the expertise in this matter.

Mr T. Buswell interjected.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe that the Leader of the Opposition is on his third warning.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, not quite.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I honestly think that it is time that the Parliament made a statement about the behaviour of the Leader of the Opposition. He should be thrown out of the chamber.

Mr T. Buswell: Oscar the grouch. Move a motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, do not push your luck or you will be out on your second call.

Mr T. Buswell: Sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: An unnecessary distraction by way of speculation will not help in the pursuit of NOPSA's inquiry. The experts from NOPSA, whom I spoke to at a meeting on Saturday, indicated to me that the only appropriate way for the investigation to be properly done was for the professional experts to be allowed to perform their duty, compile the information and produce the report and its findings. I have been assured that this is being done and it is being done in a timely manner. I spoke to the NOPSA chief executive officer today and I asked him specifically for his advice in relation to the release of the other reports. He said that his strong advice is that until the final investigation is complete, please do not release those reports. The process is an integral part of the investigation. We do not want to get caught up in this desire to whip up hysteria, throw rocks, point fingers or attribute blame, which is exactly the space that the opposition is living in.

Mr T. Buswell: It is called accountability, not blame .

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: No, it is not.

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Mr T. Buswell: You are saying that NOPSA is saying, “Don’t release NOPSA reports”. What does that say?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I do not believe that I interjected on the Leader of the Opposition a single time during his speech.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Point taken.

Mr T. Buswell: You were busy talking to the member for Rockingham.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition might like to listen.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: In more ways than one, the Leader of the Opposition’s behaviour is reminiscent of an ill-prepared, ill-disciplined eight-year-old boy. It is absolutely appalling that we have this manifestation as the Leader of the Opposition.

The strongest possible advice from NOPSA to me personally was, “Please, do not do anything to disturb the integrity of the inquiry”, and I am not going to. I take my responsibility seriously. This is not a minor incident; it is a major incident that might have massive financial ramifications on various parties. I will not throw out, reject or ignore the advice of the man who heads up the inquiry body.

In relation to the daily gas supply update —

Mr T. Buswell: I ask you seriously: what was his justification?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: At some point something needs to be done about the behaviour.

Mr T. Buswell: I just asked for his justification.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I am on my feet trying to respond to the issues that the member raised in his speech.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Premier is quite right. The member did seek the interjection in the correct way. Get the attention and get the response but do not keep at it and we will be okay.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: What is being sought is forensic detail—fixed detail—in a scenario in which it cannot be provided. The situation from day to day is not fixed. It is not a certain situation or picture that is unfixed, unmoving or unchanging. Of course, if it were possible, every tiny grain of detail would be provided at every moment in time, but real life is not like that in this sort of situation. There are a great deal of unknowns in this situation. On a day-to-day basis Alinta is uncertain of the demand for the next day; for example, on a particularly cold day household gas consumption can leap dramatically. Alinta cannot provide the sort of fixed detail that this poorly thought out demand is expecting of them. Do members opposite think that Alinta would not be responding in the best way possible?

Mr T. Buswell: Can I ask a question?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: No. Does the opposition think that?

Mr T. Buswell: Let me answer that for you.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, you asked whether you could ask a question and the Premier said no; he has limited time and he wants to continue. Let us keep moving.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I will ask it in the broad rhetorical sense. It is a common tool in the use of the English language to use a rhetorical question. Anyone with any degree of sophistication in the use of the English language would understand that. The government is liaising closely with the Western Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Chamber of Minerals and Energy. They are both on the gas supply committee and both are part of the formation group. The CCI and the CME have separately met representatives from my office and the Minister for Energy’s office, and had meetings with both groups yesterday. As I understand it, the flow-on of communication is daily.

With regard to communicating daily gas supply allocations, regular updates on what the North West Shelf and other gas producers are able to put into the system in addition to normal requirements is being regularly communicated to stakeholders by the Office of Energy. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned Don Voelte. They are unable to give absolute cast-iron figures every single day in advance of what they can produce the following day. It cannot be done.

Dr S.C. Thomas: They can give more figures than they are giving now, though.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: So now the opposition is attacking the North West Shelf and Woodside. It is remarkable.

Dr S.C. Thomas: We are criticising Alinta.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Alinta is not the producer of gas.

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Mr T. Buswell: They ring a lot of people at 5.30 pm and tell them how much gas they can have.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: There is no formal gas allocation process across the whole state. What is in place is a publicly available priority list, and we have announced that. The priorities are: firstly, to protect the health, safety and property of the community—this is all being done voluntarily with great cooperation—and secondly, to minimise broad community disruption, although we are being told by the opposition that we should be shutting down parts of suburbia. The opposition is asking why we are not shutting off gas and electricity supplies. The third priority is to minimise the economic impact. Based on these principles, the following priority order is being determined: firstly, the essential energy infrastructure must be kept intact; secondly, essential services must be supplied; thirdly, essential supply to residential services—yes, they are being provided; fourthly, industry is providing essential goods and services; and, fifthly, obviously, all other industries. In the fifth hierarchical level, some people, on a day-to-day basis, will miss out. We have lost 30 per cent of our gas supply. It appears to the best of our knowledge that categories 1 to 4 are currently receiving essential energy needs, although monitoring is ongoing. In the face of the disappearance of 30 per cent of our gas supply, we have maintained provision to those first four hierarchical needs. Irrespective of what members opposite think of the government, the contributors to the voluntary group should be congratulated for that.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: Hear, hear!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: They should not have rocks and spears thrown at them and be condemned and accused of mismanaging the situation or of price gouging. It appears that priorities 1 to 4 are being addressed. Customers without gas or electricity are essentially in that fifth category of “other industries”. We have heard this rolling panorama of potential crises. The first industry we were being told would face crises was the hospitality industry. When the Minister for Tourism stood in this place today to explain that the Australian Tourism Exchange had been a rip roaring success, she was mocked by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr T. Buswell: I didn’t mock her.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: He did mock her. One week ago he was condemning the government for the potential situation that faced the Australian Tourism Exchange 2008, but when the minister stood up to report, not in a political sense —

Mr T. Buswell: Why are they right now in a meeting with Alinta?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition is called to order for the second time.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: When the minister stood up to report to the Parliament of Western Australia that, far from massive embarrassment due to disruption, the Australian Tourism Exchange had gone off very well she was criticised and mocked. I went there yesterday for half an hour, and people congratulated us for what we had done.

Then members opposite were asking what crisis we would face next. At one stage the state was going to be in crisis because we did not have enough gas to pour beer. It is a difficult situation for people who want to drink draft beer. However, how about we address the priority of need and accept that the gas is required for things like hospital services. The hierarchy of need tells us where we should apply our priorities. I will not go through all the other scenarios that have been hung out before us. Some people are being very adversely affected.

Many of the affected smaller parts are Alinta customers. Information on these customers is confidential to Alinta and those customers. We want to keep Alinta in a cooperative framework. It is not appropriate that we demand access to all those details on a daily basis. A significant proportion of Alinta’s —

Mr T. Buswell: Alinta had to ring everyone to tell them.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Is the member seeking an interjection or is he trying to contribute by yelling across the chamber.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: He is demonstrating his complete incapacity to behave in a mature, responsible way. He is the most immature, irresponsible, unfit person to hold that office.

A significant portion of Alinta’s load is weather dependent, including residential. It is difficult for Alinta to make a firm or long-term estimate about the gas that may be available for its commercial customers against that fact. Alinta advises that it is doing its very best to distribute its limited gas in a reasonable manner. Any issue that a particular customer has is a matter that Alinta will try to address. The Opposition has asked for a weekly update and critical project time lines. The government is committed to providing the best information it can for stakeholders. I say that without fear or favour. I will provide as much information on a daily basis as I possibly can. I honestly think the general population believes me when I say that.

Dr S.C. Thomas: I am not so sure.

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Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Little Jimmy Cagney down there is not so sure! I make the statement anyway. It is important that this information is accurate. Wrong information would be worse than no information. I repeat: what is being demanded of us is an absolutely detailed granular tabloid of information on a daily, if not an hourly, basis. That could not happen. If we create that model we will run the risk—it would become within a day or two an absolute reality—of the information turning out to be incorrect. That is what would happen.

Mr T. Buswell: No.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Of course it would. The Leader of the Opposition should think it through. All sorts of ramifications could flow. Imagine if people made decisions based on what they believed was the absolute clear-cut situation that would prevail the following day, and it did not. Who would be responsible then? The Leader of the Opposition should think things through. It is an immature, ill-thought out proposal. The CCI and the CME are represented on the gas supply coordination committee, as I have already said. The Office of Energy has provided regular updates to the media and stakeholders as it has become available, with the latest provided yesterday. These updates are being provided several times a week and sometimes daily. I repeat my tribute to the staff at the Office of Energy, Jason Banks in particular. That man has shouldered a superhuman task in the past two weeks. At some point, the state of Western Australia will recognise what an incredible effort that person and his office have undertaken. That will be acknowledged in some way, rather than this completely disgraceful attack that seems to be coming from the opposition on their efforts and expertise.

Information on the working order of the storing power stations was provided to Parliament last week. Imagine the scenario if I attempted to be absolutely categorical about the day, hour, minute, second that a power station would be back firing energy and people started making business decisions based on that, and it turned out that that information was imprecise. We cannot provide absolute precision on these sorts of matters. The Leader of the Opposition should think through his silly recommendations before he demands the state accountability. We are providing the most accurate information we can. It cannot be specific to the detail that is being demanded in this matter of public interest.

I have taken responsibility, along with the Minister for Energy, for the government's response to the situation. Can we imagine what would happen if the committees we have talked about could meet only if we were there? Imagine setting up an emergency response group that could meet only if the minister or Premier were actually in attendance. In this situation, we must know how to structure a response and be able to delegate. We must have faith in the responsibility that can be undertaken by the other people. I refer to price gouging.

Mr T. Buswell interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I do not know when people on my left thought it was convenient to try to over-talk the member on his feet and think they were going to get away with it. They might try to seek an interjection in the proper way, and they might get a response. The next person who tries to talk over the Premier or whoever is next on his feet will be called to order. I suggest it is not the member for Dawesville or he will be going home.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission is there to investigate price gouging. The Chamber of Minerals and Energy and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia are on our groups advising members. We have already addressed this issue. If price gouging is taking place, it must and will be addressed. However, let me ask this: does the Leader of the Opposition have one skerrick of evidence to substantiate the broad-based allegations that he is making?

Mr T. Buswell: I did not make allegations. I said there is a potential risk.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The answer is no. He tried to put words in the mouth of Don Voelte. I caution him against that.

Mr T. Buswell interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Do not go there!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: One of the questions being put to businesses is: if it is possible for businesses to replace gas-fired generation with diesel-fired generation, are they in a position to be able to do it and can they do it? It may well be that the answer is yes but that the diesel-fired generation will cost them five, six, 10 or 15 times more. Of course, the gas that is freed up will then have a market price. Is that price gouging?

Mr T. Buswell: No.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I thank the Leader of the Opposition.

MR F.M. LOGAN (Cockburn — Minister for Energy) [3.52 pm]: The interventions of the opposition continue. One of the questions that the opposition put by way of interjection was addressed, I presume, to the

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Premier and me, and it was: what is the government's priority issue at the moment? My priority issue is to deal with the situation. As the Premier has indicated over and over again, losing one-third of its supply of gas from the north west of the state is one of the most important situations that Western Australia has faced. We have a whole series of organisations in place to deal with it. Those are the committees that we have established after I visited Varanus Island and saw with my own eyes, immediately after the fire was put out, that the extent of the damage was far greater than any of us had thought and that the repair of the damage would take longer than we had expected. That led to the creation of all the organisations to which the Premier has referred and which are doing a fantastic job looking after the supply of energy and people affected by any laying off, and looking at alternative energy sources, such as distillate and coal.

The first part of the opposition's motion refers to the release of the inspection reports of the Department of Industry and Resources and the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority. I addressed that in question time, as did the Premier. Effectively, we have been advised very strongly by not only NOPSA, but also the department itself, which is the responsible department. The Leader of the Opposition has pointed out that ultimately the department is responsible for the jurisdiction. The department has sought and received State Solicitor's Office advice, which supports DOIR and NOPSA and which is not to release information about any of the investigations that have been undertaken on Apache Energy's facilities until such time as the complete investigation has been undertaken and the reports have been released. That is the advice we have received. That is from NOPSA and DOIR and confirmed by the State Solicitor's Office. That is what we are going to do. We do not want to undermine this investigation, because of the very serious ramifications that would arise from doing so. We are literally pleading with the opposition members to do the same thing, and I wish they would listen.

Mr T. Buswell interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister has limited time. I suggest you listen to him.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: As for the advice we have received for why we should not do that, the Premier has already addressed that and I addressed it in question time. It is quite clear that the advice we received is that we should not release these reports because it would undermine any potential prosecution that NOPSA or DOIR may undertake as a result of the investigation. Should there have been a breach of the Petroleum Pipelines Act, it may result in a prosecution. Their view is that the release of these reports prior to the final reports would undermine any possible success of a prosecution. As for litigation and any action taken by companies against Apache Energy for loss of income, or any defence by Apache to that litigation, we have been given advice that the release of these reports and the impact it could have on the investigation would seriously jeopardise any legal action. That is the legal advice we have received, but it is not accepted by opposition members.

The Leader of the Opposition earlier asked a question, and I am surprised he did not quote his sources. I am sure the source was Kim McDonald of *The West Australian*, who has asked me various questions about a paper that has come into her hands. Nevertheless, the question was about the employment of a petroleum engineer. I received a document, not in my ministerial office, but in a meeting last week when the document was referred to by a department.

Mr T. Buswell interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, you are called to order for the third time.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The Leader of the Opposition's question was whether it came to the ministerial office. It was raised at a departmental meeting. As for the employment of a pipeline engineer, had the Leader of the Opposition carefully read the paper, which I assume he received from Kim McDonald, he would have seen that it refers to 2005-06. I was not the minister then. Why does he not read his leaked sources a little more carefully?

DR S.C. THOMAS (Capel) [3.57 pm]: I say to the Premier in the words of the great Jimmy Cagney, "You dirty rat!"

Mr A.J. Carpenter: It is one of my favourite stock lines, "You dirty rat!"

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I do not think it is quite parliamentary, but given the interjection I will allow it.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Is the current flow in the pipeline a standard flow and what is the variation in that pipeline flow? Has the pipeline got a set or a variable supply?

Mr F.M. Logan: You know exactly what is going through the pipeline. How many times have we spoken about it?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: The Minister for Energy oversees a department called the Department of Industry and Resources, or DOIR, but he would be the opponent of industry and resources, or OOIR. We have a major crisis

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and all we get from the minister is the sound “ooh ah, ooh ah” because he has nothing to say. Does the pipeline have a variable flow or not? What are the peaks and troughs? The minister cannot manage a variable flow and give industry some support. How many of the Premier’s ministers have been to the south west to visit industries that have been affected by this crisis? Have the Minister for South West and the Minister for Energy visited? When some of the people from south west industries that have been affected by this gas crisis came here, they told the Minister for Energy about their problem of not being able to manage their businesses because they could not get any advice after 5.30 the night before. They told the minister that they were having significant problems. They told the minister that they had problems with the accountability of the system. They told him that their industries were at risk. The Premier said, “Nobody is telling us anything. Industry is not coming to us and telling us there is a problem with the system.”

Mr A.J. Carpenter: Did I say that?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Yes, go and have a look at it. What was the minister’s response? He said that it was not the government’s problem because it was a private industry.

Mr F.M. Logan: You asked the question. Do you want the answer?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Yes. What did the minister say?

Mr F.M. Logan: The issue that you raised just now and the issue the Leader of the Opposition raised was raised with Alinta this morning at the regular meeting. The Premier has just answered it for you.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: What did the minister say? He said that it was not the government’s problem.

Mr F.M. Logan: What I said was that it was a private company, contracts are in place and those contracts have to be honoured. Are you suggesting that we should do something else?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: The minister told them that it was not his problem. He washed his hands of it.

Mr F.M. Logan: Are you suggesting we should do something else?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Does the minister care about the industry and the thousands of jobs that are at risk? He told them that it was not his problem. The Premier got up today and said basically, “Nobody has come to us with those issues.”

Mr A.J. Carpenter: Which issues?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: With issues about the openness and the obvious way that gas is being distributed in a supply-fed system. Industry has come to the Premier’s government and said that it is having problems with the accountability process and that it cannot deal with the system he has in place at the moment. The Premier came into this place and said, “Nobody has come.” They came to his Minister for Energy, and they were ignored.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: I invite you to get someone to read the *Hansard* to you as opposed to you reading it yourself.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: We will have a very good look at it.

This government is in crisis as much as the gas system in Western Australia because the government cannot manage it. It does not have a plan in place to manage the gas crisis. It did not know in advance what it would do. After the event, it does not know what it is doing and it has a minister in charge who should not be there.

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine) [3.59 pm]: My name was mentioned during this debate. I want to add a few things to this debate. A little more needs to be discussed today than simply trading personal issues across this house. This is an issue that affects the whole of the state.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

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