

*Minister for Environment — Answers to Questions — Adjournment Debate*

**HON SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [10.06 pm]: I rise with slightly more decorum than I did earlier when I found myself entering the chamber to complete silence because I was supposed to be on my feet, and I had a mouthful of crabsticks from the members' bar! I thank Hon Giz Watson for rescuing me with a glass of water; it is good that Hansard cannot record everything that goes on in this place!

I want to draw attention to a couple of answers the opposition has received from the government in this place over the past two days. It is always good, after we have come back from a break, to give ministers a chance to get back in the swing of things, to read up on their briefs and see how adequately they can answer questions. Unfortunately, today and yesterday the Minister for Environment has failed to answer questions that in my view any minister worthy of the title would regard almost as dorothea dixons. To the three or four questions I have put to her this week I have received no answers, and I want to talk about some of the problems that that is causing.

In common with many other members, I woke up this morning to read the article by Robert Taylor in *The West Australian*. The article is entitled "Cabinet a work in progress—or not, as the case may be". The government has enjoyed a very long anniversary; it started on 6 September, but because it took some days after last year's election for the National Party to make up its mind whether it wanted to be progressive or reactionary, the anniversary seems to be extending itself over several days. As a result we have seen quite a few of these comment pieces in the media about scorecards, reports and that sort of thing for the government's first year. I quote the comments made in the article about Hon Donna Faragher. It states —

The youngest member of Cabinet, she has a big job and struggled early on. Still not dealing with issues affecting Woodside because of conflict-of-interests kerfuffle over her husband's shares.

I have to say that this is still a matter of some concern and confusion on this side of the house. It seems as though it was only last week that one of Hon Donna Faragher's colleagues had to get his partner to sell shares in a company because of a conflict of interest.

**Hon Donna Faragher** interjected.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** I have not yet got to the main subject that I want to deal with; I am just giving a bit of commentary on the article that appeared in *The West Australian* this morning.

**Hon Donna Faragher** interjected.

**Hon Ken Travers:** You've touched a raw nerve!

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** I do seem to have upset Hon Donna Faragher a bit, do I not? Just let me carry on for a while. We asked her to clarify the position some weeks ago and we were told that she was still standing aside from Woodside issues. According to Robert Taylor, that has not changed.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Is that what you base everything on—what you read in the paper?

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** We do not really know what is going on there.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Tell us the Robert Taylor bit about the Leader of the House being all fuzzy and environmental. Tell us about that bit. Are you hooked on that as well?

**Hon Ken Travers:** Was it news to you, too?

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Certainly not, but I want to know what the honourable member thinks. I mean, that was written by the same person in the same publication on the same day.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Mr President, Hon Simon O'Brien —

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Do you take that as gospel as well?

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Hon Sally Talbot is trying to make her own speech.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Thank you very much, Mr President. I appreciate your intervention. Hon Simon O'Brien may like me to jump straight to another paragraph headed "Simon O'Brien". I enjoyed this. I am sure my colleague Hon Ken Travers enjoyed this too because this is the subject of some great concern to us. It states —

This low-profile Minister has to find a way out of the Liberal promise to complete the Roe Highway extension to Stock Road, a project getting bogged down in studies and protests that was a daft idea anyway. The Perth-to-Bunbury Highway still isn't open and there's no sign of a start on the Butler railway extension.

Mr President, I am distracting myself here. I do not really want to talk about Hon Simon O'Brien. I want to talk about Hon Donna Faragher.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** I have got through only the first paragraph on Hon Donna Faragher; she has obviously caused a bit of concern. I guess that my problem with this is that I have already owned up to the house tonight that I own only one share, and that is a share in the Denmark Co-Operative. However, it has never seemed to me to be that hard to sell shares if they are in some sort of conflict with what I am doing professionally. I therefore do not really know what is going on here. However, clearly, Hon Donna Faragher is still not dealing with matters affecting Woodside. The article in *The West Australian* goes on —

Business claims she was quickly captured by Department of Environment and Conservation bureaucrats but she has the Premier strongly in her corner and shows signs of improvement with handling of Gorgon final approvals.

I will make a couple of points about this. One is about the handling of the final approvals for the Gorgon project. One does not have to be a student of political history or state development in Western Australia to know exactly what Hon Donna Faragher did. The scope of the Gorgon project was expanded, but she knows as well as we do that the real work on Gorgon was done by the Carpenter Labor government and the Minister for Environment at the time—Hon Mark McGowan—not her immediate predecessor, Hon David Templeman.

Several members interjected.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** The Minister for Environment at the time put in place the basic framework which Hon Donna Faragher then tinkered with. However, the main point of this is that all Robert Taylor could find to say about Hon Donna Faragher in *The West Australian*, our own state daily newspaper, was that she had the Premier strongly in her corner. That raises an interesting point about what is going on here and about who is driving this car. I strongly suggest—we see evidence of it every day—that it is not the minister who is driving this car. Clearly the Premier is providing most of the traction here. That is evident in a number of different areas, which I am happy to go into on another occasion, as I do not have time now. It was interesting to note yesterday that we seemed to have a new contender for this position. If all the speculation in the media is right and the Premier is working up some kind of reshuffle in the next couple of weeks, Hon Donna Faragher should take a close look at Hon Norman Moore. Even though the Premier has said that Hon Norman Moore is not a warm and fuzzy person on the environment, I wonder what that means about what will happen to all the cute little animals who might miss out on their press releases if Hon Norman Moore takes over. However, the Premier said that Hon Norman Moore is becoming one of the great conservationists of the Western Australian government. Unfortunately, Hon Norman Moore has been called away from the house on urgent parliamentary business. I think that if he were here he would be blushing on hearing what the Premier said about him! Even that was not the main point I wanted to make.

The Minister for Environment can resolve all these questions about whether or not she is in charge of the environment portfolio by showing us that she is prepared to stand up to the Premier and stand up to her cabinet colleagues on some key issues that she simply has to win for the sake of the environment and for the sake of the community of Western Australia. She has got some great role models here. Hon Peter Collier has clearly shirt-fronted the Premier on some energy reforms—what my colleague Hon Kate Doust calls “government by thought bubble”. Hon Peter Collier stared the Premier down, and Hon Peter Collier won. He provides a fine role model for some of his colleagues.

We saw earlier this afternoon another minister who has been called away from the house on urgent parliamentary business, Hon Robyn McSweeney, stand up to the Premier. It was absolutely spectacular. She showed fantastic commitment to promote the issue of breastfeeding in Western Australia. I was very proud to be in the house when she said that. I do not know whether she knew that she was flatly contradicting the leader when she said that; nevertheless, that does not matter. She is another fine role model. Hon Donna Faragher, when I make these speeches, gets very upset because she clearly thinks I am having a go at her.