

SUPPLY BILL 2001

Second Reading

Resumed from 12 June.

DR WOOLLARD (Alfred Cove) [10.53 am]: I support the Supply Bill. However, I express concern about some specific aspects of the Bill. As I mentioned in my maiden speech, significant high conservation-value forest areas that contain old-growth trees were not listed in the Regional Forest Agreement. These include the forest blocks of Dalgarp, Collins, Preston, Red Gully and Barrabup. I urge the Gallop Government to protect those areas. I remind the Government that the Australian Labor Party State Platform, Constitution and Rules 1995, section 38 under the heading "Wood Production" says that it will -

Develop a strategy so that woodchipping in high conservation old growth native forests is ended by 1998. The strategy shall ensure continuous employment based on production of woodchips from plantations, regrowth forests and saw mill waste.

This Government has brought about many good changes for the forests and I congratulate it on the allocation of resources to south west communities to assist with timber industry restructuring. However, in relation to native forests, I would like the Government to allocate money to buy out the Marubeni Australia Ltd native forest chip log supply contract. It was stated in a report to Bunnings Forest Products Pty Ltd that -

Marubeni Corporation has been responsible for all commercial matters on the Japanese side since BFP's chip exports commenced in 1976.

Western Australians would be alarmed to know that Marubeni is allowed to turn about 460 000 tonnes of logs from this State's native forests into low-grade woodchips this year. Most of those logs will be from mature or old-growth karri and marri trees, which are vital habitat trees for the endangered native wildlife in south west forests. This means that karri and marri logs equivalent in volume to 4 000 of the Kings Park display karri log will be turned into woodchips. The irony of this is that the Japanese pulp and paper companies have stated that they do not want Western Australia's native forest woodchips, especially marri chips, because they are too dark and difficult to process. It is stated in this report -

Australian native forest chips, and Western Australian Marri/Karri in particular, are well down the quality spectrum, . . .

The table indicates that the marri-karri mix from Western Australia is seventh on the list of preferences, whereas blue gum is third on the list. Recent reports from Western Australia have shown that there is enough mature blue gum plantation wood to more than substitute for Marubeni's entire native forest chipping supply. To add insult to injury, I am told that the Forest Products Commission recently told Marubeni that it is not to purchase karri logs grown in private plantations, because this would reduce the demand for clear-felling and woodchipping in native forests. This type of behaviour is unacceptable. The best way for the Government to deal with it would be for it to buy out the Marubeni native forest chip log supply contract.

Mr Barnett: Did you just refer to karri plantations?

Dr WOOLLARD: I will come back to that.

Mr Barnett: I have never heard of karri plantations.

Dr WOOLLARD: I discussed both marri and karri. I am also concerned about the sale of community assets. Governments are required to be good economic managers. Any government that inflicts financial pain on electors will be punished severely at the ballot box. This is not a difficult process. Every family in this State must manage its finances, and most do so successfully. The principles are simple; maximise income and minimise expenditure to hopefully create a surplus that can accumulate assets in the future. Do our governments follow those simple principles? Apparently not. One of the most devious of the deviations from sound family economic management principles is the process of asset sales. Both political parties have undertaken asset sales with gay abandon when in power. There are government bureaucracies in this country whose sole purpose is to identify community assets that can be sold off to the private sector! Community assets were not created to provide a pot of gold for another government; they were part of the same process that all individuals use to provide for a future. Some of these assets are large businesses that provide dividends to the Government. Arguments about the sale or retention of these assets are based on simple economic analysis. Telstra, and perhaps AlintaGas, fall into this category, and Telstra also has a community service component. However, other assets are more troublesome; namely, our native forests. Our native forests are a remarkable asset with magnificent heritage importance and even greater economic importance through both their ecological and tourism value. Last year, the Sierra Legal Defence Fund report stated that our forests are worth 25 times more

when left on the ground than when felled for woodchips. However, without the public's permission, these trees are still being sold for a pittance to the private sector to be turned into woodchips. The examples become more potent when we focus on local issues. Many heritage buildings, parklands and coastal reserves are publicly owned and are, therefore, community assets. Some Governments hold the view that because those assets do not produce an income, they must be sold. However, this view is a little short-sighted. My home does not produce an income, but it still has long-term value for my family.

In my electorate, we have the example of Duncraig House, which is a beautiful, heritage-listed building in the Heathcote heritage precinct site. If any members have not visited Heathcote, I would gladly show them around that area, which is a popular parkland and an area that we need to preserve for the future. The community, with the aid of local leaders such as Michael Coleman and Katie Mair, the Mayor of Melville, has sent a resounding message to both state and local governments over the past few years that it wishes to retain ownership of this remarkable land and wonderful buildings. However, local government is threatening the community with higher rates if it wishes to retain these assets. The community already owns these assets. This action would be unacceptable in other circumstances and should be condemned.

I understand that the current Labor Government may push ahead with the proposals by the previous Liberal Government to sell Duncraig House in the Heathcote precinct for private use. During the election campaign, part of my platform was to ensure that Duncraig House would remain in public ownership and be restored to enable it to be used for community purposes. I will continue to fight for these issues. The 1999 campaign to save the lower parkland attracted 2 500 signatures of support. A further campaign to save the whole Heathcote site - Duncraig House, the buildings and the lower parkland - resulted in 2 000 signatures of support. A further campaign resulted in the collection over 8 000 signatures. The community feels very strongly about this area and wants the entire Heathcote heritage precinct to be kept intact, including Duncraig House. If this or any other Government were to sell an asset such as Duncraig House, it would expose itself as being part of a culture which holds the short-term view that income is the only thing we should value and assets exist to be disposed of. We need to look a little further into the future if we are to represent the community appropriately.

Also of concern in my electorate are the Swan Estuary Marine Park and the degradation of the Mt Pleasant foreshore. In view of the fact that the Government is cutting jobs, I hope it will take note of community concern about environmental issues and give consideration to putting more resources into the Department of Environmental Protection to ensure that areas that are at risk are protected. On Saturday, the community again expressed overwhelming support for the environment to be put high on the political agenda. Both major parties need to pay heed to this very strong and continued support for environmental issues. I congratulate the member for Nedlands for winning that seat. The member's statements in the Press indicate that she will be supporting my endeavours to protect our environment. The member for Nedlands said in her pre-election material that she supports a ban on logging in our old-growth forests. This support will be welcomed, because the state Liberal Party's policies have not yet changed, even though the community has given it a clear message that it cares and wants our environment to be protected. The forest policies of the federal Labor and Liberal Parties are abysmal and in urgent need of attention.

I also have some concerns about the health budget. In addressing these concerns, I point out that on 30 May, when we were discussing the shortage of beds in the public hospital sector, the Minister for Health, in his response, referred to me as a former member of the profession. I remind the minister that, as I stated in my maiden speech, I am a registered nurse. That was why I applied to join the health and education subcommittee; as the only nurse in this Parliament, I felt that my health and education background would be of benefit to this committee. The minister also stated in his reply that the first task of his review committee - which I am pleased has a nurse participant, who I believe may be preselected by the Labor Party for the federal seat of Curtin - will be to put in place a structure to allow the Commissioner of Health and the chief medical officer of this State to take back control of the health system. As nurses are the largest providers of health care in this State, I hope that the current funding will result in the re-establishment of the position of chief nursing officer, who can then participate in this process.

The minister had been given the impression by his advisers that the Australian Nursing Federation had put in a claim at the eleventh hour for an extra three per cent for community nurses. A letter that was sent to the ANF on 29 May states -

I confirm that at the conciliation conference on 28 May 2001 you indicated that the ANF would provide a detailed clause or clauses in relation to your proposal for inclusion of a separate classification and wage schedule for Community Nurses. I look forward to receiving this document as soon as possible.

I have with me today a copy of a letter sent to the Health Department on 2 May, four weeks earlier. This letter was part of the ANF counteroffer, and it included the ANF's three per cent claim for community nurses. This letter and the offer prove that the ANF did not come in at the eleventh hour and present a new claim. It is

possible that when Mr Ellery, on behalf of the Health Department, asked that community nurses provide a separate classification and wage schedule, he did not appreciate that the community sole practitioner allowance was the claim for community nurses.

In that debate the minister stated also that the Government has offered almost \$300 million over the next four years to settle the dispute with the nurses. There are probably 1 000 vacancies in the nursing sector, 800 in the metropolitan area and 200 in regional areas. Under the agreement, \$44 million of that \$300 million will be quarantined to employ 400 nurses in addition to the 1 000 nurses that are required. However, where will that \$44 million go if the Government is unable to attract nurses back into the public sector?

The minister stated in the Parliament that since taking up office, he has visited health care facilities. It should be obvious to the minister from those visits that the patients who are admitted today, unlike the patients who were admitted 20 or 30 years ago, require more complicated and sophisticated care. As I mentioned earlier, the length of stay is shorter and patients are being discharged earlier, sometimes without adequate domiciliary nursing support in the community. When the minister talks about the level of care, I wonder whether he wants to reduce nursing to a series of tasks. The nursing profession abandoned task-orientated nursing in the 1970s, and we now have total patient care.

Is this Government attempting to deskill nurses, so that they have responsibility only for specific tasks, rather than the provision of total patient care? If this is the plan of the current Government, is it also planning on deskilling occupational therapists, doctors, physiotherapists and speech therapists? The nursing profession as a whole would support this Government if it were able to direct more funds into nursing education, so that nurses are able to have a greater clinical component to their education. I hope the Labor Government is not committed to supporting One Nation's policy of returning to hospital-based training programs.

The minister also mentioned that the \$4 million the Government hopes to save from the metropolitan health services restructure is earmarked for the patient assisted travel scheme. I fully support the allocation of resources to the patient assisted travel scheme, but is this robbing Peter to pay Paul, when metropolitan health services are already in a crisis? I have already informed the House that, when the current agreement for nurses in the public hospital sector goes through, aged care nurses will be paid 30 per cent less than their colleagues in the eastern States. I have written to the federal Government and the federal Opposition about aged care, and I recently met with Senator Evans, the federal Opposition's spokesperson on aged care. In these discussions I expressed my disappointment that Labor's five-point plan on aged care does not address the two main issues for aged care nurses in this State - salaries and excessive documentation. Although the senator agreed on the importance of these issues, he gave no assurance that a Labor Government would address them.

I now turn to the allocation of the police budget. In the House recently, I could not support the wording of the motion by the member for Stirling about inadequate police numbers in rural areas, because I felt that the wording may have been detrimental to my electorate, which also suffers from a severe shortage of police. Two police stations, Palmyra and Murdoch, cover suburbs within my electorate. In the Police Department annual report for 1999-2000, the following figures are given for the metropolitan region -

Number of sworn officers	1,948
Number of unsworn personnel	173
Ratio of police to population	1:700
Number of police stations	43

I seek leave to table the police statistics for my electorate for the duration of the sitting.

[The paper was tabled for the information of members.]

Dr WOOLLARD: Members will see that the Palmyra Police Station ratio is not 1:700, but 1:2527. The Murdoch Police Station ratio is 1:2691. Overall the community in Alfred Cove has a ratio of sworn officers to population of 1:2646. These figures are unacceptable, and I call on the Minister for Police to guarantee equality in police services by ensuring my community has the same service provision as others. In particular, my community would like another police station in Alfred Cove, near the Canning Bridge, as this is a "hot spot" area with many main roads intersecting. Statistics have shown that areas with a number of main roads and highways are more vulnerable to crime.

In summary, I ask the Gallop Government to look at mechanisms to save our high conservation value old-growth forest, a promise given in a statement in 1995 - 460 000 tonnes of native forest has just been woodchipped. I call upon the Government to save the entire Heathcote site, including Duncraig House; to address the issues of parity of salary for nurses in the public hospital sector, particularly in the aged care sector; and to provide more police south of the river and look at establishing another police station in the vicinity of Canning Bridge.

MR COWAN (Merredin) [11.16 am]: The Supply Bill gives members an opportunity to talk about key issues that have an impact on them, and I shall not be any different. I want to take up some issues that have an impact on the electorate of Merredin, but before doing so I will comment on an issue that seems to preoccupy this Government. The Labor Government wants, very early in the piece, to establish the scenario that it is a good financial manager, and that its predecessors were not. Few people in any constituency, not only the electorate of Merredin, have any great concern about hearing Treasurers talking about net cash deficits, the net public debt or anything of that nature. They are interested only in what will be delivered to them. There is no value in this Government persisting in this approach to the Western Australian public that the coffers are bare and that some of the planned changes are now impossible because there is no money. That does not wash, for one simple reason.

Everyone acknowledges that, in the preparation of a budget, a number of items will always arise between one budget and the next. If anyone does not believe that, I refer him or her to budget paper No 3. That paper includes a number of policy measures that impact on the budget. Page 6 provides a clear and concise record of all the decisions made by government and their impact on appropriations. Decisions are always made that have an impact on the finances of the State, but for which an appropriation was not made in the budget papers. For the interest of members, in the year 2000-01 the amount was \$222.8 million. Inevitably, that funding is usually accommodated under the Treasurers' Advance Authorisation Bill, which is introduced to the Parliament every year. I make no apology for the fact that when the budget papers are produced in August, they will contain a similar page that will detail increased expenditure that has not been budgeted for, for issues that were very important for the previous Government. I question whether anyone would challenge some of those issues.

Let me deal with a number of them: the dairy industry; the locust plague; and \$10 million for people who suffered poor seasonal conditions to help them deal with their lack of income while the matter of exceptional circumstances was being dealt with. During this Government's term - and it is still early days - it has not added one cent to some of the issues in the economy that are pressing, yet we hear constant carping about how terrible was the previous Government. This Government has had time and it has not made the quantum shift in areas where there needs to be some level of financial support. A sum of \$10.1 million was made available for drought relief but not one additional cent has been added. I could continue with a number of examples where funds were made available to meet some of the unbudgeted expenses of government agencies. It is inevitable that health, education and law and order issues go back to the trough for more money. The Minister for Health will find that is the case. Very early in his appointment he had to deal with the salary demands of the health profession, particularly nurses. For 2000-01 the figure was \$42 million but that will blow out over time. For this budgetary year we estimated that \$57 million had to be carried in, but the new Government will find that it will be much greater than that. The figure will be closer to \$100 million. If that figure is spread over a number of forecast years, it becomes quite a burden on the recurrent account.

It must be acknowledged that there cannot be a budget over a period to which one can rigidly apply oneself. As much as Governments try to budget precisely, there will always be additional expenses. That has always been the case and it will remain so. I have little difficulty in accepting that this Government will find that it will have to budget for circumstances that the previous Government did not foresee. That is understandable; it does happen. The Government cannot continue to use that as a reason for claiming that the cupboard is bare, because it is not the case. When members open their budget papers in August they will find that the revenue for the State - unless I am mistaken - will be about \$10 billion and it will be greater than it has been in any other year. The House has just had a lecture from the member for Alfred Cove about budget management and the fact that Governments should not spend more than they receive. If Governments borrow money they should not borrow more than they can afford to repay.

This Government's revenue will not change dramatically; if it does, it will change to the extent that it will have grown. There will be revenue growth. The question is how to spend the accumulated funds. Grants from the Commonwealth will be reduced because of the returns to the State through the goods and services tax. Due to revenue growth, the Government will have a greater amount of money to appropriate than has been appropriated in the past. The key issue is where the money will be spent. There is no question that recurrent outlays for the Government will increase substantially. In the areas of health, education and law and order there is no doubt that, in the main, the increases will be justified. They are the key areas of service delivery demanded of Government, irrespective of its colour. Government members will find out that it does not matter how much money is provided as, in the eyes of the public, it is never enough. This is particularly so when one gets down to nuts and bolts issues where a community or small group of people want something and do not get it. They are the sort of people who will indicate that they are dissatisfied with the policies of the Government.

I agree with some of the comments made by the Government on issues associated with changing spending priorities. It is natural that, having come into office, the Government wants to change some of the priorities that the previous Government had. That is accepted. I do not think it is appropriate that there be constant reference

to the Government being unable to meet its obligations because the funds are not there. There will be revenue growth in this State and it will be a matter for the Government to decide how it will appropriate the revenue. I suspect there will be a significant increase in recurrent outlays. That can have only one of two impacts: it will either reduce the amount of money that is available for capital outlays or it will require the State to increase its borrowings. The Government will have to do this if it wants to maintain strong capital outlays to keep up with the economic growth and demand for infrastructure and other developments that occur in an economy that is growing strongly and where population growth is strong.

That will be the final choice for this Government. Where does one draw the line on recurrent outlays? What does one do with the consequences of that if it has to be expanded - and I accept that it will if the Government is to fund its promises? The Government will have to meet the requirements imposed on it through unbudgeted outlays, particularly in the rural sector - whether it be drought or the deregulation of the dairy industry. Western Australia was the only State prepared to provide funds to assist the dairy industry to meet head-on the issue of deregulation. We have provided a considerable amount of money for restructuring the timber industry. I know there is an argument with the federal Government over whether it should provide a similar amount of money; nevertheless, the State gave considerable funds to assist the timber industry. All these things have to be taken into account with the Government's election promises. The only conclusion one can draw is that recurrent outlays will expand considerably and there will be a reduced level of investment in capital outlays. I suspect strongly that will be the case, particularly in the transport portfolio. The \$800 million that was spent consistently by the previous Government on capital programs within transport, particularly on road building and maintenance programs, is likely to see a considerable shift. The shift will take us back to where we were in the early 1990s when an audit was conducted of the infrastructure associated with transport that showed that the Government of the day was not maintaining the existing road system in Western Australia.

In fact, the maintenance requirement fell short by \$85 million a year, and that did not take into account the capital works program for the construction of new roads. We embarked on a policy of improvement, and we fixed the situation. The people who rely heavily on transport in this State will be disappointed when they realise that we will once again find ourselves in the position in which transport infrastructure falls away. The Government might be able to shroud that to some extent by a greater injection of capital into improving public transport in the metropolitan area; however, it will not satisfy those people in areas that receive no benefit from the provision of enhanced public transport services in this State.

Another issue that concerns me relates to three election promises of the Government and its subsequent undertakings. The first is the decision to establish a science minister. The Premier regards this as important and he has taken that upon himself, so we now have a Minister for Science. In addition to that, the Government has promised that \$50 million will be invested in science in Western Australia. On the surface of things, that is terrific and I applaud that policy. One of the reasons there was not a science minister in the previous Government was that I decided there were already too many titles after my name. I did not want to be the minister for commerce and trade; regional development; small business; and science. It was as simple as that. Science was incorporated in the Department of Commerce and Trade with the clear direction to make sure it delivered on issues associated with science. This State developed the first science policy of any State and we were in the process of implementing that policy. We identified a number of key issues, such as the need for a pool of good-quality researchers attached to all or any of the Western Australian universities and the need to attract to Western Australia groups such as the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, particularly in those areas in which Western Australia had some strength. The resources sector is the first thing that comes to mind. It was of great value when CSIRO indicated to my predecessor, a former member for Kalgoorlie, Ian Taylor, a willingness to bring a petroleum research institute to Western Australia. I carried on the initial work of Ian Taylor to ensure that the facility would be delivered. I am pleased that it will be opened, on schedule, in October this year. However, I note that although \$50 million has been promised for science, a contradiction exists in that the department responsible for the delivery of science-based programs, the Department of Commerce and Trade, is under the impression it must reduce the amount of funding set aside in its budget for strategic science programs. We have been promised \$50 million, but the Government is telling the responsible department that it must exercise budgetary restraint and not spend money. That will have a significant impact: first, it will prove the election promise was hollow and, second, it will ensure that Western Australia does not achieve all the things in the areas of science and technology and research and development that are so important. I provide one small example: Western Australia has a very long coastline; yet, with the exception of the research Fisheries WA conducts in relation to fish stocks, very little marine research is done in this State. We have by far and away the largest and most valuable offshore resources of any State in this nation, particularly in petroleum and energy. I thought it appropriate that CSIRO's marine science division wanted to re-establish in Western Australia. Under a previous regime, it withdrew the facility that was established in the northern suburbs of Perth. I thought it appropriate for us to win it back. We put forward \$8 million of taxpayers' money to attract back that division of CSIRO. I will be very disappointed if I learn that this

Government, through its so-called exercise in budgetary constraint, turns that body away. It will be equally disappointing if the Government reduces funding for the centres of excellence, which contribute to the ability of universities in this State, in conjunction with industry, to win cooperative research projects. I remind the Government that it cannot have it two ways: it cannot establish a Minister for Science and say it will dedicate \$50 million to improving the lot of science in this State while removing funding for those programs of value that have already been tested so that they do not progress. That would be hypocritical in the extreme. I hope it will not happen.

I turn to the issue of salinity. As part of the greater environmental debate, salinity is the matter that has been taken up by Western Australians in the private sector and supported by government for a long period. That is exactly as it should be. We received some public criticism during our time in government. I asked staff within my office to identify how much money was spent on work associated with land care, dealing particularly with salinity. The answer was quite extraordinary. Through three key government agencies - Agriculture Western Australia, the Department of Conservation and Land Management and the Water and Rivers Commission - approximately \$42 million was expended on an annual basis on matters associated with land care, most or all of which had direct relevance to combating salinity. I find it interesting that, yet again, the Labor Party election promise was that whatever is spent on land care and salinity would be increased by \$10 million. However, the minister responsible for that area now says that the State Government expends \$30 million on land care and salinity issues. Through some fabricated accounting, \$12 million has been lost. One does not need to be a Rhodes scholar to know that when this extra \$10 million is put into land care, we will find through the budget papers that a program has been cut, and that instead of \$52 million being spent on land care, salinity and associated salinity issues, the amount will be greatly reduced.

There will be lots of shouting by the Government that it has increased expenditure by \$10 million, because of a new \$10 million program. However, it will not talk about the cut in existing programs that will amount to at least \$15 million to \$20 million. The Government will not fool people in the private sector who spend much of their time dealing with the issues of salinity and land care. I recognise that the Government must take up this issue with the federal Government - at least I hope it does. I grow a little tired of the Commonwealth Government indicating to Western Australia that every cent that comes back to us across the border must be matched from the State Government's coffers. I see the Minister for Health looking up. He has a battle on his hands on two fronts. The first issue is aged care funding, and the way the Commonwealth offers support for people who want to take up beds in aged care homes, hostels or hospices. Unless the Commonwealth approves the beds, it is difficult for the local body to get started. The second issue is Health Insurance Commission funding to the States. In capital cities, the distribution of Medicare funding through the normal schedules is about \$600 per capita per annum; in the Kimberley it is about \$70 per capita per annum. I guarantee the Minister for Health that in the commonwealth-state agreement on health funding, Western Australia will not be compensated for that. Those are the arguments that the minister and the Premier must take up to restore some equity to the way in which funding is made available. The same applies on the issue of salinity.

The Commonwealth Government was late on the scene on land care programs. I will give the Natural Heritage Trust its due; it is of great value. I am pleased to learn that the new Government will maintain that program. The new program that has been put forward, which plans to spend \$500 million over seven years, will achieve at least two purposes. The first is to buy back the water rights that were overallocated in New South Wales to ensure that the Murray-Darling basin has a greater release of water to the mouth of the Murray River. The second is to assist the Government of Queensland to pay compensation to farmers who want to clear land in Queensland; whereas Western Australia has had an offer of around \$158 million over a seven year period that will amount to \$20-odd million a year. Some sticking point exists over whether the States should match those funds. If Western Australia is spending \$42 million a year, and a \$10 million program is added to that as a result of the sale of AlintaGas, effectively in this financial year WA will spend \$52 million. We receive around \$25 million to \$26 million from the Natural Heritage Trust, of which about \$16 million or \$17 million goes directly to land care operations associated with salinity, and we will probably get about \$20 million from the new program. Effectively we are putting \$50 million to \$55 million toward land care, but the Commonwealth is offering us no more than about \$30 million and saying that Western Australia must find another \$20 million. That does not add up. I hope successful negotiations will occur between the State and the Commonwealth over the issue of matching money. It is only when the Commonwealth matches the funding that the State allocates to salinity that we can start to talk about the balance being matching money. Until such time as the Commonwealth does that, we need to get those funds from that program and make sure that we can deliver them to the communities and to the individuals in the land care bodies that effectively undertake to do the work.

I want to bring up a number of other issues. One is that this State will have increased revenue to meet its budgetary requirements. Some difficulty will be experienced in meeting the unbudgeted items of expenditure incurred by the previous Government. I acknowledge that, and say that every one of those projects needed to be done. The Government must also add to that its election promises, to which it is committed. However, the

Government should not keep telling us that the cupboard is bare. The Government will receive increased revenues, and will be able to spend that increased revenue. How the Government spends it is entirely up to it. I am sure it will have to increase its recurrent outlays, which will reduce the capital outlays in the budget. I hope that the capital outlays and budgetary items to be cut are not in the fields of science and technology and research and development, or in areas which deliver services to rural electorates, particularly those electorates that at the moment are suffering other economic adversity because of poor seasonal conditions.

MRS EDWARDES (Kingsley) [11.45 am]: I will continue on the theme raised by the member for Merredin that the cupboard is bare: I wonder where the money has gone. Our electorate offices - if we read the newspapers, most of us have an electorate office - need to be maintained as the years wear on. Recently 50 fluorescent tubes were replaced in my office. That was because each morning they took 20 to 30 minutes to light up, and when they did they were dim.

Mr Kucera: Like the opposition front bench.

Mrs EDWARDES: Like the front bench opposite. Members may think that is not a major problem, but the response from the Ministry of the Premier and Cabinet was quick. I have always found the unit run by Paul Majewski, under the leadership of Mal Wauchope, to be effective. Whenever I have had a problem it has always been resolved quickly. Over the past few weeks though, they have been slow to return my phone calls and I was allocated only 50 fluorescent tubes. I rang them and said that we had a problem, because another 30 tubes needed replacing. We have the same problems with those tubes; they take 20 to 30 minutes to get going and they are very dim. I feel as though I have sunglasses on; it is that dim. They sent me back a message that electorate offices, as with all other areas of government, had suffered cutbacks. The message said that lighting would be upgraded in members' and electorate officers' work areas; that is, where I sit and where the two computers are located. It said that all other areas would receive new tubes when others expired. That has created a greater problem as we move between the two rooms in which those 50 new fluorescent tubes are producing brilliant light and into an area where we could be wearing sunglasses. The stress on our eyes from the contrast in brightness as we move between those areas, is now far greater than working in only dim light. Our work areas are not only where the computers are located. For the sake of 30 fluorescent tubes the staff in my office will have eyestrain. An occupational safety and health problem has been created through these cutbacks in expenditure in electorate offices, and in all other areas of government.

Mr McRae: The office that I took over from the former member for Riverton had five breaches of the Occupational Safety and Health Act. That situation existed for 12 years. While that member was the responsible minister he did absolutely nothing. It is a bit rich your coming here and saying that.

Mrs EDWARDES: It was not acceptable then, and it is not acceptable now. We should not breach workplace safety conditions in our offices. Is this the reason that some members of Parliament do not yet have an electorate office and are not likely to have one for months? Is there a problem with cashflow? This Government might have a few more members than the previous Government had, but the price of parliamentary democracy is that members be provided with the wherewithal to talk to and work with their constituents. That means providing an appropriate electorate office. To say the cupboard is bare is not acceptable. I cannot believe that providing me with only 50 fluorescent tubes when I required 80 tubes is an appropriate solution.

Those who have heard me speak during my time in Parliament know of my interest in protecting our children and my concern about the marketing of violence to children. That occurs in a number of different ways in the various forms of media; for example, in films, videos, television cartoons and music. Many such concerns have been expressed by my constituents and by people throughout the country. I had the honour of being the state censorship minister for eight years. While we do not subscribe to censorship, we abide by two principles in Western Australia and Australia generally: we believe that adults should be able to read, hear and watch what they like, but the protection of our children is paramount. Members have given bipartisan support to that approach.

I will raise today some issues that have been brought to my attention. The first issue is the movie *Fifteen Minutes*, which is currently being screened. The movie has a mature audience 15+ rating. A public review of the classification system will be conducted later this year. Questions have been asked about the appropriateness of the MA15+ rating because the features carrying that classification contain some violence that may not be suitable for viewing by 15 and 16 year olds. It has been suggested that perhaps a 12 to 16 year old or 12 to 17 year old classification and a further classification for younger children would be appropriate. Complaints have also been received about the general rating. It is suggested that a general classification movie might not necessarily be suitable for a three or four year old, but it might be suitable for an 11 or 12 year old. Perhaps the whole classification system should be restructured to reflect changing community standards. We class people aged between 13 and 17 as teenagers. That age range could be a more appropriate base for this classification. Some 12 or 13 year olds might like to think they are mature, but that is not necessarily the case.

I have received a complaint about *Fifteen Minutes* that has been referred to the Office of Film and Literature Classification. The complainants believe its explicitness and impact warrant a restricted rating rather than an MA15+ rating. A letter from the National Viewers and Listeners Association of Australia states -

Is this the sort of film that you think would be suitable for 15 year old's or what about the unsuspecting parents who take their younger children to see the film, is suddenly confronted by such a "punch" of violence?

The MA15+ rating allows a parent to take younger children to see the movie. Some people say that parents have an obligation and responsibility to find out what their children are seeing and hearing. Not all parents have access to that level of information. How much do film goers know about a movie before they see it? It can be difficult to track down the detail, even using the Internet, and to find out why the OFLC has allocated a specific classification. Not all parents will do that, so we must ensure that they have more information.

I have been pushing for an advisory notice on cartoons screened on television. For the past eight years, censorship ministers have agreed that that should happen. However, we could not convince the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations, the body that controls commercial television broadcasts, that commercial television stations should warn parents that the material contained in some cartoons is not suitable for children under the age of eight. Many studies conducted in the United States indicate that children under the age of eight have viewed between 12 000 and 15 000 episodes of violence on television by that age. While that does not appear to have any impact at that young age, the effect is evident in their teenage years in antisocial behaviour. When I was Attorney General, I was very conscious of studies focused on the behaviour of teenagers in our remand and juvenile detention centres. Members know about the tragic cases of young people in the United States rampaging through schoolyards, and young people who commit suicide. One mother told a senate committee that when she could not rouse her son one morning - he had committed suicide - she removed his earphones and noticed that while dying he had been listening to death metal music. The mother of one of the Columbine High School mass killers had no way of knowing or understanding what her son intended to do when she sent him and his cousin off to school on that fateful day. He had taken one of his father's guns intending to kill all the teachers at the school. The night before and in the car on the way to school he had been listening to death metal music.

That issue has been brought to the attention of the censorship ministers. In 1996, we established a code of practice in conjunction with the Australian Record Industry Association. That code was based on the premise that audio recordings advocating suicide, violence, sexual violence, necrophilia and other abhorrent or criminal activities should not be available to children. Even though those products have stickers warning about the explicit material they contain, some retail outlets sell them to children. The censorship ministers have agreed that they will undertake a review of the operation of ARIA and the code of practice. We have not heard much about that and that is why I have raised this issue today. We need far more promotion of the code complaints hotline. Some people do not know how to complain, so they approach members of Parliament. When one lady complained to ARIA, the association provided the totally inadequate response that circulation was justified by the artistic merit of the recording bearing in mind the wide range of music available. That is a totally inappropriate response from a body that has been charged with overseeing the code of practice. It is generally working well, but some problems have emerged. We would like to think that a level of maturity exists within the recording industry because it cannot just be left up to governments and parents; the industry itself must also take on some level of responsibility.

An audio recording code will be reviewed this year and I suggest to all members of the community to have their say. I have received many complaints over the years, and this is another opportunity to be heard, particularly about a likely change of classification. Following the development of digital videodiscs, music is being classified for the first time. Currently under the code only written material is classified, not lyrics - unless a lyric sheet has been printed or if the word is printed on a cover. The audio recording cannot be classified and that is an area of concern.

An inquiry was undertaken in the United States and some of the material produced is frightening. The inquiry considered how music lyric violence affects our youth and its impact on youth behaviour and wellbeing in the United States. As we all know, music has been a part of our lives. If one is into exercise, music is great for listening to when exercising. We sing to our children and babies to soothe them, and sometimes we put on some music for ourselves. Aristotle believed that music could shape character, as did Plato who believed that music could be used to change whole societies. Young people may not have the ability to filter out the words - although some people may say they do not listen to the words. What nonsense! I do not know about you, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr Andrews) but when I was a teenager I knew all the words to the popular songs, as do the kids of today. I was talking to my 14-year-old last night and I said, "Do you know this artist?" He said he did and I said, "Well, I am not very happy with those words" - and he knew the words! That is frightening because

you cannot say that kids do not listen to the words and that they are only interested in the tempo of the music. It does not happen that way. They do know the words.

The American Psychological Association includes media influences on the list of factors contributing to a child's risk profile. Child psychologist Dr David Elkind says that music can influence young people as much as any visual media. In 1989 the American Medical Association concluded that music exerts a greater influence on teenagers than does television. Surveys found that more teenagers than adults believe that popular music encourages drug use, pre-marital sex and contributes to a culture of aggression. More specifically, research at the University of Florida shows that the more negative the message, the more young people listen to and believe that message. Two researchers went on to find that listeners to music with potentially negative themes were more likely to report that they knew all of the words to their favourite songs and that the lyrics were important to their experience of the music. This proves my point that the lyrics remain in the subconscious.

People either support or oppose censorship but the bottom line is the protection of young children. We must acknowledge that we have this responsibility as a society, as parents, as the music industry, and as a Parliament, to ensure that we help our children.

I have talked generally about heavy metal music. The senate inquiry examined the audience who listen to heavy metal music or watch DVDs or some of the computer games at the extreme level that use heavy metal as background music. Firstly, the indications are that heavy metal fans are largely white male adolescents. Secondly, although much of the heavy metal audience can be characterised as quite normal or typical kids who just happen to like the music, it does strongly draw kids who are otherwise troubled or at risk. Thirdly, because so many troubled youth prefer heavy metal music compared with audiences for other types of popular music, heavy metal fans tend to exhibit a number of worrisome attitudes and behaviours. They are more at odds with their parents; they may have come from separated or divorced families, and report a relatively low level of satisfaction with their family relations; and they are often at odds with the school environment or authorities. They also tend to be risk takers and thrill or sensation seekers.

In the area of beliefs and attitudes, heavy metal fans express lower levels of trust in others. As troubled youth are drawn to this music, one study found that adolescents in juvenile detention centres are three times more likely than are regular high school students to prefer heavy metal music. I suspect that would be the same in our juvenile detention centres.

Finally, heavy metal fans tend to be fans in the true sense of the word. They are fanatical about the music and are highly committed to and involved in it. The lyrics promoting suicide, criminal activity, and death are seen as something to be believed in.

Although it appears that kids with the attitudes that I have just outlined, turn to the music, so too do many normal adolescents who manifest few or none of those attitudes and behaviours; they also love the music. Knowing an adolescent as a heavy metal fan does not tell us much about whether he is troubled. However, if you know a youth is troubled, it is a good bet that he is a heavy metal fan.

The rap audience is said to be different from that of heavy metal. I will not discuss that as they link up more with the music as against the lyrics. However, the lyrics are also critical, and some rap artists, about whom I will talk later, still promote the heavy metal theme of suicide and criminal activity.

In summary, the primary concern about the influence of violent music is whether and how it affects the behaviour of adolescents. Most experimental studies describe the music's effects on beliefs. That often leads critics to claim that the research is irrelevant. This is the reason the senate committee in the United States undertook those hearings.

The findings on the effects - and I will not go through all of them - state that videos laced with violent images made adolescent viewers more antagonistic in their orientation towards women, and more likely to condone violence in themselves and in others. Finally, at least one non-experimental case study reported in the clinical research literature indicated that eliminating access decreased the frequency of violent acts among teenagers and young adults in a locked treatment facility. Therefore, by removing the heavy metal music from a group of students, the frequency of violent acts was reduced.

Other conclusions from the research on all kinds of media content leave little doubt that children, adolescents and adults learn a great deal from what they hear and see in the mass media. Popular music is largely for, of and by adolescents. It focuses on many of the issues that are central to adolescent concerns, many of which are taboo topics that parents, schools and churches may not do a very good job of addressing. Today, adolescents attain most of their information about sex and sexuality from peers, media and the music media because of their focus on such topics that are likely to fill that need. That is a major concern to us.

During one of the public hearings, a girl who asked a question also asked if she could make a comment. Her comments brought home to me where the responsibility lies, and it does not lie with the kids. She said that people complain about the actions of youth; however, who makes the movies, who sells the alcohol, who produces the television, who writes the advertising, who imports the drugs, who contracts with the artists and who uses and abuses young people for sex? Adults do. Young people are then blamed and asked why they act the way they do. She concludes by saying that the truth hurts. That is why we cannot close our eyes and say it is only an issue of censorship and that we do not want to become involved in censorship.

The bottom line is that our children must be protected. The marketing of violence to young people is not acceptable. We must turn more and more young people away from that level of violence. Everybody has the responsibility to do that. The responsibility to stop marketing violence to our young children lies not only with the Government and parents, but also with the media industry. Parents can turn off their children's computer or tell their children not to attend concerts, and they can pay attention to what is on the computer when their kids use it; I always leave the volume turned up so I can hear it. We can also refuse to buy products that glorify violence. Parents need to be aware of what their kids are doing.

We are all aware of parents who do not exercise control over their children or who are not confident about their responsibilities as parents because of the enormous peer pressure that is placed on young people. One of our underlying concerns must be the protection of young children. One of Marilyn Manson's singles that was released a year or so ago, is called *Disposable Teenagers*; my message is that our teenagers are not disposable. We have a responsibility to protect them. I encourage every member to become involved in the review of audio recordings and the classifications review that will occur this year. The music industry must be told that our children are not disposable.

[Quorum formed.]

MR BIRNEY (Kalgoorlie) [12.13 pm]: I thank the member for Murray-Wellington for bringing me an audience for my speech in the Supply debate.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Dean): The bells were rung because of a lack of a quorum; we now have a quorum, therefore, the member for Kalgoorlie has the floor. I ask that members please pay due respect to that.

Mr BIRNEY: Thank for your protection, Mr Acting Speaker.

During my grievance, I neglected to read into *Hansard* a number of headlines that appeared in my local newspaper over the past two to three months. I will do that because they touch on the subject I referred to earlier. A number of the members of the Government's frontbench have ignored Kalgoorlie, broken a number of promises and have also failed to uphold many commitments made by the previous Government.

On 7 June, the headline in the *Kalgoorlie Miner* was, "minister ignores election promise". On 8 June the headline read, "Goldfields let down, claim community leaders". I am not sure when the following statement was made, but I think it was after the election. The headline states, "Edwards does backflip on election promise". A recent headline states, "a lack of staff leaves DEP office unmanned". On March 13, yet another headline asks, "will promises made now be fulfilled?" Another article in the *Kalgoorlie Miner* on Wednesday, 6 June, that relates to the Minister for Health says, "men's health funding uncertain". On Friday, 8 June, another headline says, "Kucera uncertainty puts hospital project in doubt". I have not trawled through the papers for any length of time. The final headline says it all, "minister reneges on promise".

My colleague, the member for Eyre, is running madly around Kalgoorlie trying to plug the holes in the sinking ship. The member for Eyre is very well thought of in my electorate. He is trying to defend a Government that would appear, when reading these headlines, to be indefensible. The seat of Kalgoorlie has been held by the Labor Party for the best part of 100 years. This is the first time that a Liberal has managed to win the seat. I only just managed to win it, so members would think that I would be a good target. One would think that the Labor Party would examine the margin by which I hold the seat. The Labor Party has held the seat for the past 100 years. This bloke is probably a fluke! Why does not the Labor Party spend some money in Kalgoorlie?

Mr Bradshaw: It wants to punish the Kalgoorlie people for not voting for the Labor Party.

Mr BIRNEY: I will take that interjection from the member for Murray-Wellington. These headlines tell a good story about how the new Labor Government has absolutely no interest in Kalgoorlie-Boulder or the goldfields. If members do not want to do this for me, they should do it for the member for Eyre. As I have said, he is well thought of in my electorate and he is trying to plug the holes in the sinking ship.

I now refer to a subject that members may find more mundane. I am happy for those members who were asleep on the couch to go back to sleep. This subject is a hobbyhorse of mine, and I feel strongly about it. It is appropriate that I talk about this issue in debate on the Supply Bill. It has the potential to save the police budget

millions of dollars a year, to more than double the number of crimes that are solved in Western Australia and to take criminals off the street en masse. I am sure that all members want to know what this magic formula is that can save the police budget millions of dollars and take a host of criminals off the streets. I refer to DNA sampling and testing.

In 1980, scientists discovered that there are differences in people's DNA.

Several members interjected.

Mr BIRNEY: I am glad I cannot hear well - I have bad hearing; however, I am sure the interjections were irrelevant.

Scientists can now use what might be considered a genetic fingerprint. DNA can be found in blood, semen, saliva, fingernails, hair and also in skin. In 1985, British scientists first developed DNA tests for police to use in Britain. Those tests were complex, but they were well developed. Scientists have managed to refine those tests over time. DNA sampling and testing is the most advanced crime-fighting tool that can be offered to the Western Australia Police Force. One of the biggest problems with DNA sampling and testing is the element of hysteria that surrounds it. The hysteria tends to cloud the benefits that could be gained if this State had a regime that included DNA sampling and testing. Civil libertarians have said that they are worried that people could be framed if this technology is used. They are also worried that it is an example of Big Brother. I have not managed to find a good argument on the side of the civil libertarians.

Mr McRae: Can I suggest one?

Mr BIRNEY: Please do, but quickly.

Mr McRae: The real argument is that catching criminals after crimes have been committed is too late. The challenge is to prevent crime before it happens.

Mr BIRNEY: I take that point. I will get down to some facts and figures shortly. The member for Riverton will find that although the prevention of crime before it occurs must be examined, apprehension of criminals also provides a fairly significant public benefit. Civil libertarians have put forward an argument that people could be framed for crimes through the testing of DNA samples. A person could be framed despite that; a person could be framed for a crime if someone pinches his wallet and leaves it at the scene of the crime. People can be framed under the current regime. Another technological advance has occurred in recent times, which allows the age of a DNA sample to be identified. That reduces the possibility of a person's being framed.

One important element of DNA sampling is that DNA can prove a person is innocent. The argument against DNA testing goes off on the tangent that it will attempt to prove a person guilty, but DNA testing can also prove that a person is innocent. The New York Innocence Project is a good example of that. That project used DNA testing to prove that 40 convicted criminals were innocent. Many of those 40 people were on death row. What an absolute tragedy it would be to convict or put to death an innocent person. The benefits can be seen in this application of DNA testing in the United States.

My information is that the clearance rate of crime in Australia - perhaps the Minister for Health can correct me if I am wrong - is between 10 and 15 per cent. The clearance rate of crime in Britain, which is a country that has a DNA database, is in excess of 30 per cent - more than double the clearance rate in Australia. Those numbers speak for themselves. Sixty-four thousand person-to-scene matches were made in Britain between 1995 and 2000. That equates to about 500 matches a week that were made with the help of DNA testing. British police also conducted 144 mass screenings, which resulted in 53 matches, 20 of which were for murder and 33 for rape. What a terrific tool! Why is it not used in Western Australia? I am also told that about 80 per cent of people accused of a crime confessed when they were faced with DNA evidence. Once again, that would have a significant impact on the police budget.

There are two or three options for DNA testing - samples can be taken at birth, from criminals or suspected criminals, or from everyone. My preference is for DNA sampling at birth. If a person never commits a crime, that sample will not impact on him. If a person does commit a crime during his life, he deserves to be caught. If DNA sampling can facilitate that capture, the public is well served. I am also told that blood samples have been taken at birth for some time. I would like legislation passed to empower the police to use those blood samples as a DNA database. If that is the case -

Ms MacTiernan: How would you deal with Jehovah's Witness babies?

Mr BIRNEY: Perhaps the minister could talk, rather than screech. I might then be able to take her interjection.

Those blood samples are already there; they are locked away in a vault. If legislation is all that is needed for that DNA to be used, legislation is the way to go. The Big Brother syndrome is not a viable argument. Little can be

told from a piece of DNA on its own. The only thing that can be told is the gender of the person it was taken from. I am not sure how people arrive at the Big Brother argument. I am told that the cost of each test is between \$60 and \$100. I cannot help wondering about the cost of providing police on the beat to actively pursue investigations and criminals. I do not know what has been spent on the Claremont serial killer case, but I suggest that it has been an expensive investigation. I cannot help wondering whether that investigation might have stopped a week or two after it began had DNA sampling at birth been introduced some time ago.

DNA sampling and testing can only protect the innocent. There are no good arguments against it. One relevant argument for it, in the context of the Supply Bill 2001, is that it could have a significant impact on the Government's bottom line.

MR McNEE (Moore) [12.27 pm]: I have heard a lot about fuel prices. My opponents during the election, including the government candidate, wandered around my electorate saying that they did not like high fuel prices. That is pretty good, because no-one likes high fuel prices. When I inquired what those members said they might do about the problem, I received the usual answer - nothing. I was not able to enjoy the benefit of being able to make those sorts of statements during the election campaign because I was a member of the Government at that time, which had to come up with the answers, as difficult as that was. The indication was that if those opposite had been in government, something would have happened to the price of fuel. How? There has been a lot of talk in this Chamber about that since this Government took office. I do not know whether the Government is having any impact on fuel prices. Could anyone tell me why petrol prices in my electorate yesterday were in the order of 108c a litre? In some cases it was more than 108c a litre and in others it was just a smidgin cheaper. The average was about 108c a litre. I remind members that I paid 112c a litre last week.

Mr Barnett: Which town was that?

Mr McNEE: That was in Wyalkatchem, not somewhere in my electorate. I paid 112c a litre. I want members to understand that, because it is important. I want to know where the money is going. What is causing this problem? I am told it is not freight, which accounts for less than 2c a litre. Some retailers handle only a small volume of petrol, and need to make a higher mark-up. Many small country petrol stations are involved in a number of different activities. They may have a small dining room, rent videos or engage in a variety of activities that go to make up a business. Some of those small business people tell me they need to add 10c a litre to the landed price of their fuel, due to their small volume turnover. However, 9c or 10c a litre is still missing. I do not know why country petrol retailers are paying that extra price. This Government makes great mileage out of the things it is supposed to be doing. I am not even sure how effective its petroleum pricing policy is in the metropolitan area and in the larger rural towns, but in the smaller country towns its record is pretty dismal. The Government needs to look at that problem, which is important to my electorate, which is a "doing" electorate - one that produces and adds to the gross national product of this nation. My electorate contributes some of the tax dollars that this Government spends. Petrol pricing is an important issue in my electorate.

I understand that some reviews of road construction are being held. The Government's attitude towards country roads at least must match the level of the previous Government. The previous Government, under the same financial constraints that the present Government labours under, was able to provide funds for country roads. As a result the people of my electorate can hope that in the future the roads needing repair will be dealt with. To the credit of the Howard federal Government, every shire in my electorate received about \$1 million, to be spent on local roads. The Howard Government faced the issue in the same way as the Court Government did. All the present Government has done to date is decide to hold a review, a summit or whatever. Sitting in this Chamber listening to the Labor Party when it sat on the opposite side of the House, it appeared that it had all the answers, and knew all the questions. I did not think the Labor Party would ever get into government in my time, but I thought that when it did move into government after the last election, all the answers would be popping out like peanuts. They are not in fact popping out like anything. All that is popping out is more problems.

I make a plea on behalf of my electorate that the Government gives real and proper consideration to the needs of rural people. It is all about how economically production can be done. As a result of decisions of this Government, all that has happened is that costs have risen. The margin in which economical production can take place is very slim, and it does not take much for the Government to move in and make that margin even smaller. Many people involved in the trucking industry, for example, have huge weekly repayments on their vehicles and need to be able to produce and deliver at the cheapest possible rate to maximise the available business. This Government has given way to pressure groups in some areas, and it is time it looked at the overall picture and made decisions that are fair and just, because these ones are not. These decisions indicate that some sections of the community might start to set the economic conditions for Western Australia, but I do not think that is right or fair. I ask the Government to give proper representation to people in rural areas. I make a plea on behalf of the lime sands routes. The previous Government made a decision. An inquiry was held, which led to a decision

being made. Now the present Government is going to review the decision and listen to people who say, as residents' signs along the Bindoon Dewars Pool Road declare, "lifestyle versus road trains". If that noisy minority wants to say that, that is fine, but if they want a lifestyle, they need to look at how that lifestyle is achieved.

Mr Kucera: They live in a community, not an economy.

Mr McNEE: If that is what they want, that is fine, but we must look at how that is achieved. This Government is saying it will review the issue. Why would it want to do that? A review has already been held, and a decision was made that a certain practice be followed. Whether members like it or not, huge quantities of lime sands need to be moved into rural areas. The project had just started to get into gear when it ran into a couple of seasons that did not leave a lot of cash in the farming community, so some programs had to be curtailed. Once that hump has been passed, the demand for lime sands will be huge. Some of the roads that the road trains are going to need to use will be dangerous unless they are brought up to standard. They will be very dangerous. The Government needs to re-evaluate its program and stop bumbling. It is becoming known as a Government that does not make decisions. Government members do not understand that being in government is about making decisions. They do not understand that when they are running the business of government it is no different from any other business; some of the decisions they make will be right and some will be wrong.

Mr Barnett: One would be lucky if they worked nine to five on a good day.

Mr McNEE: Yes; on a good day. The Leader of the Opposition is absolutely right.

Ms MacTiernan interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Dean): Would the minister please withhold her opinions.

Mr McNEE: Members of the Government also have to learn that too much analysis leads to paralysis. That is the mode the Government is in now. It needs to have the guts to make decisions and to get on with the business of government.

I want to talk about road safety issues. I was amazed that someone suggested the other day that the speed limit in country areas be cut to 100 kilometres an hour. I do not mind if the metropolitan speed limit is cut to 50, 40 or even 30 kilometres an hour. That decision belongs to people in the metropolitan area. I was talking the other day about four-on-the-floor gearboxes - this Government is stuck in reverse. We have to use commonsense. I do not want to see people killed on the roads. I have an old car that was made in 1969.

Mr Kucera: It is younger than you.

Mr McNEE: Would it be younger than the member? I do not know. The comment by the member was not a bad effort but it did not go anywhere.

The amazing thing about my old car is that it has drum brakes and I can drive it at 110 kilometres an hour. I own other cars that I can also drive at 110 kilometres an hour and they have disc brakes and all the modern equipment. Considering all the advanced technology that now goes into motor cars, why do people now say that the speed limit should be reduced to 100 kilometres an hour? The hardest thing for me is keeping the car at 110 kilometres an hour as that makes me tired. A member of this House was once brave enough to say that the country speed limit should be increased. If I were allowed to drive at 120 kilometres an hour, the car would be happy and I would be happy and alert. There would be no problem. If I do not keep the car at 110 kilometres an hour, I am likely to get caught by a Multanova camera. It is said that the cameras are put in black spots. One was located outside the Northam swimming pool - I do not think it is a black spot as I have never seen an accident there. If I were to drive home tonight there would be one there. If it were not there it would be at Bakers Hill or somewhere else. They are supposedly placed there for my safety. That is a load of garbage and it is the sort of thing that really makes me cross. If I were allowed to drive at a proper speed I would not have any problems.

I know that the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure does not like road trains. While driving in the country I have often noticed that the passing lanes are too short. Drivers often get stuck behind road trains that are travelling at about 100 kilometres an hour. The road trains are very technologically advanced vehicles. They are not back in the T-model Ford days like this Government! That is where it is well stuck. The road trains are quick but other vehicles often want to pass them. The passing lanes are an aborted version of the real thing. It is indicated that drivers can pass if they can see a certain number of metres ahead. The passing lanes are too short. The ultimate solution would be to provide more passing lanes.

I want to make some comments about agriculture if I have the time.

Ms MacTiernan: We would not want to miss more of this!

Mr McNEE: I am pleased that the minister would not want to miss any more because I am going to keep telling her about things as I am not too sure whether she takes in lessons. I will keep telling her about things until the message gets through.

I make a plea for agriculture and for agricultural research. Farmers have been kept viable by changes in research and technology. Australian farmers have the ability to take on new technology, adapt it and make it work and thereby lower unit costs of production. It is the only way farmers can stay in business. Global positioning systems are now much more widely used by farmers. People were spraying on my farm the other day and after the vehicle had been around a paddock once, it was able to go around again unaided, due to the use of a global positioning system. Farmers say that using a GPS makes paddocks a bit smaller as the system is so accurate. It saves time and smaller amounts of chemicals are used. All these little advantages add up. These days there are few dramatic changes that can be made in agriculture. I make a plea to the Government that Agriculture Western Australia be well funded so that it can play its part in research. I get concerned when the equipment from research stations is sold. I hope that there is a plan to control that. Agriculture Western Australia research stations have made a significant contribution to agriculture, which come from a mix of scientists and people in the paddock. A lot of good and innovative advances have come out of that. Those good things must be maintained.

I will now talk about salinity, which is a very important and emotive issue. I have a booklet entitled "Running Down The Salt In Australia". It was written by a number of scientists. The first part of the summary states -

The threat of dryland salinity in Australia is huge but practicable solutions have proved elusive. Although the spread of salinity is generally attributed to human disruption of the hydrologic cycle, there is compelling evidence that it pre-dates settlement.

I had never read that before, but it is something about which I have thought. I think it is important that somebody has written it down.

[Leave granted for speech to be continued.]

Debate thus adjourned.

[Continued on page 1177.]