

CORONAVIRUS — AL KUWAIT

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson) informed the Assembly that he was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Leader of the Nationals WA seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Nationals WA) [2.47 pm]: I move —

That this house calls on the Premier to explain how the *Al Kuwait* was allowed to berth at Fremantle port despite the state government having knowledge crew members were ill and outline what steps will be taken to ensure an incident like this does not threaten trade and the health of Western Australians again.

This is a very serious issue that has taken up a significant amount of time over the last few days for both the federal and state governments. The public deserves to have clarity and confidence that the Premier and his government are focused on facts and not politics. What has emerged beyond doubt is that the Premier's assessment yesterday of how the process broke down was wrong. Yesterday, the Premier said to ABC news —

“If there's cases of people reporting high temperatures on board that should be reported and red flags should be raised ...

We now know that they were. The Premier was also quoted in *The Australian* as saying —

“I would say to everyone involved, in particular the commonwealth agencies who knew about this, they need to be on guard and be alert about these cases.”

We now know that it was not in fact a breakdown in the commonwealth system. The Premier told Parliament yesterday that he had only been made aware of that situation that morning. We know that that is also not the case.

Mr M. McGowan: That is wrong. I said I was made aware yesterday morning; that was correct.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: You told the Parliament yesterday that you had only been made aware of the situation that morning, and we now know that the state government was aware that a situation needed attention.

The Premier was so quick to shift the blame from WA to the commonwealth to make a political point yesterday, that he forgot that the facts, which he has emphasised through this whole period of COVID-19 is the most important thing to focus on. Before we get to that, I want to make sure everybody in this house understands why it is so important that we get this right, and put some context around the fact that this has an impact on a very important part of our economy. There are 56 000 sheep in a feedlot in Baldivis, I understand, that should be being loaded on a ship bound for Kuwait. Those sheep will have come from about 200-odd producers in our state, most of them most likely from the south west, but anywhere between Geraldton and Esperance. They would have been sourced over a period of six months. It is critical for those producers to be able to sell due to the dry seasonal conditions that we have experienced. The dry weather has led to a lack of feed and a lack of water. The Nationals WA have often stood in this place and explained why this live export trade is so important and why we need to make sure that we have access to these markets.

Under ordinary circumstances, this vessel could load in one day at best, but it usually takes a couple of days. The truck drivers who transported the sheep were waiting to load but have now been stood down, so we now have people in that economic supply chain who are unable to operate. They will most likely be off doing other jobs unless we can resolve this matter very quickly. It is my understanding that the unions at the wharf now require a one-hour break between shifts due to the necessity of minimising contact to prevent COVID-19 spread, so that will add to the loading time.

From our perspective, the Premier and his government need to focus on getting the vessel loaded and out of WA as soon as possible. Instead, the government is dealing with the fallout of a problem that is of its own making, because the Premier was so quick to judge and to deflect. Instead of coming out yesterday, acknowledging that there had been a breakdown in the system, and committing to work with the commonwealth government to ensure that it did not happen again, he shifted straight into protect-and-deflect mode, which was not what anyone in the industry or in Western Australia needed to hear. That fell short of the response that our state required and expected, not least because the Premier has spent considerable time talking about the benefits of the national cabinet taking a collegiate approach between the states and federal government.

It was very disappointing to hear those comments yesterday. The Premier cannot accept the accolades when things are going well and then turn tail when problems arise. It is his responsibility to ensure that he is factual and considered. We are still in a state of emergency; people are still concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their health and welfare, and they should be able to expect the Premier to be factual in the statements he makes. Instead, he yesterday chose to wrap this issue up into some sort of debate on international borders and the reasons he has

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taken such a hard line on state borders. I think Gareth Parker at 6PR got it right when he invoked notions of the *Ruby Princess*, the state hard border closures and the international borders. It was foolish. The live export trade has never been in question. The live export trade is a vital part of our agricultural sector, and it was identified very early on as an essential service. There is no question that we would not find a way to facilitate it, which is why protocols had been developed and why they should have been followed. It is considered an essential service, and so many people in our state depend on it for their livelihood.

There is now a complicating factor with the new restrictions in place for trade to the Northern Hemisphere. That cut-off date is looming fast, and we will have another situation to deal with. I know the Premier understands this, because I have heard him talk about it. They cannot return to farms; the alternative is that they will likely have to find domestic markets if we cannot get this ship out of port and into the market that is waiting for it.

We need less finger-pointing, a reassurance that the Premier and his government are reviewing the protocols that were put in place, an explanation of what has occurred, and an assurance that the government is minimising the likelihood of this situation being repeated. I am not insensitive to the fact that, from time to time, especially in a state of emergency, processes will fail. We are not operating in a black-and-white scenario. We accept that from time to time there will be human error. What we do not accept is a Premier who first makes a very strong point of spending two months telling everyone that he works in a collegiate manner with his federal counterparts and that there is no room for politics in this situation, but who then finger-points and shifts blame.

We would today like a simple “I got it wrong” and an undertaking to explain to the Western Australian public what happened. I think that would set the right course and put us back on track. Our request to the Premier today, through this motion, is to please tell us that he and his government have identified any areas that could be strengthened or amended; and to please explain where things went wrong. That would be an honest and appropriate approach from the state government. That is what the people of Western Australia and the sectors that are dependent on their livelihoods being able to operate want to know. After that, we need the Premier’s attention on getting the ship out of port as soon as possible to keep our international customers trading with us, because that is a real risk. There has been so much discussion about this over the last couple of days. It could have been managed so differently. If that shipment cannot be made, as I said, alternatives will need to be found. In the current climate, it is likely that that will be a truck to the eastern states. Although our truckies are consummate professionals, I do not think that a road trip on a truck across Australia is the preferred outcome for those 56 000 sheep.

We would like to see the blame game left until later, if at all, and to get on with figuring out what happened within the state government process. Protocols that were put in place have been very clearly articulated by the federal government. The Minister for Agriculture, David Littleproud, made it very clear that the federal government was putting its protocols in play to ensure that the Premier and the state government understood very clearly what was happening. I hope the Premier’s explanation today is as fulsome as the update that he provided on his Facebook page, because that was very fulsome indeed. It was very, very explicit and clear that the Premier did not feel that the state government has any responsibility to answer to this. That is clearly not the case. I think it was an occasion of the Premier shifting too quickly to blame and deflect, instead of simply saying, “Something has happened; we need to find out what has gone wrong”, and asking how we can strengthen this process to make sure that it does not happen again. It is only right that the Premier corrects the record and provides a fulsome explanation in this place, as he has done on other platforms and in other forums, since his remarks yesterday clearly sheeted home the blame to the commonwealth.

We need to make sure that we have protocols in place so that the process is not repeated. That is the outcome we are looking for. We hope that the Premier will be able to explain to us that there has been a thorough inquiry and investigation. Again, we understand that people are human and processes break down, but there is now an opportunity for explanation. This has become such an enormous issue because the Premier was very quick to point that finger, and we feel that it needs to be explained in full so that everybody involved can be clear about the processes we have to ensure that we can continue to operate through our ports effectively and efficiently. The Minister for Health has said today that because of the protocols that were in place—the requirements around social distancing and the like—there was very minimal risk to the community, and I accept that, but I think that we need to make sure that everybody is on alert, because this is where disasters start to happen.

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Leader of the Opposition) [2.57 pm]: The Premier has some explaining to do. This is another example of our WA Labor Premier playing politics. He stood here in this chamber earlier today and said that he has a meeting with our Chief Health Officer every day, and sometimes those meetings go for hours. That same office was alerted via email at 10.39 on Friday morning—that is when the email came in to a team member in the office of the Chief Health Officer for Western Australia—that patients with fevers were onboard the *Al Kuwait*. It is inconceivable that the Premier was not updated. The question remains: either the Premier was not updated and there is a breakdown in the communications between the Chief Health Officer, with whom he meets every day, and his office, or the Premier deliberately came out yesterday to create fear and alarm and cause panic in the community,

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likening the arrival of the *Al Kuwait* in Western Australia to the *Ruby Princess*, no less. There were 42 crew members on board, and six of them have tested positive for COVID-19. As far as I can see, the system has worked. Those crew members have been taken off the boat and put into quarantine. They were tested appropriately. None of the crew members were allowed to disembark, consistent with the protocols that have been put in place, and there were personal protective equipment requirements for Western Australian workers—inspectors, public servants and the like—who went on board that vessel. Because of the Premier’s language, he is putting jobs in Western Australia at risk. That is what the Premier is doing. The incomes of our Western Australian farmers are at risk, with no destination for those 56 000 sheep or no means for them to get to their destination, and there was no crisis. The Premier needs to explain why he created a crisis yesterday without having all the facts on board and without checking whether he had been alerted. Had he checked with the Chief Health Officer, I am sure he would have found that email trail—the email trail that has been made public by Minister Littleproud who, quite rightly, is very upset that the Premier has tried to point the blame for that ship docking at the federal minister and his office. It was completely inappropriate. I quote an article that states —

Mr Littleproud said the emails proved Mr McGowan was incorrect and accused him of creating unnecessary fear in the community by suggesting border security measures had failed without taking the time to confirm the facts.

“We are confident everyone has adhered to [the protocols]; if they haven’t we would be more than happy to ... be transparent about that,” Mr Littleproud said.

“It wasn’t until the 22nd of May that in fact, the ship themselves notified the Department of Agriculture that someone had an elevated temperature and was showing symptoms.

“At that point, the Department of Agriculture immediately notifies the WA Department of Health ...

That was as per the protocol. That happened on Friday. Then, yesterday, the Premier came out with the dramatic announcement that we had a potential *Ruby Princess* dock in Fremantle. That is ridiculous—absolutely ridiculous. Our institutions have pulled together.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! Members on my right, you will have an opportunity to answer.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The national cabinet arrangement has been working well until recent times. Now, the Premier is at loggerheads with other Premiers over the lifting of restrictions; there has been differing medical advice and differing health advice, and now this bombshell has been thrown into it. Basically, the Premier is trying to lay the blame for what is a non-issue at the feet of the federal agriculture minister, because this is a managed environment.

I ask the Premier, on behalf of Western Australians, to get back on the job of a COVID-19 recovery plan for Western Australia. Start looking for a jobs plan for Western Australians and stop these ridiculous political stunts that cause fear and alarm in the community. There are seniors in my electorate who are too frightened to leave their homes. After they watched the Premier on the news yesterday, they rang my office and said, “Have we got another epidemic? Have we got a second wave?” That is what people who contacted my office said yesterday, Premier. The Premier has caused that. He needs to apologise and he needs to get back on the job and get Western Australians working again.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [3.02 pm]: Premier, I have to say that I am disappointed. It is not good enough. The Premier’s knee-jerk reactions are now damaging this state and the live export industry. I think the Premier needs to stop playing the blame game. Both federal and state governments need to work together to find a solution to get this boat safely loaded with its valuable load of 56 000 sheep and on its way. The Premier built up some good political capital in his handling of the health crisis, as has the Minister for Health. Everyone understands that. The Premier built up that political capital and is now undoing all that good work. He is taking the aggressive position on not only this issue, but also a variety of issues. Jumping the gun on the information that was provided by the federal government, as we saw happen yesterday, was a real disappointment. As the Leader of the Opposition said, the Premier talks about meeting every day with his health officials and the like, but I am disappointed that he jumped the gun on this occasion and made these suggestions without doing the work to find out what was actually going on. There have been some other things: feuding with other state Premiers, inconsistency on borders and tourism, unhelpful comments about the AFL and Victorians, and the like. The Premier is undoing all his good work. He built up his popularity to 89 per cent, but he is now on the downhill slide.

One thing I really want to emphasise is the importance of our live export trade. It cannot be underestimated. In my electorate, there are many sheep producers. They are doing a fantastic job and have just started to regain confidence. It is a \$200 million industry. They have just started to regain confidence that we are on the other side. The federal government has done a good job and it is now starting to gain confidence that we can produce a quality product and we know we have a market for it. The 56 000 sheep that are currently being held and fed in the Baldiavis feedlot have come from far and wide—Esperance, Kojonup, Narrogin, Geraldton and many other places in between. The

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value of the shipment is somewhere between \$10 million and \$12 million and, as I said, it is part of the \$200 million industry. There are no welfare issues. The sheep are being well fed and are in excellent condition in the feedlot. The truckies are on stand-by and, as we know, the boat is being cleaned.

Our farmers are starting to regain confidence in the live export industry and, as a consequence of the 31 recommendations in the Moss report, which were all adopted by the federal government, our farmers are now budgeting on recommitting to this important market. Once again, I cannot emphasise enough the value of our sheep farmers in Western Australia. They work overtime to produce a quality product. As we saw recently, members of the WA public appreciate our farmers and their food security. When we saw the distasteful performances of some of our citizens around WA when they raided our supermarkets and the like, we looked to farmers to provide a quality food product on our shelves so that we could have that reassurance that when we went to the shelf, there would be some lamb or beef or whatever.

I think the Premier has dropped the ball on this one. As Gareth Parker said this morning on 6PR, the Premier has made a mountain out of a molehill. He has unnecessarily alarmed the public, he has jeopardised public confidence in the live sheep trade and he has invited those who would like to end the trade back into the public debate. Speaking of which, I beg the Premier not to get the Minister for Agriculture and Food involved in any way. We have seen pictures of the ag minister on the Stirling Bridge, and she has stated that she is opposed to the live export trade and having any of that in Fremantle. I do not think it is necessary to get the agriculture minister involved in any way, shape or form.

As our leader pointed out, this is a health issue and a border issue. It is not a live export issue. During question time yesterday, the Premier spoke about the many ships off our various ports and he talked about Dampier and Port Hedland and the iron ore ships and the like. I ask the Premier what protocols are in place for crew members arriving on all the ships, planes and trucks that enter the state. In May 2020 alone, we have had cargo ships from China, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Chile and Hong Kong, just to name a few. That demonstrates the vast array of different ships and different products. I am sure that protocols are in place for the crew of all those ships. It is really important that we do not politicise this issue because it happens to be a live export issue. I ask the Premier to please forget the blame game and work with our federal authorities and with Minister David Littleproud. I am not interested in making a massive issue out of this. I am interested in getting the ship loaded with the 56 000 sheep in the next two days. The crew can be substituted, as the Premier mentioned this morning, and exemptions can potentially be granted if we cannot get the ship going by Monday, but let us hope we can. Premier, let us get this boat back out on the water, with a healthy crew and 56 000 healthy sheep.

MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier) [3.09 pm]: I thank the opposition for the motion. In terms of what has occurred, so that people are aware—I may have explained it outside Parliament, but I will now explain inside the chamber—an email was sent from the commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment to the generic address of the Department of Health’s Public Health Emergency Operations Centre on Friday morning at 10.39, from memory. The email outlined that a sheep ship, the *Al Kuwait*, was due to arrive in Fremantle Harbour in a few hours. The national department of agriculture had already provided approval for the ship to come in. That decision had already been made. The email that was sent states, “No concern for COVID-19 on vessel”. That is what it sent. The email said that three people had elevated body temperatures but that those elevated body temperatures were very mild and that one of the crew members experienced small pain when swallowing. That email arrived at the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre on Friday morning and was noted by whichever staff member at the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre and no further action was taken.

Clearly, there has been a communication issue here. If the commonwealth wants to communicate information of this nature and this magnitude, we need more than an email. Perhaps we need a telephone call to someone more senior than a junior officer at the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre. I have been to the centre and there are dozens, if not scores, of people working there. I do not know who accessed the email, but I make the point that at the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre, which is part of the State Health Incident Coordination Centre in East Perth, there are dozens, if not scores, of people working for multiple agencies to manage the COVID-19 issue on behalf of the state. Many of them have been working there for three months in a heated and difficult environment with high levels of stress and very long hours. They have been dealing with lots of issues over the course of the last three months, and I pass on my thanks to all those people for all the work they have been doing. I understand that it has been a very stressful and difficult time for them.

It would be fair to say that Western Australia, and Australia more generally, has done a good job in dealing with the COVID-19 issue. We can look at our relationships across our states, our efforts to combat it, our health response, our public health response, our hygiene and sanitation and our measures to reduce the prospect of infiltration of the virus into Australia and each of the states. It has been a sterling effort by all the people involved—the Australian and Western Australian communities—who have embraced the measures that were necessary to be put in place.

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The first point I make is there was—I will read the email again—“No concern for COVID-19 on vessel”. That was the advice that was received. The principal criticism is why this did not ring alarm bells. The words in the email were “No concern for COVID-19 on vessel”. There have been some efforts to work out exactly what happened with the email. I assume someone in the office in East Perth read those words, “No concern for COVID-19 on vessel”, and did not take any further action, probably based on that. If the federal department of agriculture, the Australian Border Force or the like have concerns, there needs to be more than an email. There needs to be better and stronger communication and at a more senior level. The important change that needs to come out of this is that we update our communications.

The second thing is that the system has worked. The six crew members on the ship who tested positive did not come ashore. The remaining crew members on the ship did not come ashore. We did not have any people leave the ship; they remained on the ship. The system has worked. We have not had the situation—as many states have had—that someone who is infected may have left the ship.

This morning, I spoke to Minister Littleproud, the federal Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management, to discuss the matters involved. It was a very friendly and amicable conversation. I think we agreed that there needs to be better communications than just a —

Mr D.T. Redman: So you were quite conciliatory in that?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I have some things in common with him, actually. I have met him before. It was a conciliatory conversation. I did inform him that the informal practice between the Australian Border Force and the federal Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment is that there is ordinarily a phone call, and that did not take place on this occasion. Ordinarily, the federal department of agriculture and the Australian Border Force would make a phone call. That did not occur. I think we need to formalise those practices. In the future, we cannot rely upon informal practices.

Minister Littleproud has received a transcript of my comments yesterday, and he was quite satisfied that it was not a hostile set of words that I directed towards the federal government. Indeed, we agreed that the relationship between Western Australia and the commonwealth government has been very amicable over the course of the last three months, and that we have worked extremely effectively together, particularly on all the big issues that have confronted the country and the state over the last three months. I think members will find that the commonly held view at the national level is that the relationship between Western Australia and the commonwealth has worked effectively. We are a far-flung state, with an area that has a long border and many ports; therefore, I think that working cooperatively on these things has paid dividends for the state and the commonwealth. Indeed, the Prime Minister and I were as one when there was a push to close some industries in Australia, and I agreed not to do that. When there was a push not to allow schools to open, the Prime Minister and I agreed that we would reopen schools. Therefore, on many big issues, we were as one, and we held off some of the other states on some of the big issues in the country. Members can ask him, if they like. I am sure he will confirm that.

I turn now to two other issues. I heard the Leader of the Opposition say that this was a non-issue. It was resolved, and the system has worked. However, to say that a ship with six people on board with COVID-19 is a non-issue is not correct. It is an issue—it is a public issue. COVID-19 is the biggest issue in the world. It is the biggest issue in my lifetime. This virus is the biggest issue in any of our lifetimes. To say that it is a non-issue is not correct. The Leader of the Opposition and I disagree on that. It is an issue. That is why we went out publicly yesterday and spoke about it. Imagine if we had not done that—the opposition would be saying that we were trying to hide things. Imagine if we had not provided all the information that we had at our disposal at that time. It is an issue. Therefore, we made sure that we provided all the information that we had at our disposal at that time. When I went out and spoke about this matter, I was unaware of the email that had gone to a generic email address at the Department of Health on Friday morning. I was aware that six people on the ship had tested positive. Therefore, naturally I went out and spoke about it. I did not play it down. I did not say it was a non-issue. In fact, I used some language to explain as best I could the situation that existed and the extent of the knowledge that I had at that time.

During this process over the last few months, I have found that we have to release as much information as we can, as quickly as we can, because people are thirsty for information. If we do not do that, people accuse us of hiding information or endangering lives or things of that nature. In many ways, we cannot win in this environment. We provided all the information that we had when we had it, but we did not know about one email, and we were attacked for not waiting longer. In any event, Mr Speaker, a lesson learnt, and we now know an email was sent to a generic email address. As I said, obviously, we need to have better communication than that because it is not good enough for the state to rely upon that.

In relation to the ship, clearly, we want to get the *Al Kuwait* away from Western Australia as soon as possible. In discussions with state representatives and Minister Littleproud, I said that we would like to see the ship leave. The

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most prospective way of that occurring is for a new crew to fly in and go through the appropriate, very careful quarantine to get to the ship without contact with anyone else, the ship to be cleaned and the ship to sail away with the cargo on board. I have agreed with Minister Littleproud to work on that as soon as we can, but I find with ships that things always take longer than I think they will. What one might think would be an easy exercise takes time. We do not have the regular airline services into Western Australia that we had. Direct flights into Perth are very few and far between these days, and getting a new crew here will obviously be quite an exercise. Then there are the quarantine arrangements to protect the state and people, the cleaning of the ship and the transfer of the sheep. All of that is an exercise. We have agreed to cooperate with the commonwealth to work towards that outcome because my main priority is to get the ship away to solve the problem and deal with the health issues. As I said, whenever I have dealt with ships throughout this period, I have found it to be complex and difficult, and circumstances change day to day. That is currently our intention, but in these situations, we find circumstances change. If circumstances change, we will need to deal with that. That is the process we will go through.

The member for Roe's broader issues are about Victorian AFL teams, the disputation between me and the New South Wales Premier, and different rules between states. States do have different rules. If I had followed the other states on some things, our state would not be in the good position that it is now in. I will give the member one example—that is, schools. The major eastern states still have huge difficulty getting kids back to school. What do we have? Kids have been in school since the school holidays ended. We have had kids back at school for six weeks or so, against considerable objection. There are many other issues. Sometimes states will do different things within set parameters, but, broadly, as a country, the states, territories and the commonwealth have cooperated extremely well. If we look at another major federation in the world—the United States—we see the President and the state governors at extreme loggerheads and armed militia storming state parliaments at the urging of senior federal politicians. That is what is going on in United States. Whereas, in Australia, we have a weekly hook-up, when we all talk cooperatively and amicably, work out certain guidelines and arrangements and then implement them. There might be nuance and difference between the states and we might have the occasional mild disagreement. That is the difference between this Federation and the United States, and I know which one is working better. I know which has the best health outcomes in the world and which has the worst.

Australia is doing something right. It is really quite laughable for the member to say that we are feuding. Even the member for Roe is laughing. It is laughable that the member would suggest it is some huge mistake I have made in saying that the Victorian AFL teams should have “hubbed” in Western Australia, and that giving them a very mild verbal touch up as part of that is somehow a great offence. I did not realise that the member for Roe was a comedian; now I do! He has a wry sense of humour in even suggesting such a thing. That is what has occurred. It is an issue. The issue is being managed. It is not a non-issue, Leader of the Opposition; it is an issue. The health minister and I have dealt with it as best we can and provided as much information as we can. Clearly, the communication protocols between the commonwealth and the state need to be improved.

MR D.T. REDMAN (Warren–Blackwood) [3.25 pm]: Oh, how the tone has changed! Is it not amazing how the tone has changed? The Premier has had accolades so far, and I absolutely agree with the accolades that he has managed Western Australia in a way that has given him a lot of political credit from the community. Is the Premier leaving the chamber? What a shame.

The SPEAKER: Member, you do not discuss whether members are leaving the chamber; it is unparliamentary.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: It is a shame that the Premier will not be here to listen to the matter of public interest. Is it not a shame? I think for an issue as critical as this —

The SPEAKER: It is not our fault that you did not do your speech right.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I think it is a shame that the Premier is not here to listen to the debate, which goes to the core of his management of this issue in Western Australia.

I made the point that the Premier has managed this issue well in Western Australia. As the Leader of the National Party put on the table, the Premier highlighted that he has used facts as the basis for his decision-making processes. He has drawn a very hard line on the hard border in Western Australia—quite rightly so—to make sure that we have a level of protection. Western Australia is a natural, biological island so let us take advantage of that. The Premier has, quite rightly, been unrelenting in his protection of Western Australia. In recent times, the pressure has come on to lift those borders, even from other states. I point straight to New South Wales, which wanted to lift the borders and open up the economy. The Premier was quick to his feet to level at the Premier of New South Wales the fact that the *Ruby Princess* was at the heart of her decision-making process. He made sure that the Premier of New South Wales had ownership of that issue. The *Ruby Princess*, in New South Wales, was at the core of the argument that the Premier is running to say that we should not open our borders. Why would we open our borders to a state that let in the *Ruby Princess*?

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In Western Australia, the *Al Kuwait* has docked under the Premier's watch; it has a COVID cluster. Let me go through the time line of what happened. The *Al Kuwait*, a livestock vessel, departed the United Arab Emirates on 7 May, destined for Fremantle. On Wednesday, 20 May, the ship submitted a pre-arrival report to the federal Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, which noted that at least three crew members had some health issues. On Friday, 22 May, the ship submitted a further pre-arrival report that stated one crew member had a high temperature and three others had shown similar symptoms in the past 15 days. On the same day, the commonwealth granted the ship permission to berth. A Fremantle Port Authority pilot boarded the ship wearing the necessary protective gear. On the same day, we now know that the federal department of agriculture told the WA Department of Health there were sick crew members on board and also released the emails that were sent to the department. Those emails were sent four hours before the ship docked. The Western Australian government formally knew about it prior to the ship docking in Fremantle.

On Sunday, 24 May—two days later—Fremantle Port Authority members heard rumours that a sick crew member was on board and state officials had instructed them to disembark. Mr Keith McCorriston, a member of the International Transport Workers' Federation, made the point at the weekend—even sent some emails, maybe even to the health minister and certainly to the Premier—that there were some issues. On 25 May, Western Australian Department of Health officials boarded the ship and did some testing, which secured the fact that six crew members on board tested positive to COVID-19. If it were not for Keith McCorriston, Western Australia would likely have had another *Ruby Princess* situation. The Premier jumped the gun last week and made the point that the federal government should have informed Western Australia about what had happened prior to the ship docking. The federal government said that it told Western Australia. The Premier has jumped the gun on that argument! It came right down to a person on the wharf making the point that there were some issues and that obviously drew everyone's attention to it. When the issue broke, the Premier demanded, no less, that the federal government explain why state health officials found out by word of mouth. He demanded it, no less! The commentary was in higher and harder language than that.

My alarm went off at six o'clock this morning, and on the radio I heard Russell and Nadia talking about the issue. I heard David Littleproud talking about the issue. I heard Keith McCorriston also talking about the issue. Where was the Western Australian government? Where was the WA Department of Health? Where was the port authority? For a good three hours this morning on ABC radio, they were nowhere to be heard. That is most unlike the Premier. He should be out there, backing Western Australia in what is a significant issue for our state that concerns not only the health of Western Australians, but also a key part of our federal trade. It would be interesting to know where they were. They were probably planning the spin of how they were going to manage the issue for the 12.30 pm doorstep. Of course, the Premier's tone changed into one of being conciliatory, saying that the state government was working with the federal government. He said, "I'm even going to give my good mate David a call. Yes, I'm aware now of this email that was in play. Maybe we should improve our communications between the state of Western Australia and the federal government on such issues." That does not give us confidence.

Quite frankly, this Premier needs to apologise to the people of Western Australia. He needs to apologise to this chamber for misleading it yesterday on the very issue of the state being formally aware of what was going on with the health of people on board that boat. The Premier got that wrong and he needs to take ownership of that. He needs to table the facts. He pointed out today in his response that the best thing that can be done in these circumstances is to put the facts out on the table. Let him put his briefing notes out on the table! Let him put the protocols out on the table! I might add that my colleague in the upper house Hon Colin de Grussa made a point of asking about those protocols and whether the government was doing this right. The Minister for Agriculture and Food; Ports said that it was. She said that the state had implemented —

... agreed, nationally consistent, additional border security measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Each port has its own set of unique circumstances and therefore each port authority has assessed the particular risks and threats to safety of its employees, industry partners and the community in the conduct of its business.

That was in answer to a question without notice in the upper house on 17 March. Where did they go wrong? The Premier needs to table that and his response. In my view, and in the view of my colleagues, as has been pointed out by the Leader of the Nationals WA, he needs to implement a review of those port protocols because, clearly, they have been found wanting.

The Premier needs to show leadership on this issue. He needs to give people confidence that we can manage the issue of COVID-19 in Western Australia. He jumped the gun on this issue, which has put uncertainty out there and also threatened our relationship with the federal government on managing these issues, not the least of which is that we have 56 000 sheep looking to find a home in Western Australia. Farmers are a group that have been through

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the barley marketing challenge and now they need to get those live sheep out to market. The tone today was interesting. I said right at the start that there has been a tone change. The Premier must have said half a dozen times that it was a generic email address.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health) [3.33 pm]: I would like to acknowledge those members today who have recognised the strength of the Premier's leadership in our COVID-19 response. I think that what we saw yesterday and today is the continuing strength of that leadership; that is, we continue to demand that the system continues to protect Western Australians. That is what it has done. We do not resile from making sure that our system is up to the task of ensuring that Western Australians are protected from one of the most deadly pandemics ever to impact the globe. This is serious stuff, so it is not surprising that, from time to time, things get serious. It is not surprising that, from time to time, the going gets a bit rough and tough. But that is what strong leadership is about, and that is the leadership that the Premier has demonstrated. We want to make sure that we continue to keep Western Australians safe. We want to make sure that the systems that we have in place, which have served us so well so far, continue to do the job. Obviously, what we thought was emerging yesterday was a situation in which, potentially, the system may have had gaps in it and may have been letting us down. From that perspective, I am not surprised—in fact, I continue to be delighted—that the Premier is maintaining a very strong and vigilant approach to ensuring that the systems do just what they are required to do.

It is true that when the press conference took place yesterday, the Premier did not have all the information that we should have perhaps had. That included the information provided by the Department of Health through the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre, which had come through on the morning of Friday, 22 May. It is true that that information, which was delivered to a generic inbox at an incorrect email address, provided information that some crew members on board had elevated temperatures but that there was no concern about COVID-19. I do not want to second-guess the response that was undertaken to that. The information simply said that the ship was about to dock—it was not seeking an opinion—and it was in a tone that did not raise concerns; that is, there were no concerns about COVID-19. Perhaps those protocols should have been a bit better. I will come back and address that point later in my contribution.

It is true that we were not aware of that information when we presented to the media yesterday morning. I heard late on Monday evening that seven crew members on board that boat had been tested for COVID-19. Obviously, that is a grave concern. The boat was tied up and already at the point at which Western Australians had been on board the boat—I understand that I should not call it a boat because that is disrespectful. Western Australians had been on board that ship, and obviously that is a point of some concern. When we heard yesterday morning that six of those seven crew members had tested positive, that was obviously of even greater concern. It was of great concern because we wanted to assist those crew members.

I am delighted that the ship's company was able to move swiftly to ensure that the crew members were taken care of. They were taken off the ship yesterday and are quarantining in a hotel. I assume that these crew members, unlike the average cruise ship passenger, are a younger age profile, fitter and potentially healthier and therefore probably will not require hospital care and can continue to see out the quarantine period in the hotel. In the event that they require hospital care, they will be transferred to Fiona Stanley Hospital. Part of the role of our health system under the international protocols is to ensure that the crew members are cared for. I acknowledge the role that the International Transport Workers' Federation plays in continuing to work with the ship's company, the shipping agency, the Western Australian government and the commonwealth government to ensure the ongoing welfare of the crew members on board the ship.

Ultimately, we could have had a higher level of communication about the information on board that ship. I understand that the informal protocols require that if there is a biosecurity concern, that information is elevated by way of a phone call to the head of the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre, Dr Paul Armstrong, and that Dr Armstrong makes a call about how to respond. I stress that that is not a call about whether the ship is to be tied up—that is the commonwealth government's purview—and nor is it necessarily to inform the port authority, although ordinarily we would expect that to take place and be communicated. My understanding is that the information protocols come via security authorities to both the port authority and the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Operations Centre. Obviously, that information came through the PHEOC in the form of that email. I understand it did not go to the port authority, so that is obviously something that needs to be looked at. Maybe there should have been phone calls to Dr Paul Armstrong so he could have elevated the issues, although at this stage it is just by way of email to that generic account. That was obviously looked at. We know it was noted, but there was no call for action to be taken. Indeed, the wording of the email would not have necessarily given rise to action on this, although with the mention of the heightened temperatures of those people, perhaps it could be said that action should have been taken.

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Mr D.T. Redman: Leading to this broader community assessment now to make sure people who have not got symptoms and there is not a general spread, I would have thought that the very basic premise of having heightened temperatures would be part of the remit.

Mr R.H. COOK: I suspect that is right—the member and I would say that is right and I suspect the punter industry would say that is probably correct too. I just want to provide some context for the information provided. There was also the report provided from the ship on 18 May, which is the 96-hour report. That is the report that goes via the Maritime National Coordination Centre, which provides an early health profile for the ship. That recorded that some crew members were feeling unwell, but that they had received antibiotics and the situation had improved as a result. As I said in my answer to the question earlier, that report also requires the ship to report on six individual disease profiles and they include Ebola, MERS, SARS and of course COVID-19. None of those diseases were ticked as being reported. That is by way of suspicion; it is not necessarily a diagnosis. The context of that and the information provided as a result of the biosecurity report was that at that time a range of information was taken and it was decided that a watching brief needed to be maintained, but it did not need to be elevated by way of action. The member and I are not on the spot, and I accept that maybe that information should have been elevated. Maybe a phone call was expected to follow up, which I understand is often the way it is done, but those things did not happen and obviously we will need to have a look at that.

Further to that, on Sunday, the Fremantle Port Authority contacted the Department of Health and sought advice about what it should do with those crew members. Information continued to be gathered, investigated and exchanged over the next 12 hours or so, and, I think, following a request from the ship or an agreement with the ship's company, it was decided that Health would go on board and assess those crew members. In the context of that, swabs were undertaken and ultimately we found positive cases. Today, the WA Medical Assistance Team will go back onto that ship and do further clinical assessments of the crew, and further processes will be established to monitor the health of the crew while the vessel is alongside, and onboard isolation zones will be established. I understand that minimum crew requirements are being looked at, and in the context of that, a further 27 crew members will be taken off the boat today to ensure that they continue to be isolated. A skeleton crew will be left on the boat and those crew members will continue to be monitored as well. Regarding the future of the vessel, we hope it will be able to leave as soon as possible, but obviously those discussions are ongoing with both the shipping company and its client, the agency that has purchased the flock of 58 000 sheep.

As we said earlier, we continue to learn about these issues. As Dr Paul Armstrong reported to the media earlier, every time there is an incident, PHEOC does an incident report and an analysis and works out how things can be improved. The Commissioner of Police observed to me earlier today that between half a dozen and eight agencies were involved in that process, from the early health reports right through to the process involving the Fremantle Port Authority and the Department of Health. Those agencies will look at what lessons can be learnt about the communications stream and the protocols that are in place. Obviously, we need to continue to learn, because at the end of the day the health of Western Australians is at risk. It is not just the public at large who is at risk; we also need to ensure that the Western Australians who go onto these vessels, whether they be pilots, Australian Maritime Safety Authority officers or other biosecurity workers, have a safe environment in which to work. I understand that the State Emergency Coordinator, the Commissioner of Police, will be pulling together a multiagency discussion to see what can be learnt from this process.

It is pleasing that the Premier was able to talk earlier today with the commonwealth Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management, Minister Littleproud, to continue to grow the cooperation that exists between the state and the commonwealth on these matters. At the end of the day, it is the Western Australian public whom the state government wants to continue to protect. At all stages of this matter, the Western Australian public was protected—it was protected by the Emergency Management Act and the protocols that are in place. No crew members left the ship and they therefore did not become a public health risk. We will continue to investigate this issue to make sure that we can find all close contacts, although I think we are satisfied that we have found all close contacts, so there is no further potential for an outbreak of COVID-19.

This just goes to show why we continue to be vigilant and concerned about COVID-19 and the dangers and inherent risks associated with the easing of restrictions and continuing to open up our community and economy. We want to do all those things, but we have to do so in a way that manages the risk. This episode, together with incidents of travellers coming back to Western Australia and occasionally infecting the people who have looked after them, demonstrates how dangerous this virus is. We have to continue to be vigilant to make sure that we protect the safety and wellbeing of Western Australians.

Division

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 27 May 2020]
p3219b-3228a

Speaker; Ms Mia Davies; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Roger Cook

Ayes (18)

Mr I.C. Blayney
Mr V.A. Catania
Ms M.J. Davies
Mrs L.M. Harvey
Dr D.J. Honey

Mr P.A. Katsambanis
Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup
Mr S.K. L'Estrange
Mr R.S. Love
Mr W.R. Marmion

Mr J.E. McGrath
Ms L. Mettam
Dr M.D. Nahan
Mr D.C. Nalder
Mr K.M. O'Donnell

Mr D.T. Redman
Mr P.J. Rundle
Mr A. Krsticevic (*Teller*)

Noes (33)

Ms L.L. Baker
Dr A.D. Buti
Mr J.N. Carey
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke
Mr R.H. Cook
Mr M.J. Folkard
Ms J.M. Freeman
Mr T.J. Healy
Mr W.J. Johnston

Mr D.J. Kelly
Mr F.M. Logan
Mr M. McGowan
Ms S.F. McGurk
Mr K.J.J. Michel
Mr S.A. Millman
Mr Y. Mubarakai
Mr M.P. Murray
Mrs L.M. O'Malley

Mr P. Papalia
Mr S.J. Price
Mr D.T. Punch
Mr J.R. Quigley
Ms M.M. Quirk
Mrs M.H. Roberts
Ms R. Saffioti
Ms A. Sanderson
Ms J.J. Shaw

Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr R.R. Whitby
Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr D.R. Michael (*Teller*)

Pair

Mrs A.K. Hayden

Mr P.C. Tinley

Question thus negatived.