LAKE NOWEGUP LIMESTONE QUARRY

Grievance

MR J.R. QUIGLEY (Mindarie) [9.37 am]: I rise to grieve to the Minister for Planning on the issue of the proposed Lake Nowegup limestone quarry to be built by WA Limestone. I had a brief discussion with the minister prior to grievances to put him on notice about the substance of the grievance. This is the third time that Parliament has granted me the indulgence of grieving on the Lake Nowegup limestone quarry—an indication by the Leader of the Opposition, who sets grievances for the opposition, of the high importance that we place on the preservation of the block in its natural state at the head of the Nowegup valley. This proposed limestone quarry would not have been possible had there been a Labor government in power in Western Australia. To briefly state the history of this project, an application went before the City of Wanneroo and was approved by the planning officers. The council table overruled it and the case then went to the State Administrative Tribunal. There was an invitation by the City of Wanneroo and the community for the government to intervene at the SAT hearing to oppose this inappropriately located limestone quarry. That did not take place; the minister explained that during the last grievance on this matter, and we need not traverse that ground. The issue of the SAT hearing is dead and buried. Local government approvals are therefore in place for this limestone quarry to proceed. A public meeting on the matter was attended by all politicians bar one, supporting unanimous opposition to this quarry. The day before the meeting, the member for Ocean Reef and Hon Michael Mischin from the upper house, both Liberal, took the minister on a guided tour of the Nowegup valley to point out alternative locales at which limestone could be quarried for the growth of the northern suburbs. Make no mistake, in the districts of Alkimos and Yanchep, which are made up of rolling sandhills, vast quantities of limestone blocks will be required to stabilise the sandhills. The question is: do we take it from the deposit at the head of the Nowegup Lake valley or from a little further east?

I am informed by my Liberal friend the member for Ocean Reef, with whom I have been working on this, that since that meeting he has had discussions with the Minister for Planning and Hon Michael Mischin about the possibility of relocating. Six sites were put forward as possible relocation sites. At the end of my speech, I will seek to lay on the table a document identifying those sites. I have it here, but do not have it to hand at the moment. The six sites were put forward by the members and by Mr Mark Zeigler and Ms Sabine Winton of the community action group as suitable sites on crown land. However, the relocation of WA Limestone would require a lot more than the erstwhile efforts of the member for Ocean Reef; because WA Limestone quarry is sitting on a resource that it values. The minister’s office would have to drive any land swap; there would have to be government will. It is clear that these people have the right to mine the limestone on that land; however, all sorts of traffic and other ancillary issues are involved. I am looking forward, as are members of the community action group—who, as I understand it, are watching these proceedings live—to hearing some words from the minister this morning indicating that his office will take over responsibility for driving the land swap. If the minister does not drive the land swap, there is no hope. WA Limestone quarry is not going to accede to a request from the member for Ocean Reef, as erstwhile a young gentleman as he is, or to requests from the older, worn-out member for Mindarie, or Hon Michael Mischin. It may, however, be swayed by the persuasive force of the minister’s office.

We want to hear this morning that the minister’s office will take over the driving of the land swap. Why is this critical, Mr Speaker? This is only the first part or stage 1. Right next door to WA Limestone’s holding is the Menchetti family’s disused quarry on which there are two lime kilns. The Menchetti family relocated its lime production business to Osborne Park, and has now approached the City of Wanneroo to relocate its lime production business to the family-owned disused quarry next to WA Limestone. The community was alarmed to find out that the solicitors of the City of Wanneroo, together with the Menchetti family, agree that there is continuing non-user rights over the quarry site where the kilns are located because the Department of Environment and Conservation has, on a regular basis, been reissuing the licences. In fact, the licence lapsed two years ago because it was not paid on time. When the Menchetti family strived to pay for the licence, it was refused. The family and the community action group went before the State Administrative Tribunal, which regarded the non-payment of the licence as an oversight and the licence was therefore renewed. What does this mean? It means that in a very short space of time, once WA Limestone is able to move in and start mining the limestone on the head of the Nowegup Lake Valley site, Menchettis can start producing lime right next door! What will we have at the head of the Nowegup Lake Valley? A concrete production plant will be located in the same way that the WA Limestone quarry in, I think, Hope Valley has next to it a lime production business owned by the same family—the Menchettis. I am not running down these families or their businesses. They are great businesses and they are great families. They are contributing enormously to the Western Australian economy. But the head of the Nowegup Lake Valley is no place for these two businesses to locate side by side. This is about more than digging out the precious limestone resource. It will start burning lime on this production site. We can see it. There will be lime ash in the air. Nowegup will face the same fight that we heard on the
radio news this morning the poor people of Cockburn are fighting. These two sites are right in the path of the south westerly winds. Any burning of lime will affect the whole valley.

All politicians bar one were at the previously mentioned public meeting. The only politician not there was Mr Paul Miles, who was of course embroiled in controversy when he stood to be the Mayor of Wanneroo in that he overran his advertising account with the Sun City News by $27 000, and Mr Dean Solly went around raising money for him to pay out the account. We understand that huge donations were received from WA Limestone. I am not saying that there is anything improper there, but the ground has been prepared.

[Member’s time expired.]

MR J.H.D. DAY (Kalamunda — Minister for Planning) [9.44 am]: As the member for Mindarie has indicated, he has raised two previous grievances and the issues he raised were responded to. As he has also indicated, the matter was raised with me last year and more recently this year by the member for Ocean Reef and member for the North Metropolitan Region Hon Michael Mischin. It was several weeks ago that I had a discussion with those members about their suggestion of a possible land swap in an attempt to identify another site from which WA Limestone could extract limestone in preference to going ahead with the development of the location outlined in the member’s grievance.

I note that the opposition is giving this issue a high priority, as the member for Mindarie has been given the right within the opposition to raise another grievance address this morning. I am interested to know whether it is opposition policy to remove this location from the resources available for limestone extraction.

Mr J.R. Quigley: The Leader of the Opposition told the crowd that at the meeting.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Did he tell them that the opposition would permanently prevent access to this block for the extraction of limestone?

Mr J.R. Quigley: Yes—to prevent that block being used.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: As I previously pointed out, the opposition and everybody else needs to be aware of the increasing shortage of high-quality limestone available for much-needed building, in particular residential developments, in Western Australia. In other words, this issue directly relates to the provision of affordable housing in the Perth metropolitan area in particular. The number of sites from which high-quality limestone is available is now quite limited. As I recall, this is one site that contains a high-value resource. Limestone is important for the development of residential estates, given that a lot of the land in Perth now available to be developed is low lying and needs to be built up to deal with drainage issues and so forth. The use of limestone is mandatory for that. It is also important in road construction. Therefore, we need to be very careful before making any decision to permanently prevent this particular location from being accessed for limestone extraction. Having said that, as I pointed out previously, if this location is to be developed, all environmental conditions and other conditions imposed by the City of Wanneroo—although, always subject to appeal in the State Administrative Tribunal of course—must be complied with. Environmental aspects are an important aspect of that process. Whatever role the Department of Environment and Conservation has, under both Western Australian and commonwealth legislation, to protect threatened species needs very much to be complied with. That is given a high priority, as needs to be the case.

Having said that, Mr Speaker, the suggestion of possible land swaps was made and seven sites were identified. The advice that I have recently received is that problems are associated with all those sites; that is, there are constraints that make it difficult for limestone extraction to occur on them. However, as yet, I have not had the opportunity to go through those difficulties in detail, but I will do so. If any of these sites, or perhaps a more likely other site, can be identified as suitable for limestone extraction and WA Limestone could be given the opportunity to extract that limestone, I would be happy to have a look at the site. It would need to be decided in conjunction with, I think, the Department of Mines and Petroleum and the Department of Environment and Conservation. Those two agencies have an important role to play in this process. If anybody can identify an alternative site, it will certainly be looked at. I do not want to raise people’s expectations too high by giving an indication that this is an easy problem to solve because it really is not. In relation to the issue of the possibility of lime kilns being located on, I think, the adjacent side —

Mr J.R. Quigley: They are already there and licensed.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: No; I understand that they have not been used for 20 years or so.

Mr J.R. Quigley: I know, but they have got continuing user rights.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Obviously, property owners in Western Australia do have rights. That is an important principle that I think is accepted by both sides of politics. Having said that, obviously lime kilns can be reactivated. That would need to be very carefully considered, primarily by the environment portfolio, I suggest. Whether the owners have an automatic right to reactivate them, without some additional conditions being put in place, I
cannot really say off the top of my head. Those issues need to be carefully assessed and I am happy to make sure that that issue is further looked into. As I said, access to limestone and other basic raw materials is really important for the development of housing in Western Australia and the Perth metropolitan area in particular. We need to be very careful not to take action that will drive up the cost of housing in the future and make it more unaffordable for Western Australians. That issue needs to take primacy. I am happy to get further information and advice about whether lime kilns can be reactivated and then consider the implications. That seems to be an additional issue in relation to whether a mine is operating on the site.

**Tabling of Paper**

The SPEAKER: The member for Mindarie indicated during his speech that he had some documents.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: It was the two lists provided by the community. I seek to have them lie on the table and have them incorporated into Hansard.

The SPEAKER: They may lie on the table for the remainder of this day’s sitting.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: May they be incorporated into the Hansard?

The SPEAKER: I do not know that they will be incorporated automatically, but they will sit on the table.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I seek leave to have them incorporated.

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