

## **PROPOSED ISLAND MARINA AT DENHAM**

### *Grievance*

**MR R.N. SWEETMAN** (Ningaloo) [9.42 am]: I rise to grieve on behalf of the overwhelming majority of the Denham community which opposes the proposal to build an island marina in the bay adjacent to the Denham town site. The minister would already have some knowledge of this proposed development, as it has been in the system to some extent for about 18 months now. It is the brainchild of one Graeme Robertson who has half shares in the Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort. Mr Robertson has a track record of developments all over the State. He is a genuine entrepreneur and most of the time his projects come to fruition and are of tremendous value to the communities in which he places them. However, if we ran a statewide competition for no-brainer ideas, this project would have to be close to the top. It would rival those eight units on top of the range near the lighthouse on North West Cape. I thought I would never see anything as stupid as that constructed in my electorate again, but this proposal will certainly rival that development.

The tragedy of this proposal is that Mr Robertson does not live in the Denham community. It is as though he has come into the town, thrown a grenade and flown away. The proposal has ignited passions in the Denham community and, in many circumstances, has even pitted friends against friends. There is a very tense, unhealthy environment currently prevailing in the town site of Denham. The situation was exacerbated initially by a very wise move by the council to defer to the community the responsibility for a decision on the proposal. Mr Robertson approached the Shire of Denham in about March or April 2003 about his proposal to build a 1.7 kilometres long by 1.2 kilometres wide island marina in the bay. Of course the shire knew immediately that it would be controversial and decided to allow the community to make the decision, saying that unless the community was overwhelmingly in favour of this project, it would not go ahead. There was no formal referendum, but there was a survey of the entire community, which is as good as a referendum. The community basically resolved by a margin of 62 per cent that it would not support the project. Sometime later, the shire took it back on itself by a majority decision to give in-principle support to the development, and to allow it to proceed to the Department for Planning and Infrastructure to get the necessary approvals so that a form of lease or sublease could be given to the developer to enable him to do some more investigations on the area. Of course, that really incensed the local community, and led to a public meeting on 4 July at which there was an overwhelming vote of no confidence in the council. That led to a special electors meeting on 6 August at which four motions were put. One was a motion calling on the council to rescind its support for the proposal by RC Developments known as the Denham Quays. That motion was carried 110 votes to 41; by a vote of more than two to one the community said that the motion should be rescinded. The second motion was a vote of no confidence in the councillors who had supported the marina development. By a vote of more than two to one - 104 votes to 47 - that motion was carried. To show the reasonableness and the temperament of the Denham community, a motion was moved to abolish the ward system; that is, to go to a single-ward local government system. The community was sufficiently mature and respectful of its elected representatives that it thought that those people should not have to bear that indignity. It knew that the Useless Loop community and the pastoral ward would effectively be disfranchised under that situation. Therefore, the community voted down that motion by 97 to 54. The final vote was a simple one: are people in favour of the Denham Quays development or not? In a vote of 124 to 19, the people participating in that public meeting held on 6 August said that they did not want it. On the strength of that overwhelming and clear-cut decision, the community said that it did not want the island marina. It was quite extraordinary when about a fortnight later the shire president, who chaired the special electors meeting on 6 August, went back to the council and reported at its meeting that -

I am confident that the meeting recognised that a careful but urgent need to plan for a sustainable economic future is required. The motions moved and voted on reflected that the Council has continued support.

When a council has just suffered a no-confidence motion by a majority of more than two to one, when does “no” mean “yes” and “yes” mean “no”? Certainly, that is an attempt to rewrite history, and it is not right for a shire president to report to his council as he did.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: What did the shire president say?

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: After chairing the special electors meeting on 6 August at which there was an overwhelming vote of no confidence in the councillors who voted for the marina development, the shire president reported to the council that -

The motions moved and voted on reflected that the Council has continued support.

There was an overwhelming vote of no confidence in the council at two public meetings - at the meeting held on 4 July there was also a vote of no confidence in the council.

Yesterday, I tabled two petitions, and I will outline the actions sought in each of those petitions. In the first one the people who are rejecting the island marina development are calling on the minister to urgently intervene to protect and preserve the unique and beautiful reserve. The second petition that I read into the Parliament called for the dismissal of the council, and concludes -

Now we ask that the Legislative Assembly request the Minister for Local Government take action to dismiss all Councillors on the Shire of Shark Bay to enable the election of a new Council . . .

The council is letting down its local community. Although it is difficult for me as an elected representative to speak against or belittle the endeavours, efforts and sacrifice that that council has made, I cannot help but think, as I said earlier, that it made a rod for its own back in this situation. It deferred to the community and asked it to make its decision. The council said that it would not accept the proposal unless it had overwhelming community support, and when it was manifestly clear that the local community did not want the development to go ahead, the shire still proceeded with it. Now that community is calling on the minister to assist and to intervene in this matter to ensure that this project does not go any further.

**MS A.J. MacTIERNAN** (Armadale - Minister for Planning and Infrastructure) [9.49 am]: I thank the member for Ningaloo for his grievance. Once again, in general terms, I surprisingly find myself in agreement with the member. We will give him an application form. We would like him to join the Australian Labor Party, because he is such a reasonable and balanced person. The Shire of Shark Bay is very keen to advance its community, and wants to take every opportunity to advance development in Denham and on the peninsula. Obviously, there have been some difficulties over time due to native title issues, and land for development has not been as accessible as it might have been. Perhaps that has created the context in which this proposal has come forward.

Originally, when the Government was approached by Mr Robertson's group to initiate a lease over the seabed, we wrote to the council and sought its opinion. At that stage the council said it would not formally get involved in this proposal. Subsequently, the shire verbally advised us that, as a result of the survey referred to by the member, the majority of the community opposed the proposal. I note that Mr Robertson has put a different interpretation on that survey. In late September the shire indicated that it would not provide any formal advice, but I understand that there has been some subsequent correspondence with the department, which I am trying to get our agencies to obtain for me, that suggests that the council is now, as the member suggests, supporting the advancement of this proposal.

When I visit Denham and see the vast natural beauty of Shark Bay, I find it very difficult to reconcile the essential quality of the place with the scale of the proposal. I think the member placed this poster on my desk, showing the "before" and "after" impressions of the proposal. Quite frankly, I think the "before" looks much better than the "after". That is obviously a value judgment.

Mr R.N. Sweetman: It is a value judgment of the whole community.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: Yes - the very special quality of that town and that region would be compromised by a development of this nature. I would find it very difficult to even give approval for the proposal to go forward to advertising. I understand the enthusiasm of the council in trying to advance the development of Denham, but I urge that, in trying to advance that development, it does not kill the very things that have made that place so special. Since my first visit to Denham, I have made it very clear that the Government wants to assist the council, and we are pushing LandCorp and the Department for Planning and Infrastructure to work on the necessary rezoning of the land on Stella Rowley Drive. The rezoning of that land is out for comment, and I am hoping to get it progressed and finalised as quickly as possible. I have also urged the department to give priority to the native title issues in that area. We have always sought to work cooperatively with the shire. The first correspondence I received from the shire after the Government took office was in relation to Cape Inscription which, under the previous Government, was earmarked to be under the management of the Wardle family. The Government has said that it believes it is appropriate for that land to be given to the shire. Indeed, I handed over that seven-hectare site to the council. I am working also on getting the land that was under a commonwealth reserve handed over to the council once reconciliation can be achieved on the issue of native title. I understand that the council wants the town to progress but I believe very strongly, as the member said, that there is support within the community for the view that this is not the way to go. I strongly doubt whether environmental approvals would be forthcoming from either the State Government or the federal body, Environment Australia, which would have a strong role to play in this part. I agree with the member for Ningaloo that it is best to be very clear about this matter and to resolve it so that we can focus on concrete and positive possibilities for Denham.

Like the member, I recognise the tremendous work Graeme Robertson has done for the State. He is an amazing man with an amazing history. His development at Monkey Mia was visionary. He has done a fantastic job there. I understand he is doing some very interesting work in Denmark. He has made a tremendous contribution.

Mr R.N. Sweetman: It is the same tactic. He threw a grenade, disappeared for six months and came back with plan B.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: It is in everyone's interest that this project be put out of its misery and for the Government to let everyone know that it will not proceed with it.