

HOUSING AVAILABILITY

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts) informed the Assembly that she was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Leader of the Liberal Party seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

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

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [3.02 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the McGowan government's failure to deliver adequate solutions to the state's critical housing shortages, leaving WA families vulnerable to an ever-deepening crisis.

In leading into this debate, I have no doubt whatsoever that the Minister for Housing is a very compassionate person and cares deeply about this issue. It is not only the Minister for Housing who bears responsibility for this issue, but also the McGowan Labor government, which has now been in office for five years, yet the housing situation in the state is a genuine worsening crisis. The government talks about investment in that sector, but what is meaningfully happening on the ground to not only contain the problem, but also pull it back from the brink? I see the problem getting worse and worse.

Figures were released in the other place due to questions asked by several folk. If we look at the number of people waiting for public housing, we see that it has increased by over 8 600 since June 2020. That is a 36 per cent increase in the number of people wanting to access secure and affordable housing. At the end of February, 32 609 Western Australians were waiting for a placement in a public housing property. Of those, 7 786 were priority applicants. That is an increase of 9 352 people since June 2018, not long after this government came into power. These figures show that the government has not put sufficient priority on the issue of housing in the five years that it has been in power. We know that in the first term of this government, with social housing, it sold 1 300 public houses.

The member for Perth became Minister for Housing in March 2021, and he was also given the task of managing homelessness in December 2021. Prior to the new minister, in November 2020, 628 people were experiencing homelessness in metropolitan Perth. We see that the figure increased to 995 people between August 2021 and February 2022. I mentioned these figures in this place a little while ago. That is in metropolitan Perth, Fremantle and the surrounding areas, so larger metropolitan Perth. That data is from the Zero Project. I have the reference here if any member wishes to obtain that reference from me. It is hard to estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness. We know that those figures are very likely to seriously under-represent the real challenge of homelessness. The census in 2016 reported that about 9 000 people were experiencing homelessness in WA on census night. Under this government, we see a growing number of people who are living on the streets and are unable to access suitable housing.

We know the government can purchase housing under the spot program provisions, yet between 2017–18, when the government came into power, and 2020–21 it purchased only 119 houses. Since the opposition alerted the government to the deficiency in purchasing houses, we have seen a recent spike. The government likes to reference the former Liberal government. The former Liberal government in 2016–17 alone purchased 317 houses under that program, yet this government has, until recently alerted by the opposition, failed to utilise that program to deal with the issue of homelessness.

I mentioned this and I will read out the quotes. I had some derisive comments from a few ministers on that side. The Minister for Housing; Homelessness is on the record as stating that his government has a pipeline of work set aside once the boom finishes. I refer to *Hansard*. On Thursday, 24 February 2022, in response to a question from the Leader of the Opposition about housing in the Kimberley, the minister gave an explanation. I will just read the part at the end of the first paragraph —

... we are still doing everything we can to deliver and accelerate social housing while also having a \$522 million social housing fund for a pipeline of work once the boom finishes.

The minister repeated in the last paragraph —

We also have \$522 million set aside so that when the market recedes, we have a pipeline of work.

That relates to the question I asked today, for those ministers who wanted to make derisive comments across the chamber: why is the government sitting on a \$522 million package and not applying those additional resources now to supply the housing that is critically needed?

We have the issue of the Boorloo Bidee Mia centre. As we understand from the latest figures, it is still at only 50 per cent of bed capacity. The minister and others on that side are very proud of that facility, but we have a \$6.7 million taxpayer-funded facility that sits half empty while people are literally on the streets dying. We know that not all those

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deaths are related to homelessness, but we also know from the various agencies that homelessness is a substantial contributor to people dying prematurely and dying on the streets of Perth. That facility should be at near-record capacity.

If we go back a little in time to 6 December 2021, we see that only 37 people were being helped by the shelter and only 30 referrals had been assessed since the opening. In February 2022, it was confirmed that the facility was housing just 47 rough sleepers. Clearly, that is an opportunity at least to help a handful of those people who are homeless and on the streets. As we understand it, the referral process is open only to those who were previously sleeping at the former rough sleepers' camp in Lord Street in East Perth and Pioneer Park in Fremantle. Clearly, there is capacity for that centre to help more people, particularly more Indigenous people, who we know are over-represented in homelessness in the state of Western Australia.

With 8 145 cases of COVID reported today, what is the minister doing to protect our most vulnerable? We know that many of our homeless suffer chronic health conditions and yet there are more people on the streets than ever before, in a COVID pandemic. If we look at the supply of housing in the market, we can see there is 57 per cent less supply compared with three years ago, including a 53 per cent decline in listings for sale and a 65 per cent decline in listings for rent. I know the minister is pleased that he has achieved additional funding out of the Premier, but this is a government that has been in office for five years, not six months or 12 months. It has been in office for five years, and all the time during that time this situation has been getting worse. In relation to the rental shortage, these are not just statistics and numbers, these are human stories and heartrending human stories. I think at least some of the members on the other side would know that the dearth of rental income is a particular issue for women who are suffering domestic violence. We now hear numerous stories of women having to stay in homes with abusive partners because they simply have nowhere else to go. I have a colleague outside of Parliament who has a low-cost rental house in Safety Bay, in the Premier's own electorate. That property recently went on the market and was rented for \$325 a week. I will say that members on the other side and the minister said, "Why do you focus on this low number, this figure of \$450 or \$400?" It is because that is the end of the market that is the most vulnerable. They are the people who have the fewest choices in life, including women who are suffering domestic violence. I will just read out a couple of quotations from a lady making an inquiry for the property that was advertised. There were over 160 inquiries for that property. The lady writes —

Hi I'm super interested in this property

I'm a single mum who shared custody 50/50

I'm trying to get my foot in the door I've just left a domestic violence relationship 8 months ago and am struggling to get a place

I understand I need 3 rooms but my daughter and I are happy to share a room im currently working ... and have worked my self up to crew leader in a short space of time —

In the workplace. I will read just one more —

Hi im looking for somewhere stable for me and my kids where homeless due to domestic violence were needing a place as soon as possible if I could view and apply for this domestic id really appreciate it It will just be me and my two kids aged 3&4 I get single parenting payments and family tax benefit this is within my range of affordability another one also have homeswest bond and rent ready.

I am just reading it out as the email was sent to this person.

But the truth is this is not just numbers and this is not just statistics. We have a homelessness crisis that has got worse and worse under this government. Five years in, this is a problem that this government owns. This is a problem that the government has to come up with other solutions for. Saying it has spent this much money or it has allocated this much money is not adequate. There is more that needs to be done to deal with the critical issue of homelessness and the supply of homes for the homeless, but also home supply in the state of Western Australia.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [3.13 pm]: I tell you, Deputy Speaker, Sir Humphrey would have been proud of the answers to the questions from the minister during question time. There were clearly some talking points. He was getting revved up for the MPI and he stuck to them. But I would just point out that it makes not one iota of difference if these are acknowledged as challenging times and everybody else in Australia is suffering from them to the person who cannot get a house and is suffering from domestic violence. It makes not one iota of difference if the minister says housing supply is the solution but we cannot get those houses on the ground because of the supply chain issues and the worker issues. It makes no difference and it is not the solution in the very short term for the people who are struggling on the public housing list that is getting bigger and bigger under this government. It is certainly of cold comfort to anyone who is in that position who cannot afford to keep a roof over their head when the minister says, "We retain the mantle for the most affordable state in the nation", because when a person is at the at the other end of the spectrum who cannot actually keep a roof over their head, they do not care.

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The challenge for the minister, who I acknowledge, because he says repeatedly and repeatedly and repeatedly in this place that the government is doing everything that it can, is that, unfortunately, it is not enough. The metrics under this government that measure how it is addressing these issues show that under this McGowan Labor government, access to housing, whether it is in the community housing section of the housing continuum, whether it is public housing, whether it is Government Regional Officers' Housing, whether it is the rental market, all those issues have got worse. The number of public houses has decreased under the Labor government. The number of GROH properties under this government has decreased. The member for Moore spoke to the vacancies in the GROH market and I have no doubt he will continue to talk about the excess that he has vacant in the midwest where there are challenges for attracting and retaining workers and accommodating essential workers in the region. There are 182 vacant GROH properties in the Pilbara. That tops the list, followed very closely, I might add, by 118 in the wheatbelt. It is very frustrating when these communities see these houses lying vacant. The purchases on the spot market, as the Leader of the Liberal Party pointed out, have significantly decreased under this government compared with when the Liberal-National government was in power. There were 97 in 2013–14, down to just 14 in 2020–21. There is more that this government could be doing, quite clearly.

I know this minister likes to play the blame game. He likes to hark back to when we were in government and point out some of the things he thinks are failures, but I would also point out, minister, that in 2010 it was the Liberal-National government leading the way nationally with the release of Australia's first affordable housing strategy and introducing that housing continuum for government to start working towards investing in not only social housing but working with shared equity and with Keystart loans. We were making sure that we were providing support and rental assistance to those who required it to keep people from having to move out of housing they were already in, and making sure that we had a whole continuum of housing available. It was very successful. Actually, we set a target of 20 000 homes in Western Australia by 2020 when it was first released and in 2015 we had to reset the target to increase it because we hit it. I am happy to acknowledge that there are some things our government might not have got right, but in terms of housing, there is a continuation of that strategy under this government, building on the successes that we put in place and an acknowledgement that we actually exceeded expectations when we were in government in terms of fielding and delivering new houses. Unfortunately, all the metrics under this government have gone in the opposite direction.

The challenge is that I am faced, when I have people coming to my office, with an impossible situation, as I expect every other member of Parliament is. I have three examples from my electorate. I have changed the names of these people for privacy because I do have very small communities in my electorate and they probably are immediately identifiable. We have Violet and her four grandchildren currently living with relatives. There are 12 in that house. They have been on the waiting list since August 2021. Some would say that is a short time in comparison with some of the wait list times—up to 350 weeks, I think, we have seen for some on the list. She moved out of her previous house, which was a public housing property, due to domestic violence issues and has been unable to be moved into a new property.

I have Natalie and her three children currently living in a car at a relative's house. She has been waiting since January for a home and is on the priority list due to the fact that she, too, was subject to domestic violence at home. Krystal and her three children have been living with relatives in two of my communities across the electorate and they have been waiting for over eight months. The feedback from constituents who end up in my office appears to be that the houses are not available because of maintenance issues. Clearly, attention has not been paid to this and is not being paid to this. There is a very good understanding in the community of which houses require maintenance and what needs to be done, so they are frustrated beyond measure that they cannot get in and have a roof over their heads. I am also aware that in my electorate that the priority list is filled with young women with young children who are currently in a domestic violence situation or who have escaped from domestic violence. Before COVID-19, there were 34 on the list in one part of my electorate alone—not the entire electorate; I am talking about Avon Valley, at this point—and there are now over 90 on the priority list in that region, I am told. When talking about people who are at that level of desperation, it is very, very challenging to have the minister saying that these are challenging times, this is happening everywhere and we are the most affordable state. That is cold comfort for those people suffering as a result of the lack of investment along the supply chain under this McGowan government.

Moving outside my electorate, we have repeatedly raised concerns about overcrowding in housing in the Kimberley and the fact that it has been exacerbating the youth crime issues in the region. I was also drawn to the example of two men with intellectual disabilities from Busselton who back in February were reported to be on the brink of homelessness. Advocacy WA and Activ Foundation, which have been advocating and looking for solutions for not only these gentlemen, but also a whole raft of others, say that it is virtually impossible to find places in our community for these vulnerable people. On a lighter side—the government might find this acceptable; I am not sure—we have had stories of teachers living above the pub in some of our regional towns they were working in because there was no housing. They had been waiting for over a year to be placed. I am also aware that it has not been uncommon, particularly in my electorate, for new graduates, in particular teachers, to sometimes find themselves sharing a house

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with the principal of the school because there has been no housing. I do not think that is acceptable in anyone's book. I do not think that is appropriate. They are then left to find a solution in the private sector, which is very difficult.

We need action from this government, not just words. We need a minister who instead of making multiple media statements and repeating that the government is doing everything it can, actually gets some rubber to hit the road. I acknowledge that there is investment being made down the track, but there is a crisis here now, and this government needs to use some of that surplus we know will be returned at the state budget to ensure that we provide those people who currently have properties with rent relief. We need to make sure we are doing everything to identify and maintain those properties at our disposal within the public service so that those who most need them can be looked after. It is simply unacceptable to be tinkering around the edges on policy that could be making a real difference for the people about whom this government talks so often but who are being left with the increasing likelihood that they will become homeless as a result of these increasing prices in the market across Western Australia.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.23 pm]: I think everybody in the room knows now that there is a crisis in housing. We have heard that solutions need to be promised. There are lots of promises. The government is very long on promises but very short on delivery. That has been the story of this government over the past five years. I wonder just how much of this is due to that strange beast, the Department of Communities—a very strange system that this government has put in place in which five ministers share a director general. Three of those ministers really play bit parts, and I cannot imagine that they ever get much time or attention from the director general, but there are two very substantial portfolios within that Department of Communities—housing and child protection.

Over the last few months we have seen just how much of a mess child protection is in. The Minister for Child Protection was under a lot of pressure due to the goings on and dysfunction in her department—the mistreatment of a whistleblower there. We called for her to resign. She should have resigned, but she is still here. Now we have got the Minister of Housing here. He is also called the “minister for homelessness” now, and that is very appropriate because he is certainly doing a very good job in that respect! We are going to see a very large number of homeless people in Western Australia if the current trends are allowed to continue without any abatement.

I refer to an article in *The West Australian* from 19 March that states, “Mandurah is the eye of WA’s rental crisis storm”. This article outlines the rental shortages in 20 towns and suburbs across Western Australia and lists them as being the worst in the state. I want to make clear that this is not a metro issue alone. Seventeen of the 20 districts listed are in regional Western Australia. I will tell members where they are. They are in the electorates of Mandurah, Vasse, Warren–Blackwood, Albany, Central Wheatbelt, Bunbury, Geraldton, Roe, Murray–Wellington, Dawesville and Moore. I know very well the situation in the electorate of Moore. I have been dealing with a local person there, a person whose family has been in that town since its inception, a person who has four children and works at a local business providing a vital service in that town. That person simply cannot find anywhere for his children to live. He is contemplating either leaving town or moving them into someone’s shed so he can squat in it and keep the children in town. He does not want to leave. He does not want to leave the job. His family has been in that town since its inception, but he might have to leave because of the rental stresses there. That is one of the 20 towns listed in that article.

There seems to be a housing shortage even in some larger communities where we might think housing would not be an issue, such as Busselton or Geraldton. But it is very much the case in all of the communities across Western Australia that we see those sorts of stresses coming into place.

I represent many of the communities that were badly affected by cyclone Seroja, and I just put on record that Monday and Tuesday of next week will be the one-year anniversary of that event when the cyclone destroyed many, many houses in Kalbarri in the electorate of North West Central, but also in many communities I represent in Moore, from Binu in the north all the way down to communities, houses and farms in the Shire of Dalwallinu and right across into the central wheatbelt as well. One of the towns that I represent has provided a precis of its situation and what it sees as being its immediate problems in the wake of the cyclone. The town has held meetings recently about this. Housing is the number one issue in that community. The shire receives regular calls regarding housing availability and what there is to rent and what there is to buy. The shire is doing surveys to ascertain housing demand. It needs to know what a local housing model might look like. The shire does not know whether that is a role for local government, but it certainly feels that if nothing else is going to happen, it is going to step up. One of the problems it sees is that there is no commercial incentive for people to build because there is not the idea that there will be a strong capital gain. If someone builds a house in some of these communities, they might make strong rental returns, but they will not make a capital gain. What can be done to incentivise people to build in a community like that where there is not going to be the capital gain that people might expect elsewhere?

There is also the fact that once we leave the metropolitan area, of course, building costs start to rise. It is going to be more expensive than it would be to build in Perth for anyone wanting to build in that region. Five houses were

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lost in the town I refer to due to tropical cyclone Seroja, and that is actually one of the lower numbers if you like. In many towns such as Morawa and Northampton, many more houses were lost, as they were in Kalbarri.

The lack of housing is holding back many businesses in the towns. Businesses cannot get staff to come in. There is no accommodation. They are not talking here about social housing. They are talking here about housing for workers who are willing to put money in and willing to pay rent. That is the case in Jurien Bay, but it is impossible to actually find anywhere to rent, and it is impossible to get somewhere to build. So we have a severe crisis in those communities and those sorts of towns right through the Shires of Morawa, Northampton, Chapman Valley, Perenjori, Mingenew, Carnamah, Three Springs and beyond.

I asked questions today about GROH. It is very sad to say that there are GROH premises sitting in the midwest that have not been allocated to be used when we have such a dire need for housing. As the representative for this very damaged electorate, I asked the Minister for Housing to give me some information about what housing was available in each of the shires I represent. That should not be difficult for him to do. There should be an inventory. One would think there would be an electronic record of all the location numbers, and up pop the numbers. Apparently, that is too hard to actually do. This department does not even know how many houses are in which towns and what their state is. I asked the minister whether there were any plans to sell them and what was their condition and the type of construction and their size. That sort of information should be readily available to the Minister for Housing, yet I saw a response from him that denied me that knowledge and denied me the opportunity to know more fully what is the situation on the ground in those communities that are suffering very real stress at the moment. They are reasonable questions that could easily have been answered and I am very disappointed they were not. It goes to show that this department is not focused on getting results, but on making promises. It is empty rhetoric and political pointscoring as far as I can see.

I know the minister has not been the Minister for Housing for five years, but this government has been in place for five years. As the Leader of the Liberal Party outlined, instead of growing houses in the early part of this government's term, it sold off 1 300 houses. That is an enormous number. The government was asleep at the wheel for the first four years of its term. Now there is a tsunami of demand but a constrained ability to build because we have not been able to get labour and supplies into the state. Only the other day the Minister for Transport outlined how her Metronet projects had blown out and how her numbers were being shot to pieces and that hundreds of millions of dollars of federal funding was needed to keep those projects on track.

The state is in the same situation with housing. We are in the middle of a crisis and the government is trying to make up for lost time—time it should have spent in the first four years of its term, increasing housing stock and ensuring that there was a supply line of housing. Instead of that, the government comes up with lots of announcements. Yes, it puts allocations in the budget, but it has no realistic opportunity to make use of that money. It has no realistic opportunity to cure the situation with those expenditures because it has left its run too late. It has not looked properly at the potential demands coming forward. That has led to us seeing more and more Western Australian families under an enormous amount of stress at a time when this budget is blowing out to billions and billions of dollars—\$5.8 billion last year.

MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Housing) [3.32 pm]: I am happy to speak to this debate and detail what the government is doing on a number of planks in relation to housing supply. Enormous reform is being undertaken in this area. The Leader of the Opposition said that the previous government did not get things right. One might start with the fact that in 2010 the then government had the biggest waiting list. It failed to mention that on numerous occasions; however, in 2010 it was at 24 136. It did not get some things right—the biggest thing was the waiting list, which is what members opposite are judging me by. I note the irony there. The previous government did not get Government Regional Officers' Housing right. In fact, it clocked up an enormous debt with the GROH program and accordingly had to adopt—the opposition leader agreed to this—an aggressive sales program of GROH properties, which included 44 in the wheatbelt. She did not get that right either, apparently, but that is minor as well—the waiting list and selling off GROH properties. She did not get that right. They were extraordinary statements by the Leader of the Opposition.

The opposition also put forward the idea that the government is tinkering. The government is undertaking an incredible reform program. Apparently, I should not issue media statements because they are just media statements; I should not tell people about the initiatives the government is rolling out. The government is undertaking significant work in housing in Western Australia. It is important to put on the record the current context we face. When we implement policy, we always have to look at the current context. Because of the COVID pandemic, rental markets across Australia are being hit. That is a fact. That is a reality. There is a tightening of the rental market as more people are returning home to Australia and to Western Australia. Of course, there have been supply chain issues. That is well on the record, and there are a number of factors in that. Anyone in the construction industry will say that a range of factors have been hurting supplies. Any good government will look at the challenges and the current circumstances and adapt policy accordingly.

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The government has been focused on three very clear platforms to increase housing supply. The first is the building bonus grant. That grant has been critical in increasing housing supply in Western Australia. There is no doubt about that. The \$20 000 grant that the government brought in is overwhelmingly increasing housing supply. There have been 27 000 approvals, 4 000 of which were in the regions. That cannot be denied. The Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre—not a government body—has said through its research that that increase in supply will mean that about 10 000 homes are added back into the rental market. The decision to introduce the building bonus grant was deliberate. It was a deliberate measure to not only support the construction industry, but also create that future housing supply. I note that the Master Builders Association put on the record that it saved jobs; it saved the construction sector. The Urban Development Institute of Australia in summary said that it was a strategic decision that showed the government understood the need for these kinds of measures. That is on the record. I quote Tanya Steinbeck's comments on the building bonus grant. She said that the government had acted "decisively and precisely" and —

... They have demonstrated a detailed understanding of the mechanics of the market, and the grave situation the housing construction industry was facing in the coming months without government support."

That is not from us; that is from a key industry body that said that a policy initiative the government introduced was not only critical, but also understood the market.

John Gelavis, the head of the Master Builders Association, said it was a game changer for the building and construction industry. He said it was going to turbocharge the residential housing sector. Jay Walter in his column, only this year, in *The West Australian* said —

Livelihoods and jobs were saved, and the generous stimulus packages enabled many first home buyers to enter the market.

Because of that initiative and because of Keystart, we have seen unprecedented numbers of first home owners entering the market—a huge growth. That is a very good sign because it indicates that we still have affordability; that a large number of home owners are entering the market. The government also introduced a rebate to buy off-the-plan apartments so that we could stimulate that sector to encourage further apartment growth, because we know we need density. I note that there has been a demonstrated rise in private investment in apartments.

The second part of the government's plan is about land supply, particularly regional land supply, which we know can act as a constraint. That is why we also made a very clear and measured response with the \$116 million Regional Land Booster program. The Leader of the Opposition says that that is tinkering. I do not think that anyone in a regional community would think that the \$116 million Regional Land Booster program is tinkering. That was another major change to help get land out to the market, and it has definitely worked. On top of that, as Minister for Lands, I am working with different local governments to look at other opportunities so that we can get regional land supply out to the market. That shows, members, that through those kinds of programs we are boosting regional land supply.

The third area is social housing. It is funny that the opposition takes well credit for the Kevin Rudd housing package, but it is well known and on the public record that the big boost to social housing was, in fact, funded by the commonwealth Rudd government. The federal government is vacating housing, which is extraordinary, and the Leader of the Opposition has the audacity to raise the issue of crowding in remote communities when it is her National political party and its Liberal federal counterparts that yanked all the funding out of remote communities. She is very worried about overcrowding, but she said nothing when her National federal counterparts took all the money out of remote communities and left our state to pick up the mess. Again, that is something that they just did not get right, according to the Leader of the Opposition.

We have announced a social housing package that is both current and long term. It is a completely logical and measured approach that has been welcomed. I note that the response to the budget from the homeless sector was overwhelmingly positive. When we announced the \$875 million package—\$2.1 billion over four years—Deb Zanella from Ruah Community Services took a moment to say that this is a really great investment. The government has been listening to the sector and doing its own analysis, and it has produced something that will actually begin to shift the dial. We have this housing program, and in the short term, right now, what can we do? We have shifted to a modular program for 150 regional homes. We have also moved to timber frame homes because we know that we simply cannot rely on double-brick, given the constraints, and that timber frame homes are a very reasonable proposition that are delivering us houses in a quicker time frame. We are spot purchasing and converting to social housing other existing stock that would have been sold to the private sector. We have re-looked at procurement procedures to see how we can speed up approvals along the way so we can get housing out faster. We have looked at Government Regional Officers' Housing. I have to say that the opposition does not understand GROH. The member who raised the issue of GROH got it wrong. I am advised that there are not 100 vacant GROH properties in the wheatbelt; my understanding is that there are 14 vacant houses. The rest are vacant as part of the normal churn process. I want people to understand that there will always be vacancy in the

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GROH system. People come; people go. At any one point, there are a number of vacancies because of the churn rate; that is absolutely normal. It is dishonest of opposition members to come in here and say that there are 100 vacant GROH properties that are not being used. It is wrong. It is dishonest. It is misleading.

As the minister, I am getting assessments done for those GROH properties that are not going through the churn at any one time and are long-term vacant and then transferring them across to social housing or to local governments. The Leader of the Opposition mocked this and scoffed and said, “Oh, just 15 houses for Derby!” She scoffed at that; I remember it distinctly. Other members of her opposition were saying that I need to re-use or review housing stock; that is what I am already doing. I have done it in Derby, where I have provided housing to the local government and to social housing. I have done it in Collie, where I have converted six vacant properties and shifted it across to social housing, following refurbishment works. We are looking at opportunities for GROH everywhere we go. Members can see that we have a very substantial reform program. The idea that we should mock or criticise a social housing fund is absolute nonsense. We are doing everything we can right at this moment to accelerate the delivery of social housing. We also understand that we face some constraints, and we want to use this fund to grow the community housing sector. It makes absolute sense that we have a fund for social housing, and that is what the construction industry tells us. The construction industry says that this is a very strong policy decision that will ensure that we deliver more social housing into the future and provide more construction jobs. The members opposite are dishonest and disingenuous because they claim that nothing is happening now and that we are simply tinkering.

Finally, I want to address homelessness. I note that this government—this has been presented to the inquiry—is investing \$190 million across government agencies. That is an extraordinary amount of money. As the new Minister for Homelessness, I am looking at how we can reform those programs to best leverage outcomes. People refer to the zero list, or the zero count; in fact, we are actually seeing more people being counted. That is the case. More people are being counted now than in the past. The actual rough sleeping By-Name List has meant we had to have a more concerted effort to account for people who are rough sleeping.

Secondly, I want to talk about the Boorloo Bidee Mia facility, or BBM. I have explained this again and again, and I think the opposition is being absolutely disrespectful. It was always our intention that BBM—our homeless facility on Wellington Street—would be a gradual process. This is based on the advice from the homelessness sector. The idea that we would put 100 people overnight in a facility is absolute nonsense. There has to be a measured approach. The risk is that if we adopt the member for Cottesloe’s approach and just throw open the doors, the whole thing could close. This model will work by being very intensive and having Aboriginal culturally appropriate support services; therefore, it is a tailored approach. Yes, it started in its twenties, then thirties, then forties, and I think it is just under 50 right now, but that is the approach that will deliver the best outcome for those people, and that is the advice from BBM. I say this sincerely to the member for Cottesloe: go down and visit the site yourself and meet with the Aboriginal organisations that are running it. It is a new model, and we want it to work. I could, for populist reasons or because a media outlet ran a story, say, “Just fill it up overnight. Just find anyone and put them in there”, but that would have disastrous consequences for those people already in the centre.

I will end on this. Can we at least have an informed, measured debate about homelessness support and services? It is not just about filling buildings, as the opposition claims. It is complex, but we have a model that is working. However, to make sure that it works and does not fall over, we need to give it time. I recognise Boorloo Bidee Mia. I recognise Daniel and his team. They are doing an extraordinary job and the model is working. They are changing lives. It is slow and it is hard, but they are even getting people into public housing. I thank them for their efforts and for the work they do.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [3.50 pm]: I thank the Minister for Housing for his contribution. It is clear to see that the Minister for Housing has a comprehensive plan when it comes to all things housing in Western Australia, whether it be Government Regional Officers’ Housing, social housing, new builds, the methods used to undertake new builds, spot purchasing or homelessness. He is a very energetic and driven minister who is delivering, and will continue to deliver, results for Western Australia.

I will talk more generally about the housing sector and make a couple of key points today. First, no-one could have predicted the economic times that we are in. If anyone had said that they could, I would say that they were not telling the truth. It is clear that there is strong economic activity in Western Australia and that that has been the case for a number of years. That is not what we all predicted at the start of the COVID outbreak. The opposition has spent many a press conference and many a time in this Parliament talking about how bad it has been in Western Australia. That is clearly not the case. What we saw when the borders were closed was increased economic activity within Western Australia and a higher demand for housing. We now have open borders and we are now seeing people coming into the state, so we have a challenge in producing housing at a rate to fulfil the demand. Of course, there have been supply chain interruptions, whether through the rail line being washed away, the impact of COVID closures, the impacts to factories around the world because of COVID, some of the conflicts that are happening around the world or the increased cost of steel and other key products. It is a challenging time, but the government

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and the Minister for Housing are doing everything possible to increase stock, through both the facilitation of private stock and direct investment in social housing.

I want to make one point: there is one group in this place that continually opposes developments in Western Australia, whether it be infill or new developments, and that is the Liberal and National Parties. They have opposed pretty much every reform we have brought in to fast-track housing in this state. We will bring in more reforms to cut red tape. Does the member for Cottesloe think we should further streamline approvals? Does he think that we should streamline approvals?

Dr D.J. Honey: I don't think we should cut councils out of approvals in their areas, like you are doing.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: This is the member for Cottesloe —

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No, member for Cottesloe; I asked you the question and you gave the answer. The answer is that he believes councils can do what they want to block new developments in this state. That is what he is saying. Do members know what? To increase housing stock, we need to build things, but this opposition opposes building anything. It will require more reforms. To increase housing stock, we have to be bold. The Leader of the Liberal Party comes in here and says that we need to increase housing stock, but he opposes every development. He believes that councils have the right to completely block developments in some areas. How does that marry up? How will that work? If the member for Cottesloe comes in here and says that the government needs to do more with housing, we will do more, but he should not come in here and complain when we do it!

Let us go through it. The member for Cottesloe and the rest of the Liberal Party oppose the state development assessment unit, which is about streamlining approvals. Dozens of residential developments are going through that process, which again will improve stock. We saw them oppose a new development for workers' accommodation in Karratha. Imagine if that had not happened and the pressure there would be now. They oppose all housing developments. We will be increasing housing stock. The Minister for Housing is doing a lot across all fronts. Members should not come in here and complain about it and oppose it, because we need to increase housing and density in some areas. For all those people the member for Cottesloe pretends to care about, we need one and two-bedroom units.

Several members interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: This is the member who comes in here and says that we cannot have a multi-unit dwelling next to a school.

A government member: Why?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: He has the idea that people who live in apartments are somehow bad people. That is what he says. Then he comes in here and talks about single women looking for accommodation. Well, I tell you what: one and two-bedroom apartments cater to single people, of whom there are many in Western Australia who need suitable accommodation. He comes in here and says they are bad people because people who live in apartments are bad people. That is what he says. He comes in here worried about housing and about where people are living when all he has done has been to oppose developments and try to paint people who live in apartments as being bad people. That is what he has tried to do. Sorry; I do not actually believe you care anything about people in social housing and people who want housing in Western Australia, because if you did, you would be supportive of new developments, new social housing projects and housing diversity!

Do members know what housing diversity does? Housing diversity brings a mixture of people into a suburb. That is what it does. Do members know what? The Leader of the Liberal Party opposes housing diversity. As the Minister for Housing outlined, we are working on the housing diversity pipeline, which is all about facilitating new developments for social and affordable housing on what we term "lazy land" or unproductive government-held land. We have released our first tranche and we will release more, because we want to be more innovative in how we deliver housing diversity. I know the opposition will oppose it. I know the Leader of the Liberal Party opposes it. I say again: the Leader of the Liberal Party believes that people who live in apartments are bad people. That is why he does not want an apartment building near a school.

Point of Order

Dr D.J. HONEY: We are simply hearing repetition from the member opposite.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member. I do not uphold that point of order. Carry on, minister.

Debate Resumed

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We will be innovative and bold, because we understand that we need more density and housing diversity. We need more smaller homes. The situation outlined by the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of

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the Liberal Party was that they would also call for more one and two-bedroom apartments and smaller housing because that is the only way to deliver the volume, density and opportunities for everyone in society. Again, I cannot support this motion from the opposition. It is completely unbelievable that people who come into this place and complain about any new housing development or one or two-bedroom units being built in their suburb would really care about housing. It is just not true and they are simply not serious about it.

MS L. DALTON (Geraldton) [3.59 pm]: The Minister for Transport is always a tough act to follow! I am very, very pleased to speak on this motion on behalf of the government and regional Western Australia. Opposition members claim that nothing is being done, but clearly they are burying their heads in the sand. Yes, housing supply is an issue—it would be ridiculous for me to deny that—but for the opposition to make false claims that the government has failed to put in place measures to address housing supply, shows perhaps it has forgotten a few key things, such as the \$20 000 building bonus grant, which is now being paid to around 20 000 Western Australians, and our \$116 million Regional Land Booster program, which has provided affordable land for housing development in regional Western Australia. Do I get to ask for an extension?

Several government members: No!

Ms L. DALTON: I just thought I would check!

The massive increase in new builds is being experienced right across the state with 370 new homes in Albany and 682 homes approved for construction in Busselton. I could list many, many of them, but obviously time is prevailing.

In the last financial year, 200 new homes were approved for construction in Geraldton alone. There has been a record amount of investment in Geraldton and right now we are also seeing a huge amount of investment in refurbishments, maintenance and the delivery of new homes. In fact, just the other day, with regard to the social housing economic recovery package, I visited one of the most recently completed homes, a fantastic property that was made available for a new family. It is really disingenuous of the opposition to suggest that nothing is being done when people are coming into our electorate offices daily to look for homes. To use this issue as a political football is really outrageous. There are a number of other social housing properties under construction right now in Geraldton and, on top of that, the government has announced that five new homes will be delivered in Geraldton as part of the modular build. This Minister for Housing is looking at all the different ways to tackle the problem and put solutions in place, with those solutions being rolled out right now. I went to Spalding recently to see the start of the renewal program. We are investing \$10 million to refurbish dozens of properties in Spalding, build new roads and create a more vibrant suburb and neighbourhood for that community.

I completely reject the opposition's motion. Our government and this Minister for Housing is putting in place many measures that are having an impact on the availability of affordable housing in Western Australia. We understand the many challenges we face with the delivery of affordable housing, but we cannot just snap our fingers to make houses appear; this will take some time. We have already seen things rolled out. The assertion by the opposition that we have failed in this space is an absolute farce.

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Ms R.S. Stephens) casting her vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (4)

Ms M.J. Davies

Dr D.J. Honey

Mr R.S. Love

Mr P.J. Rundle (*Teller*)

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 5 April 2022]
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Dr David Honey; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Shane Love; Mr John Carey; Ms Rita Saffioti; Deputy Speaker; Ms Lara Dalton

Noes (42)

Mr S.N. Aubrey
Ms L.L. Baker
Ms H.M. Beazley
Dr A.D. Buti
Mr J.N. Carey
Ms C.M. Collins
Mr R.H. Cook
Ms L. Dalton
Mr M.J. Folkard
Ms E.L. Hamilton
Ms M.J. Hammat

Ms J.L. Hanns
Mr M. Hughes
Mr W.J. Johnston
Mr H.T. Jones
Mr D.J. Kelly
Ms E.J. Kelsbie
Ms A.E. Kent
Dr J. Krishnan
Mr P. Lilburne
Mr M. McGowan
Ms S.F. McGurk

Mr D.R. Michael
Mr S.A. Millman
Mr Y. Mubarakai
Ms L.A. Munday
Mrs L.M. O'Malley
Mr P. Papalia
Mr S.J. Price
Mr D.T. Punch
Ms M.M. Quirk
Ms R. Saffioti
Ms A. Sanderson

Mr D.A.E. Scaife
Ms R.S. Stephens
Dr K. Stratton
Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr P.C. Tinley
Ms C.M. Tonkin
Ms S.E. Winton
Ms C.M. Rowe (*Teller*)

Pairs

Ms L. Mettam
Mr V.A. Catania

Mrs R.M.J. Clarke
Mr G. Baker

Question thus negatived.