

HOUSING — GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Motion

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Western Australian Labor government for failing to prevent the worsening housing crisis, with record numbers of builders and construction businesses folding each week, and Western Australians struggling to keep a roof over their heads, despite having had seven years to take action.

What we saw today in question time was a further display of what is very concerning for Western Australians around government inaction. The member for Roe asked the Premier a very direct question around whether or not the Premier would be seeking to work with the Home Builders Action Group to ensure that its very reasonable requests are met. It has put forward a plan to the government. It represents a number of businesses in this state that are under a lot of stress. We know that builders are an essential element in the provision of housing. When the builders come to the government with a plan, it would be better to listen to them rather than to just say, “It’s in the mix. It’s in there with a whole range of things to be considered.” We know that the members of that group have firsthand experience of the building industry with collectively many, many years of experience in organising the build of houses. I am sure that a range of different-sized builders are involved in the industry. Frankly, I do not know how any builder is still going when they would have signed up to build a number of houses in the middle of that COVID-inspired rush of housing approvals and were then hit with cost escalations. The Auditor General’s report laid bare that some of the WA government’s projects such as the Tonkin Gap project had in fact doubled in cost, such were the cost escalations. Cost escalations are not just confined to government projects. We know that they have hit the building industry very hard and that is why builders have been reeling. They have been spending their own resources to try to finish the builds and to keep going so that they can get through this and see some light at the end of the tunnel. They are asking for some practical assistance from the government to keep them going so they can build the houses that we desperately need.

I do not think there is anything untoward in revealing to the house that I have also had a discussion with the group. It would be instructive and I am sure that the group’s members would be happy to know that someone is speaking out and saying what they would like to see happen. They put forward some practical solutions in a document titled *The Home Builders Action Group: Industry round table*, to which the Premier referred on 25 October 2023. Those who attended the round table received a copy of this document. It proposes a five-point recovery plan that seeks —

To review and amend the Home Building Contracts Act which is not fit for purpose in the present environment.

Areas to be reviewed include:

- Part 9(1)(a)—45 days for Building Permit from Contract Signing date
- Part 10—6.5% maximum deposit. Due to the increased level of regulation, time and cost that Builders need to cover prior to works commencing on site the 6.5% Deposit is no longer sufficient and HBAG believes 10% deposit is appropriate
- Part 12—PC or PS item—This has not been possible to comply with during the past 3 years due to spiralling Price Increases

Which, as anybody would know—the Western Australian government certainly knows—have been hitting everybody very hard. If a builder is on a fixed-price contract, it would be very difficult indeed to comply —

- Part 13—Price Increases—There is no provisions for Price Increases once works have commenced on site. There needs to be flexibility to protect Builders and home buyers when unforeseen and unprecedented circumstances arise
- Part 19—Breach of Contract—There must be a way of clients terminating a Contract when the Builder fails in their responsibility. Prior to and during construction.
- Part 3A—Housing Indemnity Insurance should be discretionary for Contracts above \$500,000

The group is saying that for those bigger home builds, that insurance is not affordable and unnecessary —

- Division 3A—25GB—Indemnity Insurance to be reviewed—in particular, for Apartments and Developments which are not covered under the Insurance Scheme.

Indemnity insurance has been discussed in this house by me. In fact, we had some discussions around that with I think the current Premier when he was Minister for Commerce. I have seen firsthand the effect that the very limited amount of insurance that was available had on Western Australian families when some of my constituents ran into trouble with that. They had builds that were much more expensive than the maximum \$100 000 that they

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 8 November 2023]

p6027b-6049a

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

would have received under that indemnity insurance, and, in some cases, had to sell up the project and leave the district or face years of hardship. Moving on —

- Time Extensions—There needs to be an easy and as of right of notification to the client that the Builder is advising them of time extensions due to unforeseen delays. The past 3 years has been fraught with delays outside of the Builders control.

I know that some builders are being sued by clients who are understandably angry that their build has not been completed within the approved time, but if a builder cannot get trades or materials, the builder has a real issue in getting around to some of these builds. We saw early examples of contractors and builders that perhaps were always going to be a bit risky, but we have some seriously experienced and hardworking Western Australian families and businesses who are under real stress at the moment and are calling for help. They are calling for a recovery loan scheme to assist business, which Treasury in Western Australia could certainly have a look at. It is not that dissimilar in some ways to when rural communities find themselves in a drought and farmers need assistance, which is sometimes extended to businesses that rely upon that industry as well. It is not unknown for government to involve itself in those types of schemes and it could be a way to ensure that businesses have a future, if they could just get through this period, and continue to operate. The third point in the document states —

Further Government stimulus must be directed through the builders and the trades to keep the industry afloat; The group is asking the government to ensure that not clients, but builders are enabled to get the work done. The fourth point states —

An intelligent industry assistance package should address:

- The funding crisis resulting from 2 years of losses and that means No and Low interest loans
- Assistance for legacy and loss-making contracts resulting from the shortcomings of the Act;
- Indemnity schemes that work and don't leave builders and homeowners high and dry; and
- The need for a much closer working relationship between the industry and government.

Finally, the fifth point states —

Trade Training has to be addressed and reshaped to produce skilled workers quicker.

They were the very sensible requests of the Home Builders Action Group when it attended that round table back in October. We heard that the Premier has not ruled them out. I urge him to rule in close consideration of those requests. These people actually understand how to get houses built. Treasury officials do not understand that and I do not think members of Parliament understand that. Certainly, the home builders that have come to government with that plan understand the industry and the pressures that the industry has been under in this very difficult time over the last two years.

As we know, to some extent that situation has been of the Western Australian government's own making, along with the federal government. In the COVID period, we had that stimulus and a rush of building approvals. That has put strain on the system ever since. Unfortunately, I think some builders signed up in a rush for more than they could possibly handle. That is certainly a lesson that when government stimulus is used, it should be well targeted. We can think back to other stimulus measures that went a bit astray back in the day of the Rudd government, such as the pink batts and \$900 television sets rolling out from Retravision on the back of some home payments.

I think stimulus in the building industry has to be treated very carefully to make sure there is a corresponding match of supply and ability for the industry to carry out the work. In a nutshell, that is what the home building action group was calling for. However, we know that there is overall a capacity constraint and we are still facing a lack of trades. There has not really been an effective response from the government to actually bring a solution to the table for that.

We have heard lots of announcements from the government about programs that it is undertaking to cure the system. One of those announcements was pretty early on in the piece. It was titled "Streamline WA regulatory reforms". I have the document here from the government outlining what it was supposed to achieve. It was based on the recommendations of the Service Priority Review in 2017. It states —

In July 2020, the McGowan Government announced a package of regulatory reforms to accelerate action to streamline approval processes ...

From talking to industry in all fields of endeavour that rely on government approvals, whether it be miners, builders or developers, we know they all have one thing in common: They fail to have seen any positive effect from this StreamlineWA program.

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I remember going to a property industry conference, I think down south. One of the senior government officials there—I will not use his name because he is a public servant and that would not be right—was espousing the benefits of StreamlineWA and how it was working so wonderfully between all the directors general and others who were involved in that. However, I was sitting amongst the developers and industry, who were saying they were not seeing any changes on the ground. That is what I have heard consistently from all sorts of industries ever since this Streamline regulatory reform came into effect. There actually has not been an appreciable speed-up of approvals. In fact, for me, industries, including building and planning, have told me that it actually seems to have slowed down.

We know that the issue of accommodation supply for workers in certain country areas has always been problematic. Yet we have seen a government that has failed to take that particular matter by the horns. We have seen an acute shortage of housing in many communities in Western Australia for key workers. This government has made announcements but has not yet been able to provide the type of accommodation and programs that would make a meaningful difference to the provision of accommodation for workers.

There is another issue that I think is deplorable. It is not strictly the Minister for Housing's area of responsibility, but it is certainly affecting the provision of housing. There is a delay in Western Power providing power to business and especially residences throughout Western Australia. I have a constituent who has now been waiting 15 months for a power connection. That is extraordinary. Yet Western Power faces no penalty or requirement to provide this. It does not actually affect it if it cannot meet a reasonable time line. To me, the government should be imposing a reasonable time line on Western Power and should consider how it can use the carrot-and-stick method to ensure that it can meet those time lines. If it is doing that, I am sure that other service providers are also causing a problem for people wanting to move into their homes. That is something that the government really needs to take very seriously.

We know that this government has a conditioned response—it is almost like Pavlov's dog really. If there is a problem, it forms a crack team within government. It formed a crack team to deliver the Streamline program. I remember there was a crack team that was going to speed up green approvals. Yet from my understanding from talking to people involved in the environmental regulatory environment, the dream team for green approvals actually stripped people out of the Environmental Protection Authority and other places to make up the numbers. That has left those organisations short of personnel, which is probably why Streamline is failing altogether.

We know that there was an announcement for the Treasury housing supply unit of a crack team of bureaucrats that would fix the problem. I mean no disrespect to the Treasury, but I do not know that part of its job description involves having an intimate knowledge of how to cure housing supply issues in Western Australia. I am not sure that a top economist or a really intelligent person who understands an awful lot about finance can cure the issues that we face here in Western Australia with the residential building industry and property development sector to get the housing and land supply that we need for the future.

The minister said here today that housing approvals are at a record high. I do not know what planet the minister is on. Yes, there is a large group of buildings under construction. However, after that there is a precipice or a drop. From memory, at the moment there are around 8 000 fewer approvals per annum than what we would see in a typical year. Once this glut of houses is gone, we may well see a period of a shortage of work for some. We then might see them poached elsewhere, because it is not that we have closed borders or anything like that. People can come and go. If there is work elsewhere, they will go. Then how will we rev up our supply again once the approvals start coming back on?

I am sure that some people are holding off making an application because they do not want to go down the path of starting to build until they think the environment is more acceptable for them and that there will be an easier, more stable path for them going forward. I hope that is the case, but I have not seen the minister provide any evidence that that is so. To say that approvals are at an all-time high and to leave it at that is not really evidence that much groundwork has been done to ensure a steady pipeline of work going through in the private sector.

We know that there have been some issues in the provision of social housing through the government sector. We know that this minister proudly talks about pulling down the towers at Bentley. However, we also know that that site sits empty years after the towers were pulled down, because apparently they were not pleasant places to live. I assume that some of the people who were in there now have nowhere to live. I am not sure that has been a great outcome. I think it would be far better to see some development at Bentley and some direction given to ensure that we are going ahead.

I spoke about the crack Department of Treasury team. I see an online ad for the government of Western Australia's Department of Treasury's director of housing supply unit, which has an attractive remuneration package of \$218 000. I thought that the crack team was coming from Treasury, but apparently Treasury is looking outside for the crack team because, presumably, it has not been able to find anybody in Treasury who wanted to take on a task that everybody in Treasury knows will not go too well. It is now advertising for the task, and maybe the minister will know where the Treasury team is at. I know that the Treasurer is not available at the moment, but the minister is

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

surely keeping an eye on the matter to see how the development of the crack team that will cure the housing problem is going. It is almost an admission of failure by the government that its own ministers, its departments and the people who have been guiding the housing sector here for nearly seven years are not up to the task, because they are now having to go outside to find a crack team to cure the problem. The first point might be to admit that there is a problem and that they are failing with ideas, do not have solutions at the moment and need to look elsewhere to find solutions.

The government is very long on promises, announcements and providing committees, but very short on providing houses. I think that is becoming something that Western Australians are beginning to understand: This government is not capable of delivering projects and programs that will benefit Western Australians, which is a pity. We have a group called Infrastructure Western Australia, which has a report called *Foundations for a stronger tomorrow: State infrastructure strategy*. We have had some discussions in this place about the role of Infrastructure WA, and we have been told by the former Treasurer that it is a high-level planning organisation. It is not a tintsacks organisation that goes through projects so much as one that has the needs of the state encapsulated at a high level. Its *Foundations for a stronger tomorrow: State infrastructure strategy* report states —

Access to appropriate and affordable housing is a critical enabler for community wellbeing ...

Further, below that, it states —

The benefits of an effective housing system are evidenced across health and social services, as well as the justice system, as it provides a secure base from which people can participate in the workforce and contribute in the community. For example, conservative estimates released in 2016 using linked WA housing and health data indicate annual savings of \$16.4 million to the WA health system (or \$13 273 per person) by providing housing to people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

A good economic argument for getting the job done is outlined there by Infrastructure WA. I wonder what was taken on board to actually make sure that agencies take meaningful action to get those projects underway because we are not seeing the evidence of that. We hear the reassurances and we hear the minister attacking other members of this place, but we do not hear how the minister will fix the problem.

I know that DevelopmentWA is an organisation that has changed under this government. I wonder whether the minister in his response can explain to us what new initiatives it has put in place during his time as minister to cure the problem. I would be delighted if he has come up with some solutions and has started to put them into place, but I am not sure that we are seeing them.

I will come back to that issue because I am a regional member of Parliament and what is happening in the regions is very much at my heart. One of the many recommendations of the Infrastructure WA report was recommendation 74, which states —

Respond to the need for affordable and available housing in regional areas by:

- a. establishing the principles, criteria and models for government housing intervention in regional locations that are demonstrating market failure, informed by regional housing plans
- b. independently reviewing all regional officer housing assets and programs across the public sector, including the Government Regional Officer Housing program, to assess and identify ...

It goes on to list the needs and the “ability to respond to state agency and tenant needs”. Those are sections within that recommendation. The whole thing is a bit long to read out. I go back to the first part, which states —

- a. establishing the principles, criteria and models for government housing intervention in regional locations that are demonstrating market failure ...

We go back to the situation in the communities that cannot find worker accommodation. I also point out that it has been 2.5 years since communities in the midwest were devastated by cyclone Seroja. Although it was a great pleasure to be at Perenjori—I know the minister has some connection to Perenjori—for the re-opening of the Monsignor Hawes—designed Catholic Church following its damage by cyclone Seroja, talking to the Perenjori locals, I know that a lot of pain is still being experienced. There has not been a coordinated government response at any level to provide a meaningful plan of attack to get people back in their houses in the midwest. Many people have not been able to complete their build, and many houses are still left in a quite devastating situation for the occupants, who cannot go forward and cannot go back. If the government cannot put in place a plan in a region that is as starkly in need as that, it shows that the government is not really interested in putting in place the answers needed to address one of the greatest limiting factors in Western Australia’s ability to take advantage of the many opportunities in front of us. We know that our critical minerals industries are ready to take off and there are many economic opportunities, but we do not have the accommodation in place to accommodate the skilled workers necessary in the future.

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

I am not coming here without ideas. We have the information from the Home Builders Action Group, of which the minister will also be aware. I make a reasonable request that the minister explain to us what his consideration of that has been and whether he will be taking any action on it. I really think it is time to come up with sensible on-the-ground plans and actions rather than just forming crack groups from within government; they are the same people who have not been able to bring coordination to the effort so far. Perhaps the government's search for a new person to head up the Treasury team might reveal a guru, but I think the pay grade might need to be a little bit more than the government is offering.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.28 pm]: I thank the member for Moore for his contribution. I certainly also support his motion —

That this house condemns the Western Australian Labor government for failing to prevent the worsening housing crisis, with record numbers of builders and construction businesses folding each week, and Western Australians struggling to keep a roof over their heads, despite having had seven years to take action.

As a starting point, I am certainly glad to be back in the fold as the shadow Minister for Commerce. That is a position I held previously. I remember when the Attorney General was also the Minister for Commerce at one stage and we went through the subcontractors' legislation. He was going to fix it all. He said, "I have the Fiocco report. We're going to follow these recommendations. We're going to fix up the subcontracting industry. Look at this." Of course, what happened? As time went on, everything was watered down. We had protests out the front from the subcontractors in the building industry. Basically, what we are seeing unfold is due to the government's weak legislation. That is quite disappointing because there was pretty strong rhetoric from the Minister for Commerce of the day yet we have not seen any solutions or results stem from that.

Before I go too much into it, I want to follow-up on the point that the Leader of the Opposition made about Western Power. I think all of our constituents who are trying to build something, especially in the regions, but I am sure in the metropolitan area as well, are having massive grief getting connected with Western Power. A business in Boxwood Hill built a shed to set up a farm chemicals business with a transformer just a few metres away from the shed who could not get it connected and now has to operate it in a farmer's shed further down the road. The other day, a business owner in Katanning, which is my home town, said that he was going to help with the accommodation shortage by building four accommodation units on his small landholding on a small farm just outside of the town. What happened? He made some inquiries and was told it would be anywhere up to 15 months to get connected, if he was lucky. That enterprising business owner who is looking to solve the Minister for Housing's problems by improving accommodation in Katanning could not get any activity from Western Power. This is a real challenge. Every time we bring up this question with the Minister for Energy, he tells us that we do not understand. We understand that these are people working in good faith to solve the Minister for Housing's issues but cannot get connected to Western Power. I just wanted to enlighten the chamber about that today.

In Katanning, we have some really good industries. Ausgold Limited potentially has a very large resource and is looking to get housing for its workers and management as time goes by. Of course, the Western Australian Meat Marketing Corporation, which is probably the largest or second largest meat processing abattoir in Western Australia, has massive accommodation needs. It bought one of the hotels in town and did it up. It also has further accommodation needs on top of that. Unfortunately, without branching off too far, because of this government's lack of support for the live sheep industry, we are seeing the likes of WAMMCO in Katanning have massive issues about the number of stock that is brought in to be processed. That requires more workers, and although WAMMCO can get the workers, it cannot get accommodation.

I want to give members a couple of examples of what is happening with the housing stock. There are currently 2 847 private rentals available in the entire state. In Katanning, four rental properties are available. One is a three-by-one house and is asking for \$750 a week. There are three rental properties available in Narrogin, four properties in Esperance and there are no rental properties available in Williams, Gnowangerup, Jerramungup, Lake Grace and Kojonup, which are some of the other major towns in my electorate. We have housing available on rural properties for potential employees, but that brings us to the issue that the member for Central Wheatbelt and I come across very often—the member for Victoria Park is familiar with this—whereby School Bus Services is not providing buses, which makes it very difficult and challenging for families to get their kids to school. In turn, the workers cannot use those houses. We need an integrated system with the Department of Education working together with the Department of Transport or School Bus Services. That would help the Department of Housing's issue. The member for Victoria Park knows about my frustrations in that world. She certainly got a good example of that when we were out and about in Dumbleyung and Wagin and so forth when we were on the school bus inquiry. That is something the government could think about. Instead of working in silos, think about working together. Think about the PTA and School Bus Services working with the housing department and the Department of Education.

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

I want to give members an example of a single Aboriginal mother of two who came to my office to ask for assistance with housing last week. The private rental she was in was being sold and she had a week to find another home. Unfortunately, there was absolutely nothing that we could help her with in that respect. We certainly gave it our best shot. That is an example of what is happening at the moment.

I want to talk about the minister's response to the member for Cottesloe, who asked a genuine question about processing land title changes. All the minister ended up doing was abusing the member for Vasse about the planning laws. That was a genuine question. I had a letter from one of my constituents who said that her aunty had passed away. She and her brother were the beneficiaries of a house and a unit and they wanted to rent them both out to people in Esperance to help with accommodation. What is the problem? Landgate cannot seem to process it for nine months. Therefore, they cannot rent the properties for nine months. That was a genuine question asked by the member for Cottesloe today. What did we get? We got a tirade about the member for Vasse on various things, including the planning laws. These are genuine questions. It is pretty frustrating when we ask those questions and get that sort of response.

Nonetheless, I want to focus on what is happening with our building companies today in this current market. The Leader of the Opposition referred to the Home Builders Action Group, which is a non-political organisation. That organisation is genuinely looking to work through the issues in the world of building private accommodation and houses at the moment. In its discussion paper, it offered some solutions. Obviously, they included changes to the Home Building Contracts Act 1991, which is simply not fit for purpose in this day and age.

I turn to the recovery loan scheme. That is interesting. That or something similar to it needs to be reintroduced immediately. This is not free grant money, it is a loan scheme and with the problems on hand at the moment it is desperately needed to shore up builders' cash flow. It is pretty frustrating to see the way things have evolved. When builders brought that up with our current Minister for Commerce, Hon Sue Ellery in the other place, she said —

... a proposed loan or assistance scheme for residential builders was not something the Cook government would consider at this time.

This was raised in the meeting on, I think, 25 October 2023. These are genuine asks of the government. Obviously, there is no need for further government stimulus. We have seen what happened with the stimulus during COVID when there was a rush of people and builders had to get a pad down by a certain date. They had to get the pad down to get the grant money, and that pushed up the price. We see the devastation now with homes taking three, four or five years to build, and that is if the building company has not gone into liquidation. We can see what is happening to builders. Because the price of materials rose during that COVID period, these builders are now focusing on houses they quoted for with the cost of current building materials. They will hopefully make a profit from those, but houses built for prices quoted in previous times are much less profitable and in general terms are losing money.

The other thing is that skilled workers need to be urgently trained or recruited. I was pleased to hear the Minister for Training talking in, I think, question time yesterday about some of the actions the government is undertaking in relation to training. It is positive that the minister is working towards improving those building skills and courses in the TAFE system.

If I can, I want to go on to a couple of things that have cropped up. There was an article written by John Flint in *The West Australian*, published on Saturday, 26 August 2023. He was quoting someone named Rod Harris, who said —

“At times, I feel like ripping up my (builder's) registration. I feel ashamed of where the industry is at the present moment.”

The article continues —

Rod Harris predicts the shambolic state of WA's house-building industry will worsen before the long backlog of unfinished builds is cleared.

Rod Harris also said —

“There's been marriage failures and breakdowns and the whole emotional journey with it,” ... “It's really bad, because a lot of times, I've got to give them bad news: ‘whatever you get from HII, —

Which is obviously the housing indemnity insurance —

it's not enough money to fix what's there,'” ...

This article written by John Flint goes on to talk about the likes of Rajendra Krishnaswamy, who reached out in the week the article was written. He and his wife had a house built by Flexible Homes. What happened? Flexible Homes went under. Sure enough, Rajendra has two mortgages and a personal loan. What has happened to the directors of the company Flexible Homes? They inserted a dummy director, a vulnerable drug addict, to be the fall guy as they attempted to walk away. In the article one of those directors is pictured in his BMW in Applecross—not a problem.

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

He was a major beneficiary of this government's COVID support plan to put those cement pads down and get those houses built. This is a really bad story. It is a common story. The Attorney General and the Australian Securities and Investments Commission and other bodies need to look at the way these directors make an art form of starting something and when the going gets hard leaving the customer stranded. They just walk away and take no responsibility. They do not seem to be able to be prosecuted for the wrongdoing.

There is another example in the article of a man named Phil Smith, who is a one-eyed West Coast Eagles supporter. He no doubt supported former player Andrew Donnelly back in the day. Andrew Donnelly and his wife, Natasha, have a business named Factory Direct that picked up \$342 000 without delivering the work—patios, garages and all the rest of it. In the meantime, they are living the high life.

Those examples are very frustrating. I congratulate John Flint on his work exposing some of these dodgy operators and the way they can just walk away, in some cases, from taking any responsibility. It is pretty frustrating because people are looking just to build a genuine home for their families.

There are a couple of other examples. The WA board director of the Australian Institute of Building Surveyors, Richard Attiwell, supports mandatory inspections and said WA was lagging behind the rest of the country. He said WA was taking an age to introduce mandatory inspections.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This is another element that the housing minister and the commerce minister need to have a good hard look at. We obviously know the challenges with labour shortages. There was a quote today about 1 500 people coming to the state each week. That is a real challenge in itself. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, as at the end of June, WA had more than 20 000 homes unfinished. There were 145 construction insolvencies over the 12 previous months, including 27 registered homebuilders, compared with 93 in the previous year. According to the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, nationally about 2 000 building and construction companies have shut their doors.

The commerce minister offered very little comfort to consumers. She said that if their home building projects were not yet complete, they would be able to submit a claim under their insurance policies. The minister has ensured that government builds are safe, though, spending \$13 million on relief payments to head contractors. Government projects seem to be slightly more protected, but not private people out there. It is very important that the government has another hard look at these insurance products, if you like, in WA, in comparison with a lot of other states. Maximum insurance payouts have been potentially boosted from \$100 000 to \$200 000, but in New South Wales we are looking at \$350 000. In a lot of cases, it will take \$300 000 or \$400 000 to complete the build. An amount of either \$100 000 before the cut-off date, or \$200 000 after it, will not get the job done.

I come to a close, as I know other members want to speak on this motion. I mention a builder from Geraldton, Warren Taylor, who spoke to the media in June and stated that building companies were not offered any support and were left to navigate a hot market. The state and federal government gave all those grants out. They just washed their hands of the whole situation and walked away. Mr Taylor did an estimate costing comparing a house his company built in 2018 to a costing done in 2023, and just the roof and the timber went from \$7 042 to \$18 960. That is an increase of 145 per cent. I guess I am asking for a combined effort from this government. We have seen the issues and articles; the Home Builders Action Group, a political group out there battling for its private builders and so forth, has been putting suggestions to government. The Ministers for Commerce, Housing and Energy and the whole government need to work together. Seriously, this Western Power issue must be addressed. People want to help the Minister for Housing to build accommodation using money from their own pockets, but they cannot get connected to power. This is an opportunity as suggestions are available; the Home Builders Action Group has some high-quality suggestions. Our Ministers for Commerce and Housing and our crack Treasury group that started in January 2023, which was referred to by the Leader of the Opposition, need to come up with solutions. A whole-of-government solution is required, and I look forward to seeing some action in 2024.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe) [4.51 pm]: I rise to support this excellent motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. Housing represents many things to many people, and some people look at it as a social determinative of health and wellbeing. At a very basic level, housing provides for the basic human need for shelter and safety, but for most it is much more than that. It can provide a sense of place and somewhere to raise a family, and for most families it is one of their principal stores of wealth, typically providing a growth asset to assist with a comfortable retirement or to assist children starting out in life. As such, one of the key responsibilities of our state government is to ensure that appropriate housing is available. A mix of housing is needed. We need normal residential housing for owner-occupier families, rental accommodation in housing and apartments with a range of affordability to match social circumstances, and an adequate supply of social housing is needed for people who cannot afford their own housing. Emergency housing is needed for those facing sudden distress.

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

The great tragedy for the people of Western Australia is that this government and this minister have failed in almost all these areas. I listened to this minister and his predecessor talk long and loud about their actions to increase housing, and their actions have fallen into two categories. First, the government announces never-ending amounts of money in a never-ending series of announcements, allocated to various initiatives. The second part of the strategy is to progressively gut our planning system to remove any meaningful input from residents or councils into planning decisions that affect the amenity and lifestyle of their communities. Housing supply at all levels has continued to worsen, whether it be private housing, rental properties or social housing. The only significant achievement, if you can call it that, of this government has been disembowelling our planning system. I will talk about that in some detail tomorrow when I have the opportunity to talk on the Planning and Development Amendment Bill 2023 before this house.

It is very clear that the minister and government have an obsession with pleasing a relative handful of influential property developers at the expense of actively dealing with the housing shortage disaster that is affecting our state. Labor's coffers may be overflowing with donations from developers; meanwhile, ordinary families are struggling to find somewhere to live. I note that the Minister for Community Services is in the chamber. She must know that relief agencies are telling us—I am sure they are also telling ministers on that side of the house—stories of working single parents needing to live in cars with their children. The government's acquiescence to that handful of developers has done nothing to resolve the real causes of housing shortages. It is simply serving to make a few of them very rich, developing high-rise apartments in wealthy communities. The issue of housing is not only about supply; it is also critically about the amenity of the communities in which we live. We are not some impoverished developing country struggling to house our people; we are one of the wealthiest communities on earth with an abundance of land available, yet we see this minister and government progressively degrading the amenity of new communities.

I was privileged earlier this year to participate in a Speaker's delegation to India. Our first port of call was the bustling city of Chennai, home to some 20 million people. I was struck by the amount of greenery in such a large and poor city. I looked into this issue in a bit more detail. That city has increased its green canopy by 25 per cent in the past decade, and plans to do more. By contrast, Perth has lost over 60 000 hectares of green canopy in the past decade, mostly caused by tree loss in existing suburbs due to infill and building increasing large residences. What an absolute contrast. A country barely larger than WA, India—which is only 1.3 times the size of WA with a population of around 1.4 billion people and more than 500 times more people than in Western Australia—is repeating that achievement across the whole country in improving, not destroying, amenity. I remember a time when this minister was not a champion of the wanton destruction of the amenity of our city, a time when he was a champion of appropriate design and maintaining green canopy.

There was also a time when this minister was not such a fan of development assessment panels—DAPs. I refer to an article in *WAtoday* updated in May 2016 referring to a gathering put together by Hon Alannah MacTiernan in Mount Lawley, a Labor-held seat, at a time of considerable consternation around planning in that area. That group was very angry about what was happening and about DAPs. The article stated —

Many speakers voiced concerns around discretionary freedoms.

One of the concerns was the enormous deregulation and exercise outside the council planning process. It further reads —

Vincent mayor John Carey, seeking Labor preselection for Perth's state seat, conceded councils needed to address poor town planning schemes but said DAPs would still be able to “just push council policy aside.”

He said the processes were unfair.

The now minister talked about some timing issues in feedback and commented —

“We must tackle this key issue of three people with no connection to the community exercising discretions that contradict prescribed policies about plot ratio and height.”

This was further reported on recently in a puff piece in the *Business News* headed “Carey tackles housing challenge head-on”. As the article points out —

When he was City of Vincent mayor in 2016, Mr Carey called for a complete abolition of the DAPs, arguing the panels' decisions did not align with local planning policies.

He said at the time developers were being granted height bonuses for proposals that did not meet the criteria for design excellence, and that scrapping the DAPs could become an election issue.

The article outlined that the minister has since changed his stance. He was not alone at that meeting in Mount Lawley because former Minister for Planning Hon Rita Saffioti was also at that meeting. She was a little more cautious with her comments, but she very clearly tried to align herself with that crowd stating that she thought that council approvals being taken away by DAPs was unacceptable. The article states —

“There is a lot of feeling against the DAPs, some of the community is disenfranchised,” she said.

Ms Saffioti said the main concerns were the levels of discretion used when approving large developments, as well as the accountability and transparency of the process.

It appears that, in opposition, the now minister and his predecessor minister were happy to express the concerns that members on this side of the house are now expressing, but for some reason, this minister has now changed his tune.

I vividly recall a discussion with a young person back when the now minister was the Mayor of Vincent. The young person I talked to had attended a function with the former Mayor of Vincent and had heard the now minister's visionary approach to planning. As the mayor, he had discussed providing affordable housing while maintaining visual amenity and green canopy in communities. I also vividly remember a discussion with the now Minister for Planning when he was the parliamentary secretary to the former Minister for Planning. I was discussing my concerns with the government's planning law changes and was very pleased to hear that there would be new regulations to ensure proper amenity in both dwellings and communities. However, it appears that, as minister, he has undergone some sort of transformation. Nothing has eventuated to protect the amenity of communities. It is quite the opposite. We have seen a progressive decline in standards. There are housing developments without a single tree to be seen. There was complete acquiescence to the developers at the two attempts the government made to introduce proper standards. In both cases, this minister completely folded within days of property developers—it was only a handful—tackling him on the issue of introducing standards. He completely acquiesced to the wish of those developers over the standard of the amenity in the areas that the millions of people in Perth live in. It was all for the solicitations of a handful of property developers.

It is absolute rubbish to say that applying proper amenity standards increases housing costs. It is simply about maximising profits for land developers. It does not significantly impact the cost of building a house. It is about maintaining appropriate standards to maintain an appropriate amenity in the area. The minister might like to resort to childish name-calling, as he did at question time, and revert to his pathetic attempt to try to wedge the Leader of the Liberal Party and me when challenged on his failures in housing. His demeaning behaviour may appeal to his supporters on the back bench, but it will do nothing to help ease the distress of Western Australians who are unable to obtain suitable housing. During question time, I heard some byplay and pejorative comments about my podcasts. I can tell members one thing: I did not come into this place to be popular. I did not come into this place for my ego. I came here because I care about my community and I care about the opportunities for future generations in this state, and that is why I will fiercely defend my community and not bow to bullying from this minister and his developer supporters.

I will now go through some detail of some specific matters in relation to housing. It is this government's actions, or inactions, that have been the major contributor to the housing crisis, especially in the private and public rental sector. This government's mismanagement has added to the housing stress, with private rental vacancy rates sitting at around 40-year lows. The government has failed across the spectrum of housing-related activities and policies. Its failures are contributing to the housing crisis and are readily identifiable. Firstly, selling off public housing has exacerbated the ever-present shortage of public housing stock, as indicated by lengthy waitlists. It has failed to add to the public housing stock to compensate for sold properties despite growing population pressure. It has deceived the public with repeated announcements about funding increases for public housing and failed to deliver on the promises. It has planning policies that pander to a few developers, rather than doing anything meaningful to increase housing stock. As I said, I will go through the proof of that in detail tomorrow. It has failed to ensure timely land release in Perth and across the regions. It has failed to deliver promised worker accommodation in the regions, particularly in cyclone-damaged Kalbarri. It has stalled property development with excessive delays in various approval processes, including for land titles and power supplies. The substantial delay in approvals sits at the feet of this government, the ministers opposite and their departments. The government has failed to deliver on the two promised Common Ground projects to target homelessness. Its planning law changes will quite probably result in greater delays for housing approvals, if history is any guide.

I do not have time to go through everything in detail in this short format, but I will go through some of it in a little bit more detail. It has already been mentioned that this Labor government sold over 1 000 public houses at a time when there was already a crisis in that area. That of itself is no bad thing, but to do it without any replacement at that time was utterly foolish, and that has harmed people. It has harmed the people who could not get housing and it has put extra stress on the housing system across our whole state. This is basic stuff. There is nothing complex about it. There was a one-off revenue boost for the government and then pain. For someone to say that selling off public housing is good management beggars belief, particularly for the people on that side of the house, who claim that they are here for social justice, amongst other things.

The second point is that the government has failed to add to that stock to compensate. According to information provided to Parliament, as of 30 June 2017, our public housing stock was at 36 963, but at the end of the 2022–23 financial year, the stock was at 36 383. As of 30 July this year, we had some 580 fewer homes than we had in 2017. Members, that is over six years after Labor took government. The figures that were provided to us indicate that

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 8 November 2023]

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Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

six years after Labor took government, we were 580 homes down in public housing stock. We had 580 fewer homes than we had in 2017. They are the numbers. That is an unequivocal failure of this Labor government. It is a substantial contributor to the crisis that we face now in both public housing and rental housing, because clearly people who are displaced from public housing are desperately searching and competing in the rental housing market.

[Member's time extended.]

Dr D.J. HONEY: Everyone has been impacted by that. Renters have been impacted by those poor people. Members opposite will know that the great majority of people who are seeking public housing are doing so because they cannot afford anything else, and many of them are facing extremely tough circumstances.

We hear various excuses, but that is an appalling record of this government over a six-year period. It has deceived the public with repeated announcements. This government's substitute for actual action is to make announcements about ever-increasing amounts of money, but it does nothing to increase the housing stock. We remember the announcement in 2019, when homelessness was a big issue, of \$2.2 billion for 3 200 homes, but now we are up to \$3 billion for 4 000 homes. We were told recently, after four years of grand promises, that the government had delivered 1 300 homes, and I think that number has gone up. Imagine that. At that rate, it will take Labor another eight years to deliver the rest of the promised 4 000 homes for public housing. I note that there has been some change in those numbers, but the government has not even delivered on its promise to build new affordable apartments to offset the loss of public housing with the demolition of Brownlie Towers. I recently asked for an update on what is happening on the site, mindful that it has been four years since the towers were demolished—not since it was started, but since the towers were demolished. The reply from the Minister for Housing was that the government has done nothing despite that period of time elapsing. We heard more spin from the government to somehow justify that absolute failure to develop land that it owns and controls and on which it demolished housing. Everyone recognises that that housing was past its due date, but here we are, four years later, and nothing has even been announced about what will be done other than that the government is going to do something on a massive area of land that I recall is 28 hectares of mostly private but some public land.

Planning policies—we will go through this in detail tomorrow—have been handed to a handful of developers targeting expensive areas rather than ensuring the development of genuinely affordable apartments in affordable suburbs. A set of apartments are being built just north of my electorate in Karrinyup. This is what the government has achieved to try to get more housing built under its planning policy changes. I will talk about the set of apartments being built in Karrinyup by Blackburne. A person can buy a one-bedroom apartment in that development starting at \$600 000. If a person happens to have a couple of kids, those poor and desperate people who are seeking affordable housing can pay \$1.58 million as a starting price for a two-bedroom apartment. That is what the government has achieved under its current changes to the planning policy—homes for millionaires in my electorate and those that surround it. Nothing has been provided by way of affordable housing in higher density developments of any significance in those areas. Members opposite talk a lot about affordable housing, but the only thing it has changed in large part is to ensure that some well-heeled developers are selling some enormously expensive residences to well-heeled buyers. This government has done nothing to deal with the housing affordability crisis that we face in the state of Western Australia. Of course, the rising cost of building homes has naturally flowed into the problem that people face in trying to get a new house.

I will now talk about excessive delays in various approval processes that are stalling property development. If the minister were to focus on this alone, it would do more to stimulate the timely development of new housing than anything else. I thank the member for Roe for referring to the Landgate question that I asked today. That was a good reminder. Landgate is recording times of up to 135 days for land titles to be transferred. In some cases, people are waiting more than six months. That means that people cannot transfer a property or take on a property for that period of time. That is an enormous delay. The minister is complaining about the 60-day approval period taken by councils to approve properties, 89 per cent of which all fell within that time frame, but here we have delays of up to six months. The Australian Institute of Conveyancers considers a 20-day approval period as usual for a title transfer, but that 40 days should be considered as bad performance. Those slow approvals mean delays for housing projects that continue to sustain housing pressure and stress for renters and mortgage payers. It is difficult to understand why Landgate is having trouble in dealing with that process, given it is mostly an electronic process and the substantial increase in resources it has received. It was quite clear today that the minister had no idea of the detail of that issue and could not provide a detailed answer. Instead, he resorted to abusing the Leader of the Liberal Party and yelling in this chamber.

A recent news item reported that a childcare centre in Victoria Park is looking at a longer time frame for the energy upgrade process than it took to build the entire centre—imagine that! This is a critical need. I know that some members sitting in this chamber right now are passionate advocates for more childcare centres in metropolitan Perth. That facility needs to come online and provide that critically needed child care, but its connection to the grid is taking longer than it took to build the centre. That sits at the feet of the Minister for Energy and this government.

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

Fini Developments director Anthony Chun noted that the electrical connections process is taking twice as long as it used to.

A letter to the editor from someone in Swan View tells of the trauma of subdividing a block and how a surveyor has had to inform his clients that many are waiting for more than a year for Western Power connections, so eight months and counting is not out of the norm these days for a subdivision development. That problem has been around for a significant period of time. It has been raised in this chamber with the Minister for Energy and it is as bad as it has ever been. This government is failing to resolve that problem and it is leading directly to a shortage of housing in Perth.

My next point is the failure to deliver promised workers accommodation in Kalgoorlie. I do not have time to go through that in detail, but again we see a critical project that was promised by this government at exactly the same time. I hear ministers in this chamber say that it is terrible and there is no shortage of resources, but major mining companies are building major accommodation, in some cases for over 1 000 people, in part of the time that we have been waiting for that workers accommodation in Kalbarri. The government has simply failed to manage that project, again causing distress in that community and a housing shortage.

The government failed to deliver the Common Ground projects—one in Perth and one in Mandurah—whilst high-rise apartments for millionaires in my electorate are going apace. It is beyond this government’s capability to deliver its Common Ground projects. Tomorrow I will have a bit of time to go through the fact that development assessment panels are one solution. A 2020 review of the performance of DAPs found that development application times had blown out to 147 days against a legislated time frame of only 60 days. The average processing time for all DAP decisions stands at 145 days, nearly double the time taken when they first came into operation. Can I just say that 89 per cent of council approvals were done within the 60-day time frame. We are going to a system that has a poorer outcome in terms of approval pace.

Members, I do not have time to go on and my colleagues wish to add to the debate. The problems with the delivery of housing to the public and the community of Western Australia sit at the feet of this government. Its constant name calling and abuse of anyone who criticises anything it does is a distraction from its complete failure to deliver housing to the people of Western Australia.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party) [5.18 pm]: I rise to also add to this motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition —

That this house condemns the Western Australian Labor government for failing to prevent the worsening housing crisis, with record numbers of builders and construction businesses folding each week, and Western Australians struggling to keep a roof over their heads, despite having had seven years to take action.

I will be contributing to this debate in my capacity as the shadow Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. Quite clearly, it is well understood that there is a strong link between homelessness in Western Australia and people fleeing desperate family and domestic violence situations. The most recent census data from 2021 shows that the number of people experiencing homelessness in Western Australia had increased by eight per cent to a total of 9 729 in the five years between 2016 and 2021. That was an increase of 720 people. The number of Western Australians sleeping rough increased by more than 114 per cent between the censuses—from 1 083 in 2016 to 2 315 in 2021. WA now has the highest proportion of people living in improvised dwellings, including tents, of all states and territories; what is called “rough sleepers”.

People sleeping rough now account for about one third of the total homeless population, up from 12 per cent in 2016. The rate in Western Australia is by far the highest of all states and territories. It also bucks the national trend; rough sleeping has decreased elsewhere, from seven per cent to just over six per cent, as a proportion of total homelessness. WA’s rough sleeping is now three times the national average. To put it another way, almost one in three rough sleepers in Australia are in WA, according to Shelter WA.

We are seeing a housing crisis that continues to be a major challenge for our state. It is having a significant impact on all sectors of the economy. It is having an impact on housing availability and affordability for Western Australian families and for key industry sectors. My focus will be on those who are in the most vulnerable circumstances and those who are fleeing family and domestic violence.

A range of factors have caused this, including the Labor government’s lack of action since taking office in 2017 to address this issue. That is particularly evident for vulnerable people, with repeated state government failures to make an impact on the social housing waitlists or to add to the stock of social homes. The total number of social homes decreased every year from 2018 to 2021 under this government. In July 2023, there were 43 795 homes in stock, whereas in June 2017, there were more—44 087 homes were in stock. At a time when the state is recording the largest boom in its history, to see the stock of social housing go back in that way illustrates the fact that this government has not done its job in supporting the most vulnerable in our community.

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

As of September 2023, the number of new construction loans to owner-occupiers was down by just over 27 per cent, year-on-year. Families are finding it harder and harder to find housing, with the rental vacancy rate at less than one per cent for most of this year. Increasing the supply of affordable housing is crucial, but the best the Labor government can do is announce another special unit of bureaucrats to make decisions on its behalf. This is simply a deflection from the current crisis and an insult to those who are struggling to put a roof over their head.

One in six Australian women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or previous partner from the age of 15. In 2022, 37 per cent of homicides and related offences in WA were family and domestic violence-related. There were 18 victims. In 2022, the number of victims of assault in WA increased by seven per cent to 38 743 victims—the highest number in 30 years. Sixty-four per cent of those assaults, or just under 25 000, were family and domestic violence-related. We know that the most recent statistics for family and domestic violence show a 45 per cent increase.

There is a growing crisis of women and children who are living in the family home when it is not safe to do so. In many cases, they simply have nowhere else to go. Even refugees are struggling to keep up with the most very basic demands. WA has the highest rate of women who have experienced family and domestic violence approaching homelessness services, at 55.9 per cent. Of the 4 932 women who reached out to homelessness services in June this year, 2 756 had also experienced family and domestic violence, which is more than half.

As I have stated, we know that a contributing factor to the heartbreaking FDV tragedies we have seen over the past months is the fact that leaving is not easy, particularly when there is nowhere else to go. We hear that women's refuges are at bursting point. Returning to the home of the perpetrator cannot be, and should not be, the only option for these women and children.

South West Refuge Inc carries out amazing work. I recently met with the refuge to hear how it is struggling to help these women and children, as the demand far outweighs what it is able to provide in terms of refuge accommodation. There is a knock-on effect. Those they can help are staying longer because they cannot be housed on a more permanent basis; quite simply, there is no adequate housing stock. That is tragic. South West Refuge CEO Alison White has said, according to my notes —

... as we are aware one woman a week is killed as a result of family and domestic violence, the number of women rendered homeless for the same reason is at least 20 times this number.

To provide an indication of the level of demand for South West Refuge, in the last financial year the refuge had to turn away 340 women. The updated figures indicate that this number is increasing. Between 1 July and November 2023, South West Refuge received 314 calls for help; the number it was able to provide refuge accommodation to was 187.

I refer now to Orana House. The statistics for South West Refuge have been reinforced by other organisations that support this cohort. It was reported in *The West Australian* last month that a spokesperson for Orana House said that because of the rental crisis, the number of victims looking for housing was likely to get much worse, with victims being overlooked by landlords because they did not have a rental history. One woman had made over 330 unsuccessful rental applications before Orana was able to find her a property through its Housing Families program. Orana House has recently expanded that program with a \$50 000 grant from the voluntary initiative 100 Women. It has accommodated 50 women and 140 children in private rentals. The program relies on the compassion of real estate agents and landlords who are prepared to accept tenants who may not have a job or rental history. I put on the record to all involved what a commendable initiative that is.

I turn to the Safe at Home program. South West Refuge offers confidential support for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence to stay in their own homes when it is safe to do so. That is certainly a worthy initiative as well. If a woman is still living with a perpetrator but has moved out for a court order, South West Refuge goes in to ensure that the home is secure for the woman and her children.

South West Refuge in Bunbury is funded for 70 clients per annum. That is the tip of the iceberg. It assisted 170 clients and had to meet that shortfall through its own fundraising. Like many others across the state, this refuge is not only operating well above capacity, but also undertaking fundraising to just get by and ensure that it is not turning away women who need support.

The CEO at South West Refuge feels that we are looking at this from the wrong perspective and need to consider removing perpetrators from the home into temporary staffed housing while the women, and often children, remain. The perpetrator can then undergo education, curfews and a family violence restraining order to prevent him from returning home until he can demonstrate that he can make better choices. I know that Communicare has done some work in this space, but it is certainly a valuable point.

On 29 September, *The Australian Financial Review* reported that families with household incomes upwards of \$160 000 a year are being forced to sleep in their cars due to the undersupply of homes. Many in this house have talked about the new cohort of working poor that has been seen under this government at a time when the state is

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

enjoying the largest boom in Western Australia’s history. The article also stated that Perth has the lowest vacancy rate of any capital city in Australia and that regional areas of WA are experiencing some of the highest rent increases in the nation.

The article continues —

Community Housing Limited WA manager Sean Kelly said the state’s housing shortage meant the organisation was assisting families with six-figure household incomes unable to find rentals.

“In that central coast, Geraldton area, we’re seeing people on \$150,000-\$180,000 a year as a household income, and they’re sleeping in their car with their kids because there’s nowhere for them to rent,” ...

“This is a very different cohort we are seeing approaching us for help, and for a large proportion of them, it’s the first time they’ve come into contact with [the] support services sector.”

The regional area north of Perth, including Geraldton, Gingin, and Jurien Bay ranked 9th in the SQM index, with a 24.4 per cent yearly increase in rents as of September and a vacancy rate of just 0.5 per cent.

...

“It’s not an affordability issue, it’s a supply issue,” ... “That’s why we’re seeing people who have good jobs, medium incomes ...

Shelter WA chief executive Kath Snell also said that the WA government needed to urgently lift housing supply, but also that it needed to consider what it could do to stabilise prices. The article certainly underlined the important issue of supply.

In my local electorate, we have seen a shortage of housing. The cost of living has increased presentations of young people at the youth activity centre in Busselton. It is seeing families that have not encountered homelessness before. As a result, families are under pressure and are sharing homes. It is simply not sustainable. Overcrowding is also seeing some really poor outcomes, with concerns raised about domestic violence. The youth activity centre provides free cooked meals for youth. It has also seen a significant increase in the number of meals, going from 100 a week to 160 a week. That is really devastating to hear. Many youths are asking for extras to take home, which is a demand that this youth activity centre has not seen before.

According to a report from Accordwest in Bunbury covering the 2022–23 period across its services, the data has the common themes of predominately youth and single parents seeking support for housing affordability, as well as the housing crisis and inappropriate dwelling conditions. The number of relationship and family breakdowns and family and domestic violence issues reported to its youth services are high. During October, Accordwest visited five major towns across the south west to reach out to people needing help as part of the Hello Roadshow, which was referred to as the south west’s biggest meet and greet. In conjunction with other likeminded organisations, it visited Bunbury, Collie, Manjimup, Margaret River and Busselton communities and encouraged people to visit with the goal of breaking down barriers and starting conversations to lead to real positive change. During that time, it engaged with people from all walks of life who were homeless, couch surfing or living in cars. Accordwest shared the story of a young 19-year-old female who reached out for support in September. I will finish with a quote. It states —

The young female has been living in a property, staying in a toxic/dangerous relationship for several months.

[Member’s time extended.]

Ms L. METTAM: It continues —

She is from a family unit that is currently homeless but has identified that she is unable to live with her parents due to relationship breakdown.

Due to challenges with depression and anxiety, this young person has declined to live in a shared crisis accommodation. She is too anxious to entertain other semi-independent homelessness services in which she would live in close proximity with older adults with a range of complexities. This young person works around 20 hours per week, which means that she is over the threshold for public housing and therefore not eligible for transitional housing managed by Accordwest within their homelessness contracts.

If it were not for these thresholds, this young person would have been offered a transitional property to share with her sibling that is also homeless (currently living within a crisis accommodation).

Given the growth in ‘working homelessness’ because of the shortage of available properties in the area, this case highlights the shortfall in the public housing system in WA, which is disadvantaging young people that are applying themselves and engaging in employment even when they are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or living in a dangerous situation because there are few alternatives.

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

As I said, this situation is really tragic, and not only for the vulnerable in our community and those desperately seeking to remove themselves from dangerous circumstances. We know that there has been a 45 per cent increase in family and domestic violence incidents, according to recent figures. We are also seeing this cohort of the working poor, including many youth, across the state. It is affecting many industries and sectors and is changing the shape and fabric of our towns. It is impacting the ability of key public sector agencies to be able to attract workers to schools, hospitals and the police force. It is quite clear that this has been a significant challenge for the government and it has also been a significant failure as well. I will leave my comments there. I know there are others who wish to speak. I certainly commend the Leader of the Opposition for moving this very important motion. It has had many different impacts across this state and many sectors, including for the very vulnerable.

MS M. BEARD (North West Central) [5.39 pm]: I rise to make a short contribution to this motion. As has been noted, I also received information from some of the building groups around the various areas. One thing that stuck out to me was the suggestion about the small and medium-sized business recovery loan scheme, which is really important. A lot of builders I have spoken to, including those in the north who speak to me regularly, are struggling to get finance to bridge the gap between the losses they have made and any attempt to build their business back up and find a way to stay in business and keep the industry moving forward. A stimulus for builders and tradespeople is really important. We do not want a decimated industry as time goes on.

From a regional perspective, I want to touch on some of the issues that are pertinent to my patch and the north west—they are also pertinent across the board in regional areas—particularly the lack of worker accommodation. That is not new to anyone. The growth in Airbnb accommodation across a lot of regional towns has definitely had an impact on rental availability for local families. I was contacted by someone who lives in Exmouth. The family had lived in Exmouth for 10 years. Their children had gone to school there. Their lease came to an end and they were unable to find a rental, but there were many Airbnbs in the town that had previously been on the rental market. That is an issue that people are struggling with. In Kalbarri, two years on from cyclone Seroja, there is still no worker accommodation; it is a bare block. There is a block of land in Exmouth that is waiting to be developed. One of the biggest roadblocks for these groups is the headworks and the cost of infrastructure, which does not make it profitable for a builder or developer to commit funds to that space. If assistance is provided in regional areas with headworks and sewerage arrangements, it will have a flow-on effect; people will stay in the towns and develop businesses and those areas will grow and develop.

Another thing to remember is that there is currently a very big push in the tourism marketing space, which everybody is pleased to see. Having said that, if we are pushing tourists into these amazing regions and areas and infrastructure is not in place and housing is not available, it will be particularly difficult for businesses to grow. There is also the potential damage to the tourism reputation of Western Australia if those services and facilities are not available.

When I went to Exmouth, I visited a lady who had erected a new tent under the awning on the side of her garage. There was a new queen-size mattress on the floor. I asked her whether she had extra family staying. She said that the tent belonged to her son, who was a fly-in fly-out worker flying in and out of Exmouth. His home had been taken back and he could not find a rental. This issue affects second and third-generation families and extended families who have lived in a lot of these towns. Worker accommodation is non-negotiable. The lack of worker accommodation is having an enormous impact on the potential for towns and regions to expand. We need to find a way to expedite that development.

The \$20 000 building bonus scheme grant has caused issues. A homebuilder in my area attempted to get the grant but he was unsuccessful. He has now landed a modular home. Without that, he would not have a home. There are ways to tweak or reconfigure the grants system to provide assistance from a different angle. Previous speakers mentioned regional property developments in the north. The biggest roadblock for a builder in Carnarvon who wanted to develop a block of six units was the connection to water and power and the extended time that it would take to make those connections. Coupled with that is the enormous cost, which does not make it viable to put the infrastructure and headworks in place. The units would have most definitely been taken up by health service providers for hospital staff and by police officers and teachers, all of whom are struggling to find accommodation. A couple of teachers have had to temporarily share with people when they moved up; it has been a long temporary arrangement because nothing is available!

Another issue in remote regional areas is safe houses. I have highlighted in this place the need for safe houses. It is linked to domestic violence. Children who live in vulnerable and disturbing environments can escape to these safe houses for help from 11 at night, which seems to be the witching hour, and right through the night. We need to crank up this crucial service in the regions. There are safe houses in Geraldton and other towns that work hand in hand with the women's refuge. There is only one women's refuge in the entire Gascoyne region and it services people from as far north as Onslow and Karratha who come down inland to Gascoyne Junction. It is three-and-a-half hours south to Shark Bay and three-and-a-half hours north to Exmouth. That refuge is well used and often has a waiting list. The women and children who present at the refuge can stay up to three months. During that time, the children

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

are engaged in full-time school, which is a requirement of being there. These are really important services that protect women from domestic violence situations.

One issue with the women's refuge is that it will not take boys who are over the age of 12. A mother who goes to the refuge cannot take her sons if they are older than 12 years of age. That leads to the requirement for transitional housing to allow women to transition from the refuge. I spoke with the people who are developing this in the north and they said that if they had transitional housing, a portion of it would be kept for those mothers who cannot take their sons with them to refuges because they are over the age of 12. Some women who need refuge and who have a son who is more than 12 years of age decide to stay in the domestic violence environment. We need to change that as quickly as we can because it is happening regularly. If transitional housing were available, it would provide some capacity for mothers with boys over the age of 12 to go to a safe space together. It would mean that mothers who have left situations that were not good and had their children relocated somewhere else could use transitional housing and reunite with their children, which is really important. We all know how desperate the domestic violence situation is at the moment.

There is no men's refuge, which has been highlighted recently. People have told me that we desperately need men's refuges across the north in various places, which would potentially help the domestic violence situation. The number of people who come through my office seeking social housing, particularly in Carnarvon, has increased. The regional managers are located in Geraldton most of the time, with some in Perth, which is cumbersome because people are struggling to deal with someone who can make a decision. One of my constituents has been complaining regularly to one of the regional managers, who is not in the town. In the last few months, he received a letter from the regional manager saying that he would not be responding to any of the constituent's letters and that he would need to go through the complaints process. Clearly, people are getting very frustrated. We need to address this issue and find solutions.

The mother of one of my constituents lived in her house for decades. She kept it like it was her own home; it was beautiful. The mother passed away and this lady lives in the house, but because it is a three-bedroom house, she has been asked to move out. She was caring for her mother at the end. She now cares for her grandchildren in that house and she is struggling to purchase it, which is an option she hoped to have. Obviously, she is still struggling through that process for lots of reasons. If we can find ways to facilitate some of these situations, it would be really helpful in giving people a home. The point I raise is that outside the box, one size will not fit all.

Aged care is a form of housing that is really important in the regions. The aged-care facility in Carnarvon is fabulous. It is now full and it has some people waiting to go in. In all these towns, the aged-care facilities, particularly those attached to hospitals, are positive. In some cases, the whole family will leave town. Exmouth is a town that is now seeing a third generation of people coming through that need aged care. It will obviously be an ongoing situation that everyone is faced with. It will keep people in the regions and employ them. As we were talking about, it all comes back to this big issue of housing.

There are also people in social housing who are in a small unit with a lot of people or in a big house just by themselves. We can be creative in the way we look at how many people are in how many houses and how many houses are unoccupied. When I have asked tradies in town about houses that are boarded up in some of the remote towns, they say that they are not financially viable. I am not sure whether it means that the tradies travelling find that the situation is not satisfactory. I am just asking whether maybe in some of these locations, in the same way teachers are given an incentive to travel, there is a way to incentivise tradies to go to some of these remote locations to make a dent in some of the housing issues there with overcrowding and domestic violence.

I have used up too much time. I ask the government to look at some of these situations and suggestions about transitional housing, domestic violence and women's refuges, particularly bringing social housing back online. We need to find creative ways to engage people from outside the regions and pull them into the regions to undertake the work that needs to happen in these spaces.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt) [5.52 pm]: I thank the minister. I know that there was agreement that there be an hour for the government to respond to this motion. I appreciate that. I just want to put a couple of things on the record. I will not take my full half-hour. I want to touch on a couple of things. One is some correspondence I received from a constituent—actually not one of mine, but from Geraldton—outlining his observations. Perhaps the minister could then provide a response about some of the observations. Some of them are specific and some of them are general but they are very much in keeping with the concerns raised by the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, particularly about the challenges that builders in Western Australia are facing as a result of what we could call a perfect storm, with COVID, decisions that have been made by government in an overheated market both at a state and federal level and the way that that industry is regulated.

We on this side of the house do not ask for increased red tape. It is understood, and has been highlighted in the growing number of builders who have fallen foul in recent times, that there are clearly builders that have overextended

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

themselves. There has not been enough oversight on the businesses that have been running. People have invested huge amounts of money in their forever home or perhaps an investment. I am particularly concerned about those who are least able to afford being left without a roof over their head, maybe in a rental property or who are paying a mortgage. It is unacceptable that there is not a proactive attitude towards making sure that there is oversight of those in the sector who leave customers high and dry. I thought I would start with that.

After that, I want to touch on the Aboriginal Community Housing Organisation and the partnership prospectus that the minister and I were at the launch of. The minister launched it earlier in the year. It was the first appointment I went to as shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. I want to note some of the follow-up by the government that has been done since that time. They are really the only two issues I would like to touch on.

The letter I received contains observations from an individual who has some experience in building his own house, particularly in and around Geraldton and the midwest area. He has put a short paper together and sent it to me, telling me he would really value my feedback. My concern is that the government should provide feedback on this paper. I share some of this individual's concerns, and I give the minister the opportunity, if not now, to eventually address some of the issues that have been raised. The letter states —

According to ASIC 1709 construction companies entered into administration between July 2022 and April 2023, but for the last 2 months of the financial year this figure increased by a further 408 to 2117, 833 more than the previous financial year.

This is Australia wide —

In Western Australia the figures indicate 132 entering into administration in 2022/23 financial year an increase of 39 on the previous year.

So it is significant —

The number of building disputes last financial year was 1054 up 68% on the previous year and up from 574 in 2019/20.

Currently there are 528 active complaints and the average number of days to close is 164.

The Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety —

I understand that the minister is not responsible for this, but it has some overlap with the entire housing sector —
—Building Compliance Audit Strategy 2021–2024 in its overview it states —

“An important function of the Building Commissioner to audit the work and conduct of registered builder's and building surveyors and to monitor how well building standards are being applied.”

And also, that —

“Our limited resources are allocated in a risk-based manner that provides best value for money coverage.”

Putting that into context with the numbers we have just spoken about, I suggest that with the state of the current budget there would be additional funds, particularly to address the risks that the department sees. It points out in its own overview that it has limited resources. The letter continues —

They are currently responsible for regulating more than 15000 builders and building surveyors in an environment where residential building approvals more than doubled in 2020–2021 compared to the previous financial year to 22,527 up from 10,863.

I know there are a lot of numbers here, I am sorry Hansard, but they are significant; they are significant increases. The letter continues —

They issue licences that are valid for 3years, 1200 licences have expired since 2020.

In June 2021 new loan commitments in WA were valued at \$2.1 billion (ABS Lending indicators June 2021).

The Audit priorities statement ... indicates that Building and Energy select a number of builders to audit, and these can be chosen on a random basis. In 2021 ... Building and Energy decided to focus its efforts on builders' technical compliance, with 44 buildings Class 1(a) to be inspected.

One recommendation contained in the 2018 Building Confidence Report proposed each jurisdiction undergo mandatory on-site inspections at different stages of building work.

I understand that this is not legislated in Western Australia. Further —

The building industry and its oversight is complex and needs to be fully understood by the Builder and consumer and certainty that the oversight is adequate to protect the interests of all parties.

The constituent wrote to me and said we need to be sure that the building and energy audit program is adequately funded by government so consumers can be confident that registered builders and their licences are constantly reviewed. Current evidence indicates to him that a number of builders are in trouble, mostly through circumstances that are beyond their control and there needs to be a restoration of confidence and an urgent audit of builders' financial and technical qualifications prior to the issuing of a building permit. That may be of assistance. The suggestion from the constituent is that all licences should be reviewed annually.

As I said, I want to reiterate that we on this side of the house are not about increasing red tape but, at this current point in time, there appears to be a significant issue in Western Australia. It is the tail-end lag of what has happened as a result of COVID and an overheated market, which has been exacerbated by an increase of funds coming from both the state and federal governments. Perhaps some attention could be paid to how we can get things back onto an even keel when it comes to making sure that those who do not do the right thing in our building industry are addressed and dealt with appropriately.

The perfect storm that my constituent wrote about includes COVID-19. No-one could have anticipated that. We acknowledge that it has been a challenge. It includes the homebuilder schemes that were introduced into an already overheated market. We have had floods and we have had fires, and that has been mentioned by previous speakers. There have been massive increases in transport costs as well as in steel and timber prices. We have had restrictions on labour. The constituent is from the midwest, so cyclone Seroja obviously did not assist. We have had interest rates rising despite the advice from the Reserve Bank of Australia at the time saying that the rate would be held. We have seen the cost of living increase. All these factors are swirling around, including rent increases of up 50 per cent or more in some cases, which means that some of the businesses that are involved in the sector are desperate to survive. They are tempted to cut corners and take on risky amounts of debt. Without the appropriate audit processes, we see an increase in the number of builders who are potentially falling foul of all these things. If they collapse, a whole raft of people have additional pressures, including financial stress and fewer homes. We talk about the government's continual proposals to build more houses. There are commitments from builders in the market at the moment to build more houses. Unfortunately, builders coming undone is nearly a weekly occurrence. That leaves a hole in the market and it is certainly not assisting the government. Somehow, all the arms of government need to work together to make sure we are not just trying to put more into the market but are managing what is there. We need to be able to finish the houses that have been started to make sure that, if the owners are in rentals, they can move into those homes that are sitting half done. I am sure everybody in every electorate in the state has seen examples of that.

The last thing that was mentioned was the last-resort insurance that the Builders Collective of Australia has suggested. My constituent says maybe a better alternative is Queensland's first-resort insurance, which allows a customer to lodge a claim while the builder is still trading. These are all things that I think need to be considered in the fullness of the challenges that we face. The minister continually says the government is doing everything it can and pulling every lever. I bring a suggestion from a constituent who has seen the frustrations of builders in his area and people who have fallen foul of builders in an overheated and not thoroughly regulated market. These are some frustrations he would like addressed and, as the opposition, we will continue to work with him and others in the sector to try to make sure there is a fulsome response to the challenges we see.

The last thing I want to mention, just very quickly, minister, is the Aboriginal community housing partnership prospectus. This project was funded by the government in partnership with Shelter Western Australia. That organisation did some fabulous work, and there were four Aboriginal-controlled housing organisations, ACHOs, or Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, ACCOs. They were Noongar Mia Mia, the Goldfields Indigenous Housing Organisation, the Murchison Region Aboriginal Corporation and the Southern Aboriginal Corporation in Albany. The prospectus was put together after working with Shelter WA and the state government to create an opportunity for the private sector to partner with these organisations to deliver more housing in the Aboriginal community housing sector. There is really good evidence that the community housing sector can do far more in this market. It is something that has been underdone by both sides of government. I am supportive of creating opportunities for community housing organisations to be formalised and recognised and also be able to expand their offering in the community, particularly Aboriginal-controlled housing organisations. As I said, it was my first event as the Aboriginal Affairs shadow minister; this was at the beginning of the year. I spoke to a few people I knew in the room about what would happen next, because I had assumed that the government would be providing some funding to these organisations to further strengthen them or create a pipeline that they could apply to, to actually build or invest in these houses. It is a prospectus so it is out there for everyone to find and hopefully there has been an uptake from the private sector to partner with these organisations, but I think there is a gap. In its annual report, Shelter WA identified a gap where the state government could contribute. Page 23 speaks to the missed opportunities it saw as a result of the outcome of the immediate past state budget. That includes failing to make —

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

Significant new and increased investment into Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to enable the provision of culturally competent homelessness service delivery.

I think it would have been wonderful for the government to have been there for the launch of the prospectus and said, “We as the state government will assist you in kickstarting these funds to draw in some private sector operators.” It is all very well to be self-sufficient, but we know how difficult that can be, particularly in the current environment. Shelter WA has followed that up with its pre-budget submission for next year. It has given the government another go at responding. The third priority for the 2024–25 budget, on page 29 of its pre-budget submission, is new and sustained investment into Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. That is after a \$20 million rent relief initiative to provide financial assistance to support households in Western Australia’s private rental sector, and the second point is to establish a Western Australian housing future fund. It has a number of asks in addition to its key priorities. Again, this is a great opportunity for the government to step in and work with these four organisations and bring others into the mix so that we have localised, specifically designed community housing organisations that are Aboriginal-owned and managed to make sure we minimise what we know are real challenges: Higher rates of homelessness and lower rates of homeownership, stable homes that allow families to access appropriate health care and education, and looking after their elderly. We all agree that these issues need to be dealt with. Some solutions are being offered by Shelter WA. I know the minister is very passionate about it. It would be lovely to see that passion translated into the budget as we go towards 2024–25. They were the two issues I wanted to raise with the minister directly. I have another housing issue to raise with him tomorrow during grievances. I look forward to doing that at that point in time.

MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Housing) [6.08 pm]: I want to thank all the speakers. I listened attentively. I want to thank the member for Central Wheatbelt for her considered contribution and also particularly the advocacy of the budget submission, which I was not aware of. I thank her sincerely for raising it with me. I will come back to that. I listened very attentively but there is one issue I need to address. I understand that in politics we have robust debate. I am very used to it. The other side gives it well and I give it back. However, what is very clear from the commentary of the member for Cottesloe is that there is a deliberate campaign—I will call it a smear campaign—to suggest, through innuendo, that I do not conduct myself with integrity in the planning decisions that I make. I have read that in his commentary multiple times. I want to read some of it out because I think it is actually important for the context of the public debate. In one debate, the member for Cottesloe said —

The government cares more about a handful of property developers than the people of Western Australia.

He also said —

The minister has had a stellar performance in approving land to be developed by developers for apartments for millionaires in my electorate and nearby electorates ...

In other commentary, the member for Cottesloe said that it is no wonder that various developers and so on are the single biggest donors to the Labor Party. He said that was no surprise. This has been the ongoing commentary of the member for Cottesloe.

I want to put this on the public record right now: I conduct myself with absolute integrity in the planning and housing portfolios. I have an open-door policy for all stakeholders. Members of the opposition know that. The member for Vasse asked me on two occasions to meet stakeholders who on both occasions were opposing developments or had concerns regarding a scheme. I met them and engaged with them. In the member for Cottesloe’s own electorate, I met a group of residents who were concerned about a development that was being considered. I have an open-door policy for all stakeholders, such as the WA tree canopy advocates, and I meet them. I will meet any resident, group or stakeholder who may be for or against a development. What we have from the member for Cottesloe, who talks about falling standards, is a very clear, deliberate and repeated approach to smear me personally and the government’s engagement when making decisions.

The member for Cottesloe talks about a handful of developers. I am not sure to whom he is referring. When I announced the planning reform, I had representatives from a number of groups standing next to me. They included Shelter WA and Housing Choices, both of which are not-for-profit organisations; the Planning Institute of Australia, which represents a vast number of planning consultants and other stakeholders; and the Local Government Planners’ Association, which represents all staff who work in the local government planning sector. Yes, there were also representatives from the Urban Development Institute of Australia, the Property Council of Australia and the Housing Industry Association. I am the housing, planning, lands and homelessness minister; I engage with all those stakeholders and then make decisions appropriately.

It is interesting. The member for Cottesloe raised the issue of public open space. Multiple stakeholders have expressed their concern that in the current economic environment, any extra tax or levy would make or break a project. I have received advocacy from the Association of Consulting Architects, the UDIA, the HIA and the Western Australian division of the Property Council of Australia. In terms of the medium-density code, a large number of concerns

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

have been raised and we are working through them. In fact, I believe that we have a way forward that will address those concerns. However, the member for Cottesloe appears to be suggesting that I should not engage with members of the HIA, which includes the deeply respected Dale Alcock from Dale Alcock Homes, one of the biggest producers of homes in Western Australia. Apparently, I should not listen to those groups at all, even though any of the decisions that I make could affect housing affordability.

I am also disappointed that the member for Cottesloe has misrepresented conversations we have had about design. It is well known that I was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Planning when she oversaw major design improvements in Western Australia. Let us talk about that. I personally oversaw, with the minister, *State planning policy 7.3: Residential design codes—Volume 2—Apartments*. There is no doubt that that has significantly improved the design of apartments and multi-residential buildings. We also brought in *State planning policy 7.2: Precinct design*, a design review guide and the State Design Review Panel. All of that is wrapped up with *State planning policy 7.0: Design of the built environment*. I want to put this on the record. What we are seeing from the member for Cottesloe is an absolute smear campaign about the difficult decisions that we have to make in relation to boosting and accelerating housing supply in Western Australia. As I have said on the public record, I take every decision that I make really seriously. When I had to make a decision about the medium-density code, I actually had sleepless nights, and so I should, because I understand the pros and cons of any planning decision that I make and its implications. I have to listen to the Housing Industry Association. I find it interesting that not one opposition member referred to the HIA, which is the primary body that represents the builders who produce the housing stock that we desperately need. I listen to them about the medium-density code. I listen to the key bodies that are involved in the delivery of housing in Western Australia. I wanted to put that on the record because what we are seeing, and will probably see in the debate tomorrow, is the Liberals being deliberately misleading in this debate.

The last point, which I find bizarre, was the idea, again peddled by the member for Cottesloe, that the Labor Party has an obsession with getting density in the western suburbs. I do not. I want density across all communities. I want density near transit-oriented development. I want density near Metronet stations. I want density in my community. I want density in the city. I can want that all I like and I can create all the policy instruments, as we have done and they have been welcomed, but if a project is not financially viable, it will not proceed. Why have we seen density development in the western suburbs? Given the massive cost escalations that the member for Central Wheatbelt talked about, the only areas that are currently viable for apartments are the western suburbs, where they can sell \$30 million apartments at the top. I want to see density elsewhere. We are working on significant density projects. The member for Cottesloe might like to note that we are working on two major density projects for social and affordable housing. Do members know what? They are not in the western suburbs. Do members know whose electorate they are in? They are in mine, on Pier Street and Smith Street. Let us put to bed this rubbish that we hear about an obsession, which just ignores the basic market and housing economics that we currently face. Members can speak to any small, medium or large builders in the current housing market, as the member for Central Wheatbelt clearly has done but the member for Cottesloe has not. The member for Central Wheatbelt is aware of the deep cost escalations that are affecting projects in Western Australia.

I wanted to put that on the record because I was getting tired of the member for Cottesloe's attacks on my personal integrity in decision-making and about the mysterious handful of developers, which apparently are all the major advocacy groups, including Shelter WA.

I want to talk about the broader policy context. COVID radically reshaped the housing market. This has been demonstrated very clearly in a number of reports. Earlier this year, CoreLogic Australia stated —

The rental market has been rocked by the pandemic.

The rental market has arguably sustained the most significant and lasting change from the pandemic.

We know that COVID has done this. COVID also affected demand, because the number of people living by themselves in a home has increased. According to Peter Martin, a visiting fellow of the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University, the average number of people in households dropped. The average fell from a bit above 2.6 residents per household to a bit below 2.55, but applied to millions of households that means about 140 000 more houses or apartments are needed. We see that right now.

It is very easy to look back at history and say that we should not have done the building bonus, which the opposition now says. It did not say that at the time; it actually urged the government to take action, as did all the key advocacy groups that represent builders. They said that it was desperately needed. That grant has meant that we have a large number of homes under construction that we need right now. We brought out a number of initiatives to work with the construction industry. Those protections include that we have doubled the cap on individual payouts through the home indemnity insurance scheme. We have smoothed the pipeline of government projects to free up skilled labour. We have invested in a range of measures to attract skilled workers; in fact, there have been rolling initiatives. The member for Victoria Park will highlight those. We introduced security of payment laws, strengthening

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

protections for subcontractors, suppliers and builders. We revamped and created a call for submissions for new builders so that we could free up the system for small and medium-sized builders who had capacity. We made changes to Keystart to assist Western Australians get into a home. We introduced a \$30 million financial relief scheme to assist head contractors with unforeseen rising costs on Department of Finance and Department of Communities projects. We have included rise-and-fall provisions in future government contracts when appropriate to reduce the risk for tendering builders, and a landmark registration scheme for building engineers to strengthen public safety, industry viability and public recognition.

There has been a lot of reform and change in the construction industry. We are cognisant of and deeply sympathetic to people getting their home built right now. We know that there are challenges in the market and that is why we have made significant investments. I have to say that the round table meeting hosted by the Housing Industry Association that we held, which the opposition did not mention, was very productive. A range of issues were raised, but the number one issue raised was skilled labour. That was the key issue for builders and construction industry representatives in that room. Only this week we announced a recent initiative to expand the number of apprentices for the construction sector. There is a huge volume and I have to say this: These are the facts provided by the Department of Commerce, which is not my portfolio. Around 27 000 houses were under construction in the 2022–23 financial year, and 96 per cent of those projects progressed without complaints. I am cognisant of the issues that the sector faces, but that advice gives a clear insight into the ability of the majority of builders to work despite the difficult constraints. We are advised that supply chain issues are finally starting to ease and we are seeing some of that shift in that time frame. We know that residential demand has been strong and it will continue to be, although it tapers and has an almost cyclical nature, as we know.

In terms of insolvencies and home indemnity insurance, of course we do not want to see any builders fall. We understand the impact that has. As part of that round table, the action group put forward its proposals. I understand that the Minister for Commerce is giving consideration to those proposals. I want to again put on the public record some of the key advice. There are 4 826 registered builders in Western Australia, which is an extraordinary number. To put the insolvencies into context, in the 2022–23 financial year, a total of 27 registered builders became insolvent, of which 22 were residential builders. This is on par with previous years. Because of the concern about builders becoming insolvent, the former Minister for Commerce, now the Premier, made a change to double the maximum payout available under the state's home indemnity insurance scheme from \$100 000 to \$200 000. That was to better reflect the environment and also occurrences in which a builder dies, disappears or becomes insolvent. This increased payout applies to policies issued on or after 1 June 2020. This date was picked for a very good reason, because it represented that steep increase in the cost of building a home, which occurred as a result of the COVID pandemic and supply chain issues. I have been advised that it has been very effective, and 137 Western Australians who would have been left significantly out of pocket and unable to finish their homes have benefited from that change. That is really important to note: A key policy reform our government made has supported vulnerable Western Australians. We are also taking it from our contracts, particularly Communities, and have created a financial relief scheme to assist head contractors with cost escalations. To September 2023, 131 claims have been made and approved to builders impacted by market conditions, with more than \$13 million worth of relief payments made to head contractors. As I have said, we have also announced rise-and-fall provisions for future Department of Communities contracts to address those ongoing price fluctuations in the market. Those initiatives—the rise-and-fall provisions and the head contractor relief scheme—have been welcomed by stakeholders, including the Master Builders Association.

I think the member for Central Wheatbelt also mentioned the *Building confidence report*. I note that I am effectively speaking for the Minister for Commerce today, who is obviously not in the house. We are committed to reviewing the current legislative framework to address the recommendations made in the *Building confidence report*. It is great to hear that the member for Central Wheatbelt does not want red tape. In recognition of the tension between the call and desire for more red tape and the potential impacts that will have on the costs to industry, we are engaging to ensure that whatever measures we undertake in relation to that report are practical and will not have unintended consequences for the current market, which I think we all acknowledge is very heated. I think this is the point to make. It was certainly said at the round table by all the builders—I think this is really important to note—that any additional regulation of the building industry at this time, given the pressures the industry is experiencing and the impacts of the additional costs of adding regulation, must be balanced.

I come back to the member for Cottesloe's comments about the medium density code. I had to listen, in good conscience, to key builders who are producing those 21 000 homes right now. If Dale Alcock and the other builders who are producing most of our housing stock are saying to me that the introduction of a medium density code could have consequences for the building and price of homes, I have to take it seriously. Is the opposition suggesting that I should not and I should simply push those concerns aside? Of course it is not, but I am hopeful of being able to navigate a way forward for medium density codes that will not have a cost impact on single homes and will enable the desirable infill that we want.

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

With regard to the *Building confidence report*, we are, as recommended, currently implementing WA's first engineer registration scheme, which is expected to involve around 900 building engineers. This registration scheme is expected to increase building compliance, reduce particular costs, increase public confidence in the building industry and provide a formal recourse process for standardised engineering work. We are implementing that reform from the *Building confidence report* and we are confident that we can make it work and that that regulation will provide desirable outcomes.

I want to talk more broadly about housing in Western Australia. Looking back, we have rolled out a large number of initiatives. We have been tackling housing supply from every angle. I have to say that I do not believe there is one magic bullet; I have never believed that. I have never believed that anyone can simply say, "This is the policy solution that will boost housing supply." I understand that we need housing across the continuum. We need social housing and affordable housing and we need social and affordable density, which is the hardest one to deliver in the current market. We need medium density and we need high density, including the higher end product. Why? It is because any addition to the supply continuum is critically important. When I look at all the things we have done, it is quite extraordinary. We actually have one of the best planning systems in Australia. The member for Cottesloe happened to miss the reforms we made to the development assessment panel system, some of which I was personally involved in. These included new community engagement and the new radius model, which involves drawing a circle and making it wider for major developments in Western Australia. It even went down to changing the signage on sites to visual representations rather than some technical rubbish bureaucracy talk on the front that no-one understands so that people can see the actual proposal. We will discuss planning reform tomorrow and I am sure we will again hear the smear campaign from the opposition and this mysterious handful of developers.

We have spent record amounts on our social housing program, and we are delivering. We have now delivered more than 1 650 social homes, with a further 1 000 homes under contract. We have provided \$150 million in grants to the community housing sector, which will include an extra 300 homes. I am happy to follow up on the Aboriginal community housing organisation, but we have already opened a general call for submissions. It has not yet received much attention, because people hear it and do not think it is sexy. Basically, we are saying to every community housing provider, local government or private developer to come forward to us with their proposals, which must have a mix of community or affordable housing, and we will consider them. We might be able to work with them and give them a direct grant, whether through the social housing accelerator fund or the state fund. We might be able to work with them with land or we might be able to work with them on the project. This is open to the community housing sector, and we are particularly trying to engage that sector in the regions. I am cognisant of smaller community organisations, and the member for Central Wheatbelt pointed out the capacity of smaller community organisations, including Aboriginal community housing organisations.

I suppose it is watch this space. We are looking at what we can do in terms of helping smaller community organisations get a leg-up to grow their stock or build new homes. Certainly, I can assure the member that our \$150 million of grants to date have been going out to smaller and regional community housing organisations, but there are significant challenges in terms of their capacity to deliver, even when they get a grant. I am happy to follow up on the budget submission that the member flagged; I have not seen it as yet.

We have also changed other procurement arrangements. We have created modular prefab panels and other panels. This is for small or medium builders. This is effectively about pre-approving them so it is faster to procure new social housing projects. That effectively means we are cutting red tape for small, medium and large builders. I have talked about the call for submissions process; that is really an open process.

We set a target of 200 new modular homes and already 150 have been contracted, with 61 now completed in the Pilbara, great southern, goldfields, south west, wheatbelt and midwest. However, I acknowledge that everyone has the same idea and is now running to modular, including the private sector and the mining sector. It is now under enormous pressure and has capacity issues. We boosted spot purchasing and brought on the timber frame home program. We have increased social housing income eligibility limits for a fourth time, which means that pensioners and others will not fall out. I note that the former Liberal–National government did not do that once, despite the huge boom and demand for housing.

We are also doing big urban renewal projects, but they take longer. For example, Brownlie Towers has significant remediation and contamination issues that we will have to work through, but we are also working through other renewable projects in Beaconsfield, North Beach and Subi East. All these projects take longer times because they are more complex, like Pier Street and Smith Street, where we are using lazy government land as part of our housing diversity pipeline. At Smith Street, we are aiming for a dense, affordable social housing project. We are using a ground lease model, which is a first for Western Australia.

We are doing renewal projects in Bunbury, Geraldton and Spencer Park. These have all been strongly welcomed in Western Australia. Our efforts to actually boost the social housing stock is being seen in the number of people

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

being housed. It is promising. We have faced construction challenges and inherited ageing housing stock—much of it old, needing significant refurbishment or at the end of its life. Tough decisions have had to be made between refurbishment and, unfortunately, demolition. Despite that, we housed 2 643 applicants in public housing. That is a 35 per cent increase from 2021–22. We are adding more than 650 homes to the system. There is new construction, spot purchasing, maintenance and refurbishment. We are minimising stock loss. It is actually having an impact.

We have made an unprecedented effort in land supply. We have allocated \$6.6 million to the Regional Land Booster program. We have already seen 136 residential lots released to the market under contract in 78 towns. Under DevelopmentWA, we still have 775 residential lots for sale. We then have direct programs. We have allocated \$6.6 million for 35 residential lots in Kalgoorlie. Civil works are underway in Karratha's Madigan Estate, with 62 lots ready to go to market. At further stages, we will deliver 553 lots.

We have also supported the transfer of crown land in Kalgoorlie–Boulder for seniors' accommodation and have been working to make crown land available in Port Hedland. We met with the Shires of Derby–West Kimberley and Wyndham–East Kimberley on the issue of how we can facilitate crown land. In the last budget, we had the regional development assistance program, for which we will provide additional funding of \$3 million a year over the next four years. This will lift it to \$7 million a year. It is about facilitating development projects in regional towns, particularly in areas where private developers are inactive or limited. It allows local governments to work with the state government through DevelopmentWA to deliver projects with financial support and project assistance.

We have the housing diversity pipeline that is constantly looking at lazy government land. As I mentioned, we have two lazy land projects that are coming to the critical stage. The first is Smith Street in Perth. It will be WA's first build-to-rent project. It will be affordable for the community. It is high density and in my electorate—it is not in the western suburbs. We are also working on Pier Street, which will be another affordable social housing mix run by a community housing provider. Again, it is in my electorate. We have also created the infrastructure development fund, which is an \$80 million fund for both apartments and regional workers' accommodation. It is about finding those headworks costs. I think the member for North West Central raised them as a barrier, and I agree with her. Headworks costs are a barrier to getting projects up and going. Old figures have been provided to me, but, to date, we are supporting around 2 200 apartments through that infrastructure grants program.

In the regions, we have also allocated around \$12 million of funding for projects in the Kimberley, Gascoyne and goldfields. This includes \$4 million for the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder to extend the sewerage to service 66.9 hectares of undeveloped land to support the delivery of 400 dwellings. In Broome, we have allocated \$7.6 million to support the development of 91 dwellings for key worker accommodation to support local industry. We have also allocated almost \$200 000 to the Shire of Shark Bay to support five new homes in Denham.

Talking about workers' accommodation, we provided additional funding of \$61.6 million in the last budget for Government Regional Officers' Housing. That takes the state government's investment to \$234 million over the next four years in the GROH portfolio for new builds, leases, refurbishment and maintenance. This is critical so that we can continue to work hard, whilst recognising the current constraints that we face in regional Western Australia, to boost that GROH portfolio. I do want to note that the GROH portfolio contains almost 5 175 owned or leased residential properties. I note that in 2015, the previous government began a very aggressive sales program given that it had clocked up debt of around \$180 million.

We have also made changes to the Keystart program. We have lifted income eligibility limits and have capped the price of property at \$560 000. Most importantly, we changed the interest rate setting for Keystart. That is critical. The decision to not set it in accordance with the four big banks but on an alternative basis is actually a saving for existing Keystart customers. We also created the new Urban Connect home loan program.

I am sorry to the member for Victoria Park. I will give her five minutes.

We also brought in tax reforms. Again, this counteracts the commentary from the member for Cottesloe. We brought in tax concessions aimed at affordable apartments, such as the 100 per cent up-front stamp duty concession for apartments valued at up to \$650 000. That is really critical. We also brought in a 50 per cent land tax concession for build-to-rent. Again, that is specifically geared to the affordable rental market. Those are both big changes that we have made to try to address this issue.

Of course, we also created the remote communities fund. Do members remember that the Liberals walked out on them in 2019? We have created a \$350 million fund that includes the transfer of water and power, which is critical to key agencies. I have to admit that that is a substantial reform for Aboriginal communities that has received little attention.

In the last five minutes, I want to talk about homelessness. We have been making some very significant reforms in terms of homelessness. This year, we are spending \$225 million on 130 homelessness organisations. I announced

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

a number of key reforms last year. They included creating rough-sleeper coordinating groups in Bunbury, Geraldton, Perth, Rockingham and Mandurah to bring all the existing providers together to leverage the best outcomes that we can. Those groups in the metro area also make referrals to the supported landlord model, called Djuripiny Mia. We created this new program and it started in January this year. Again, it does not get a lot of attention. However, we said that it would purchase 100 homes and that these homes would be directly provided to rough sleepers, with Housing Choices as the supported landlord. The tenant, who is a rough sleeper, will have access to Housing First support services and will have the support of the landlord. To date, this program has been an outstanding success. I am deeply proud of it and I personally want to thank the Housing Choices team. To date, 70 homes are in the portfolio supporting 109 individuals—that is, 109 individuals who were, in most cases I believe, sleeping rough. I know it is not sexy. The opposition apparently does not care. But that substantial new program is changing lives and it is our intention to extend that program to regional Western Australia. I say that with a caveat that I have already put on the record; namely, it will take a longer time because we have to find homes and it is very tight finding them in regional markets. That will involve a longer time frame.

We have also got Common Ground under construction. The member for Cottesloe again had a jab. It is under construction right now and it will add significant capacity. We bought the Murray Street Lodge hotel and converted it to transitional accommodation and it is now supporting vulnerable Western Australians. Of course, we are rolling out our broader Housing First Homelessness Initiative, which is about assisting rough sleepers and providing support services. A lot of that does not get attention. It is not sexy like our supported landlord model success stories. I have great hope for that program and I hope that it continues beyond me and beyond this government. I hope that a future Liberal conservative government will not say, “Let’s get rid of that.” I hope that a future Liberal conservative government will look at that program and say, “It has such incredible merit. It is clearly changing lives and it is helping people break the cycle of rough sleeping.” I have to say again that I am deeply proud of the work that Housing Choices has done; it is changing lives.

We can see from all the work that we are doing that an unprecedented number of initiatives are being rolled out. I highlight this: I have an open door to all stakeholders. I meet with them to discuss a range of policy solutions, such as the round table hosted by the Housing Industry Association. We look at the recommendations and see what we can do. We are nearly seven years into this opposition and it has not presented one social housing policy. That is telling. If we look back at the last election, it did not have one social housing policy commitment. To date, the Liberal Party and the Nationals WA have presented no policy commitments relating to housing. If social housing is a primary concern and key priority of the Liberal and National Parties, one would think that after seven years in opposition, they would have released one policy—just one. That is telling given that all the key stakeholders—Shelter WA, the Planning Institute of Australia, local government planners, the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia, the Urban Development Institute of Australia, the Property Council of Australia and the Housing Industry Association—stood next to me, as the Minister for Housing, to endorse the government’s planning reforms. We know that these are unprecedented times across Australia and that COVID radically reshaped the market. We know that we have to look at all viable policy reforms. As a government, that is what we are doing.

MRS J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI (Kingsley — Parliamentary Secretary) [6.53 pm]: I wonder whether any member of the opposition has studied or worked in project management. If they have, they would have learned that every element is connected; it is the time, cost and project management triangle. When one is altered, inevitably that impacts on the others. For example, at the moment, I am redoing my bathroom. When we changed the scope and asked for a double vanity, unsurprisingly the price went up. When we asked for the tiles to go to the ceiling, unsurprisingly the price went up and the time was extended. It is the concept of project management and how to manage something that this government is using in how it manages the state. Managing the state is like managing one very big, complex and ongoing project management program. Every change that happens, some of which are outside of our control, has an impact on the other elements. However, this opposition—I should qualify this—with the exception of the member for Central Wheatbelt, who gave a thoroughly thoughtful and cohesive speech earlier, lives in a fantasy world and believes that all issues are separate and exist in a vacuum. In WA, we do not have enough—insert profession here. We do not have enough nurses, police, construction workers or hospitality workers. We understand this as a government, so the Cook Labor government has undertaken many actions to boost the workforce, including providing fee-free TAFE courses. I might add that the previous Liberal government absolutely decimated the industry by increasing the cost of TAFE courses by 500 per cent. We are providing fee-free TAFE courses in areas such as child care, construction and hospitality. We have also undertaken recruitment drives, internationally and over east, for professionals such as nurses, police and construction workers. This has been successful.

When we have altered one element, another element has changed. It has been successful. Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that we had the largest population growth in the March quarter of this year—2.8 per cent. This is a fantastic result but, by its nature, it puts pressure on the housing market, so our government is looking to accelerate the delivery of housing across the board.

Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John Carey; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski

Members would think that the opposition would be supportive of our record \$2.6 billion investment in social housing and homelessness services and our planning reform agenda, but no, the Liberal Party's position is to create more red tape for planning approvals. The member for Cottesloe also opposes infill development, but only in the western suburbs, because he fails to grasp the concept that any additional dwellings in the system, across the continuum, are a good thing for housing pressures. The deluded accusation from the member for Cottesloe that the Labor government is targeting the western suburbs is just absurd. In a bid to increase infill and medium to high-density developments, the current off-the-plan transfer duty rebate has been increased to 100 per cent for apartments in multistorey developments valued below \$650 000. This is specifically targeting the middle of the market, in which we can deliver medium to high density in the \$650 000 price range. Just like Roxie Hart in the musical *Chicago*, the opposition lives in a world of "no". It seems the opposition cannot support anything the government does.

In acknowledging the extremely heated construction market around the country, specifically in Western Australia, our government took the measured approach to smooth out the construction pipeline by delaying the start of some non-housing government projects to allow some capacity back into the market to free it up. This would seem to be a rational and sensible move to ensure that more housing is built, but, again, the opposition squeals about the time delays on promised projects and how the government has let the community down. You cannot have your cake and eat it, too.

This is the worst kind of opposition; not only does it say no and oppose everything the government does, but also it is completely devoid of any housing policies. We hear the Leader of the Liberal Party continuously and glibly interjecting, "Just build more houses", and the opposition spokesperson says that we need to do more maintenance, as if we had not thought of that. A signature of the Liberal Party is a wilful ignorance of the planning system in WA, which I am sure we will see on full display tomorrow. It does not know, nor does it want to learn, what the planning system is and what it does.

The member for Cottesloe is happy for medium to high-density housing to be built, just not in his electorate. He bemoans the loss of canopy in our urban areas. As somebody who worked in a local government on a project that delivered planting programs, I know that it is often the local residents in existing suburbs who fight tooth and nail not to have trees planted on their verges. As a local member, I have had many residents complain to me about the City of Joondalup's tree-planting program. It is planting trees on local government land, but local residents do not want them.

Understanding the interdependent complexities is an essential part of managing the state, much like the project management triangle of cost, scope and timeliness. I find it incredibly frustrating that the Leader of the Liberal Party cannot seem to grasp this concept. Given she does not understand this, it is also concerning that she arrogantly stands up in front of her Liberal state conference and flies in the face of our democracy with her elitist attitude, while she stands there proclaiming that she will be the Premier in 400-and-something-odd days. She should be ashamed of her attitude to the Western Australian people in taking them for granted in such a manner. She could not manage her way out of a paper bag, let alone manage the state of the economy and the delicate decision-making balance in which every decision has an impact on another.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

House adjourned at 7.00 pm
