

SUPPLY BILL 2013

Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [3.55 pm]: When we adjourned for lunch, I was making some concluding comments in respect of the police station issue in Armadale. I reiterate that the police commissioner is wrong, as is the Minister for Police, to say that the people of Armadale and the surrounding areas want a 24/7 counter service; we want a lot more than just a 24/7 counter service. As the minister and the police commissioner know, the 24/7 police stations we have are the ones from which the majority of services originate and around which the majority of services are focused. I should not say this in front of my colleague the member for Cannington, but it is not such a big issue; the Cannington Police Station can come down to Armadale! But what would be even better public policy —

The SPEAKER: There are a number of private meetings going on here. Can people settle down so we can listen to the member for Armadale with interest?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member for Cannington is a very good local member, he will defend his police station because he knows the benefits of having a 24/7 district hub based in Cannington. He knows the benefits —

Mr W.J. Johnston: A shorter response time.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Exactly, and that is what the police commissioner and the police minister refuse to admit. They know that to be the case, and that is why the people of Armadale, which is a regional centre, demand a 24/7 police station. I shake my head at the response we have received from the police minister in respect of this issue. The Armadale region has one of the highest crime rates in Perth; one would think that that would justify Armadale being a centre for policing in the south east corridor.

During the debate on Tuesday the police minister mentioned that she had toured Armadale with the federal member for Canning, Don Randall, who is of course supportive of the 24/7 police station concept. She said that she had visited some drug houses. What did she do at the drug houses? One wonders what she did when she visited the drug houses! Had they been closed down? I received an email today to say that she had visited a drug house near the residence of the person who sent me the email, and he said that it was still operating! If the police minister visited a drug house, the police therefore know that it is a drug house, yet it is still operating! One has to wonder why that is the case.

I have already talked about the mental health problems in my area, and I mentioned the number of suicides on the train line. I received another message today before lunch from someone who must have been listening to the debate, to tell me—I have not been able to verify this—that there has been another death on the Armadale line today. This is a tragic situation, so I really hope that this government will reconsider its downgrading of mental health services in the Armadale region.

An issue of particular concern to me is child protection and child welfare. I want to relay a particular story that relates to one family in my region. The problem that we have in not only Armadale, but also the Perth metropolitan area generally is that there are a certain number of identifiable families who are causing a significant amount of criminal activity, especially juvenile criminal activity. One family in particular has come to the attention of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support over the past few years. The police and the schools have become involved but nothing appears to be happening. Up to 10 to 12 kids are being looked after by their grandmother in this street. A resident who lives in the street in which this family resides was admitted to hospital after she attempted to commit suicide because of the problems that this family is causing in the neighbourhood. People who live in the street are constantly being abused and bricks, glass bottles and kitchen knives et cetera are being thrown. Although this is a very complex issue, the Department for Child Protection and Family Support does not appear to have any answers. It has stated, “We can protect but we can’t control the kids.” I debate whether it can protect the kids, but someone has to control the kids. Many of them are under the age at which they can be held criminally liable. The Department for Child Protection and Family Support has to do something to ensure that these children are safe and not causing havoc to the residents in that one street. The department also says that they have caused many problems in the CBD of Armadale. Armadale Youth Resources, which does a fantastic job in the Armadale area, has had a number of encounters with this particular family and a number of fights have occurred in the Jull Street mall, which at other times is a fantastic place. It can become very frightening for the local residents when these altercations take place.

I sought an interagency meeting with officials from the Department for Child Protection and Family Support and WA Police, which has not been forthcoming, although the police have been very willing to engage me in this situation and they are doing their best. The onus is on the Department for Child Protection and Family Support;

it has to put more resources into assisting this family and these children. There is no doubt that if these children do not receive greater assistance and if greater interventional programs are not set up, they will probably end up on the wrong side of the law. They are already on the wrong side of the law in many cases, but they will end up in jail. I have been told by certain people that they often talk about what it would be like to go to jail, and that is very depressing. I urge the Minister for Child Protection in the other house, who has been made aware of the situation as I have written to her in the past couple of weeks, to engage with her department. I admit that it is a very complex and difficult issue but something really needs to be done. We cannot just shake our heads and throw our arms up in the air.

I turn to a very different issue in my electorate—that is, the Champion Lakes Regatta Centre.

[Member's time extended.]

Dr A.D. BUTI: This centre was the brainchild of the former member for Armadale, the former Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, Hon Alannah MacTiernan. Anyone who happens to drive past Champion Lakes cannot help but be impressed by the superb facilities at Champion Lakes, which is well regarded as a world-class rowing course. I have already expressed my views on the upkeep of the Champion Lakes Regatta Centre. Originally, it was under the control of the Armadale Redevelopment Authority. When the various redevelopment authorities were amalgamated into the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority, the responsibility for Champion Lakes was handed over to VenuesWest. I have received a number of criticisms and grumbings about the way VenuesWest manages the centre. I received an email today from a local journalist telling me that the Champion Lakes waterways were closed again today. They have been closed a number of times. This also occurred when it was under the jurisdiction of the Armadale Redevelopment Authority, so it is not new. But VenuesWest does not appear to be investing enough time, energy and resources into trying to alleviate the problem. It is a major problem.

The other issue is the Champion Lakes whitewater canoeing facility. The member for Darling Range mentioned in *Hansard* in 2007 and 2008 the issue of a whitewater park. I believe that the Barnett government put aside \$10.5 million for a compensation scheme after the closure of Harvey Dam to whitewater canoeing. Harvey Dam was a major venue for whitewater canoeing. I would like to know where we are at with progressing a whitewater park that can be used for Olympic-style canoeing competitions and whether Champion Lakes is still on the radar. I hope so, because it makes sense to have an Olympic-style whitewater park at the Champion Lakes Regatta Centre, which has world-class facilities for rowing and still-water canoeing.

I would now like to make some comments about disability, the National Disability Insurance Scheme debate and so forth. As we all know, Western Australia and the Northern Territory are the only jurisdictions that have not signed on to the NDIS. The Premier stated yesterday that eventually Western Australia will sign on, but he cannot see any sense in doing so before the federal election. The question that should be put to the Premier is: what assurance has he received from Mr Abbott, the Leader of the Opposition, who is the alternative Prime Minister if the Liberal and National Parties form the next federal government after 14 September? What assurance has Mr Abbott given the Premier of Western Australia that he will change the current NDIS plan that is causing trouble for the Premier? If he has received no assurance from Mr Abbott, why is he waiting? Why is he waiting until after the next federal election before he signs on to the NDIS if he has received no assurance from Tony Abbott that Tony Abbott will make changes to the system that will address some of the concerns that the Premier has expressed? The Premier has stated that we have the best disability services system in Australia. We may have, but the point is that most jurisdictions in Australia have a poor system. So it does not necessarily make ours a Rolls Royce system; it just may be a better system. I have had community and professional involvement in disability services for a number of years. Yes, some non-government organisations that provide services to the disability sector say that we generally have a better system than those in other places. But the problem with our system is that not enough people can be covered by the system. The reason that a lot of people are not able to access the system is a lack of resources and funding. That is why the NDIS is such a brilliant scheme. It is a brilliant prospect for people who have a disability, and for their carers and family. This is the first time that a government at any level has been prepared to inject a significant quantity of resources into the disability services sector.

What we all should remember—I think the Australian public has remembered it—is that we are only one car accident or one heart attack away from needing access to the NDIS. The NDIS does not discriminate on the basis of whether a person is born with a disability or acquires a disability, and I think that is one of its main virtues.

We need to remember that the NDIS came out of a recommendation of the Productivity Commission. It is not a bleeding heart proposal. It is a proposal that makes very good economic sense. That is why it was diabolical—it actually would be funny if it were not so serious—when we heard the chief executive officer of Myer complain that the levy would cause economic damage to his store. People with a disability actually go shopping. The

carers of people with a disability go shopping. The idea behind the Productivity Commission NDIS proposal is to assist people with a disability to enter the workplace. It also may free up the carers of people with a disability to engage in meaningful employment.

That raises another issue. This is a federal issue, but I feel compelled to talk about it, and this is my personal view. We have moved on from the debate of last week at the federal level about the NDIS—although we still need to debate it at the state level—and we are now onto the debate about Tony Abbott's proposed parental leave scheme. It will be interesting to know how many Liberals in this house agree with Tony Abbott's paid parental leave scheme. There would probably be people on the left of politics who do agree with this proposal from Mr Abbott. The interesting thing about this scheme is that it will apply only to women. If men want to take parental leave, they will not be entitled to this generous scheme. It is only for females. Again, generally more women than men go on parental leave when a baby is born in the family. But where will the parents of a child with a disability fit into this scheme? Many parents of a child with a disability—many mothers in particular—do not have a choice. They cannot go out and work. They have to stay at home to look after their disabled child, and that means that they have to resign from the workforce. If those mothers then have another child, they will not receive any benefits under this very generous scheme.

A debate has been happening over the last two or three days to say that this is just a normal workplace entitlement. We can argue with merit that it is a workplace entitlement. But the employer is the one who should pay for it. This is a tax. Tony Abbott may want to call it a levy, but this is a tax. A tax is a tax is a tax. This is as much a tax as the carbon tax is a tax. For the past three or four years we have been hearing from the conservatives about what a terrible drain on the economy the carbon tax is going to be. This is also a tax. This will be collected from companies. So it is a tax. It will have an economic consequence. I think personally that it is absurd. We can argue the merit of this tax on economic grounds as a means of trying to get females back into the workforce. But it will also be an incredibly regressive tax, because for women who are earning \$50 000 or \$60 000 a year, the worth that they will get out this, vis-a-vis women who are earning \$150 000 a year, is of course much less. No government should be involved in such a regressive taxation system. Certainly no Liberal government should be engaged in trying to increase taxes for what will be a regressive taxation system. I repeat: it will be incredibly inequitable, not just for women who are at the lower end of the pay scale, but for those mothers who cannot go to work because they are looking after a child with a disability. Tony Abbott has not addressed that. He needs to address that. He made a song and dance last week that he supported the National Disability Insurance Scheme because carers and people with disability need to be supported. If he believes they should be supported, he should apply this generous, but very stupid, paid parental leave scheme to mothers with children with disability. It is an absurd policy, and I urge the Premier to discuss this with Mr Abbott. I also would like the Premier to come into this house and tell us what assurance he has received from Tony Abbott that he will address the Premier's concerns with the NDIS, because if he will not address his concerns with the NDIS, the Premier should sign on now. But I agree with the Premier that we want to ensure that we do not have one monolithic bureaucratic system in Canberra that tells us what services are best for people with disability. If we can decentralise that as much as possible, it is much more effective. But the Premier needs to tell us how Tony Abbott is going to improve it or address his problems.

MS L.L. BAKER (Maylands) [4.15 pm]: I hope to entertain members until the closing hours, or the closing minutes maybe, of Parliament this afternoon. I shall do my best. I want to talk about a subject in my electorate which I have touched on several times but which I have not gone into any detail about. I want to talk about small business in my electorate, which is vibrant, to say the least. It is growing and voracious in its appetite for resources, knowledge and customers. It is a fantastic, growing area of the economy in the Maylands electorate. If people think about it, they will realise that Centro Galleria is in my electorate, which is clearly the biggest focus of retail and other kinds of shopping activities. It draws huge numbers of people—obviously, they are not all from the Maylands electorate; they are from all over the metropolitan area. It is a big, major shopping complex run by a major shopping company, Centro. It is a major hub in my area.

We have smaller versions. We have little village precincts such as the Bayswater village precinct. We have the Maylands village precinct also. I am sure that members who have been reading the newspapers and who like to go out for a good lunch or a coffee on the weekend or in their time off would have been to my electorate and taken advantage of the fantastic new food outlets and coffee shops in the Maylands precinct. We have an Inglewood business precinct as well. These are mainly shops along the road focused on retail—shops along the retail strip. Again, there are quite a few restaurants, post offices, banks and health clubs—those kinds of businesses. Bedford has a very small shopping centre, with some shops along Grand Promenade. Another tiny cluster of shops are in between Slade Street, Guildford Road and King William Street.

I want to try to make sure I mention all of them, because each has its own specific set of local clientele and also clients from outside the area. I want to make sure that they are all included. They are all different sizes and they all have different problems, and I will talk about problems in small business in a minute. The retail and service

businesses in my electorate cover everything from the cradle to the grave. We have shopping outlets that look after mums and bubs, and clothing, food and the like. We have a funeral director as well. So, I thought that if people want to move to a good electorate, they will get it all in Maylands—from the cradle to the grave. We have settlement agents, information technology, accountants, fashion, food, accommodation, media, public relations and lots of online services to help people kick off their website or design a new image for their business. We have fantastic printing companies, training companies, security companies, mortgage brokers and recruitment and human resources services.

From not only the work that I have done in my electorate, but also a lifetime of working alongside and supporting small business in various positions I held, there are at least three major problems that small businesses in my electorate talk to me about all the time. I start off by mentioning that this government, in 2009, did what I thought promised to be a very positive review, known as the red tape inquiry. It was completed by the end of 2009. The committee was chaired by the now Minister for Small Business, who is not in the chamber this afternoon. It made 200 recommendations. That is an astonishing number of recommendations. If I had drafted the report, I probably would have brought them down somehow or other and clustered them so that they were not so frightening—maybe to 10, with 20 sub-recommendations in each area. Whatever the case, we have 200 recommendations. My businesses would share my concern about what has happened to the other 199. We now have a Small Business Commissioner, which is absolutely fantastic. I would very much like to see his report from his first 12 months. He started in the role in January 2012. His job is to look at unfair market practices that have been occurring, to receive complaints from small businesses and investigate those complaints, to achieve some outcomes and, if necessary, to refer complainants to the State Administrative Tribunal. I have not heard how that is going. I will put some questions on notice. As the minister is not here, she cannot enlighten me. There is a very real problem with what this government has failed to do with the other 199 recommendations. That is something my constituents raise with me. They are aware of the red tape report. They are particularly concerned about some aspects of it—I will talk about payroll tax in a minute. I would very much like to know what happened to the rest of the recommendations. I will be pursuing that with the minister.

I turn now to the Commercial Tenancy (Retail Shops) Agreements Act. Retail leases are regulated by that act. We have debated it extensively over the last four and a half years. Members would be very familiar with the positions that have been put. Tenants with microbusinesses—businesses set up in the middle of shopping centres—in shopping centres such as Centro Galleria have expressed their exasperation. I am not picking on Centro Galleria; I think they all have these kinds of practices. The big anchor tenants such as Myer, Coles or Woolies get really good deals to go into big shopping complexes, as we all know—they pay hardly anything. They have a much easier in and out. When microbusiness tenants negotiate a lease agreement, they have no idea how their agreement compares with anybody else's tenancy. For all they know, they could be charged three or four times what the guy down the road with the newsagency in the middle of the building is paying. There is simply no way of registering that. We need to register these kinds of details to try to create a much more level playing field for small business operators, who are not as empowered as the big corporates like Myer, David Jones, Coles and Woolies. That has certainly been raised by shop owners in the big shopping complexes in my electorate. I would like us to tackle that.

Small business owners have also raised the issue of payroll tax. I was very glad that I happened to be in the house today—in the Acting Speaker's chair in fact—and listened to the member for West Swan's presentation. She drew the house's attention to some of the figures around what has happened under the Liberal government in terms of the total tax take in Western Australia. She pointed out that the total payroll tax take in WA in 2007–08, which is when Labor was in power, was 33.6 per cent. She then pointed out that under the Liberal government it has now crept up, not by one per cent, not by the consumer price index, but by a massive leap to 43 per cent. Unless I have missed my guess, that is an increase of just under 10 per cent. That is a huge impost. It is no wonder that small businesses in my electorate are complaining to me. It is no wonder when I talk to small and medium enterprises in my electorate that they say, "Payroll tax is killing me. Can't you in the Labor Party stop payroll tax?" They also say that to the Liberal Party. From memory, during the election the Liberal Party said that it would fix the payroll tax issue. It certainly said at the last election that it would tackle the issue of payroll tax. What have we seen happen? Let me repeat it. Back in 2007–08, when Labor was in power, 33.6 per cent of the total tax take was payroll tax. Now, after nearly five years of a Liberal–National government, a small business owner is looking at paying 43 per cent of the total tax take as payroll tax. I do not think anyone needs to be a Rhodes scholar to work out that that is not a good outcome. It is pretty surprising that a Liberal government would allow that to happen.

Another issue has been raised, which is a federal issue. I bring it up in this place because it was raised by a fantastic small business networking organisation in my electorate called the Central Eastern Business Association, which I might talk about a bit later. Last year Mark Whitehouse, the then president of CEBA, as it is known, raised the issue with me the issue about the tax deductible threshold for depreciation. I believe it was

raised to \$6 500 and was an attempt by the federal government to stimulate business vitality and investment. The problem, as Mark pointed out to me, is that the way in which this deductible appreciation amount is allowed to be claimed back is not actually helping businesses at all. I will read a statement from him —

Cash flow is all important to small businesses with the reduced profit margins that most are working on at the moment and gaining the tax rebate in 12 months time isn't enough to encourage small businesses to invest in their own future.

To be able to claim deductions at the end of each BAS period would be a much better way to stimulate the small business sector and also might tend to encourage investment at the beginning of each financial year rather than the end.

At a time when reinvestment in new technology for small businesses is really important to help improve efficiency and competitiveness, the current system isn't seen as a helpful solution.

I absolutely agree with him. I wrote to our federal colleagues stating the case and got the normal letter one gets back from one's federal colleagues of all persuasions saying, "Yes, good point, we'll look into it." I put that on the record because Mark has a very good point to raise when he talks about small businesses struggling to keep the cash flow going. If they get the opportunity to claw back some of that at the end of each business activity statement, it is much better than having to cashflow through for 12 months and then apply for that money back.

I will now move to a higher level and talk about small business in Australia and in Western Australia, and then move to one of my favourite subjects, which is the subject of women entrepreneurs in WA. I want to put on the record a few statistics. For those members who are not aware of it, 95 per cent of business in Western Australia is small business. The category of small business that the Small Business Development Corporation uses includes small, micro and non-employing businesses. Micro enterprises, those people with one to four staff members, and non-employing people, such as I was for a while as the sole proprietor of a consultancy selling my services as a consultant, make up that 95 per cent. Ten per cent of that 95 per cent category is small, 21.3 per cent is micro, and 63 per cent do not employ anyone and work on their own. Thirty-five per cent are women-owned small businesses and 15 per cent of businesses in the export market are run by women. Small business is, of course, a major employer in Western Australia. There is no doubt about that. Anybody who has researched it would be well aware of small business's capacity to give many kids a start; when they are at school they may get a part-time or casual job to help them through, and it is often with a local retailer. Back in 2009–2010, the statistics around the use of online services—so, how many small businesses had a website—show that only 50 per cent of small businesses had a website, and only 30 per cent of small businesses claimed they were able to trade through online orders. I find that amazing, and I would like to see the current statistics because that must have changed; certainly it has changed for me as a consumer. Maybe it is because we do not have a lot of free time, but I find I am purchasing much more online than I was five years ago.

In addition to that, 81 per cent of Western Australian small neighbourhood businesses say that their customer base is local, which is, again, an interesting figure. It means that people really are staying local and shopping local. So when people go down to the local corner shop, they are part of that 81 per cent that is helping those small businesses stay afloat.

The industries involved in small business are diverse. I will just run through a very short list of the industries in which 95 per cent are run by small business owners so that members get some picture about the nature of small business and its diversity. They include the construction industry, of which 97.4 per cent is classified as a small business; professional scientific and technical services, of which 96.9 per cent are small businesses; rental, hiring and real estate, 98 per cent; agriculture, forestry and fishing, 97 per cent; finance and insurance, 98 per cent; transport, postal and warehousing, 97 per cent; and, health care and social assistance, 95 per cent. They are just some of the figures I thought were relevant.

I will now talk about women in business. I have a lot of them in my electorate and I am sure other members have a lot of women business owners in their electorates. There is plenty of research to substantiate the statement that female entrepreneurs are a bit different in the way they start and run their businesses; I will not go into the many pieces of research.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms L.L. BAKER: Women's entrepreneurship has been recognised during the last 10 or 20 years as a very important source of economic growth in our communities, and female wealth creation globally is rapidly increasing. I am sorry to talk about statistics this afternoon, but I think it is important to get on the record where this discussion starts for me over the next four years. Back in 2009, Credit Suisse published a document that stated that in the United States women control 27 per cent of the wealth—roughly \$US22.2 trillion. In 2010, more than 104 million women in 59 countries started and managed new businesses. In Australia in 2012, women accounted for 38 per cent of the overall self-employed population. Just on that point, since 2007 the number of

women in business has doubled. I will not talk today about the reasons for that; these are just the statistics. Today in Australia, one million women are trading; however, many are economically disadvantaged, with more than half not paying themselves a wage. Twenty per cent of Australian women business owners are in fact single parents.

In WA, 35 per cent of small businesses are owned by women. In 2011, nearly 3 000 women responded to the Australian Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry's "National Research Program on Women Business Owners and Female Entrepreneurs" into women who had tendered for government contracts. Of those 3 000 women who responded, only 20 per cent had even bothered to tender for a government contract and of that 20 per cent, only 60 per cent were successful. I will talk about government contracting before I finish this afternoon, but I think that is a very interesting point to note. The amount of business that comes from the government into the community is very, very high.

I want to talk now about characteristics of women entrepreneurs. The increasing number of female entrepreneurs leads to significant growth. Women are more likely to invest in improving health, education and infrastructure. The World Bank confirms that an increase in women's financial independence and social standing has a direct impact on the welfare of future generations. Female entrepreneurs create new jobs for themselves and others and provide different solutions to management, organisational and business problems, as well as expanding the choice in entrepreneurial opportunities. The differences in working experiences are in part due to women's lifestyles, different job routines, different social relationships and, indeed, just the way they live their lives day to day. Lack of access to capital and barriers to the procurement of contracts, particularly government contracts, in the early stages of their company development often prevent women-owned firms from generating and growing income and from hiring employees. Again, in the United States if women-owned business gained only five per cent of government contracts, women would gain more than \$US5 billion in annual revenue, which would then get injected directly back into their families and provide massive benefits to the overall social fabric.

In Australia, no data is available to indicate the percentage of government contracts that have been secured by women-owned firms, yet we know that this information is crucial to planning for economic growth and stability. It would also assist with measuring the growth and the veracity of small enterprises. Some of the information that I have been giving members comes from an issues paper put out in August 2012 titled "Collection of sex desegregated data and the procurement of contracts for women business owners in Australia". Again, that is by the Australian Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry. For those members who are not familiar with some of the ways that other governments have addressed this issue, I want to give a couple of examples. I start by saying that at one stage in my career I was in charge of policy and planning in government contracting in this state. I remember that in one of the first conversations I had with the director general of the day, he said to me, "Lisa, did you know that the United States has targets for women-owned businesses in its contracting?" I looked at him shocked because it never occurred to me that a country would take that action. That was a very long time ago, but we are no closer to achieving that outcome. However, we have some good initiatives federally with Indigenous businesses. The federal government has brought in a target for contracting with Indigenous businesses, which is excellent.

I want to read through a couple of examples so members understand what I am talking about. In 1994 President Clinton signed into law the Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act, which reformed federal government's contracting and acquisition system. It dramatically changed the way the government performed its contracting functions. The government adopted policies designed to assist various types of small and disadvantaged businesses—that is, at least 51 per cent owned by one or more individuals who are both socially and economically disadvantaged—and also to ensure that Congress's social economic objectives were met. To implement those policies under certain circumstances, the government was able to provide contracting preferences to small businesses, small disadvantaged businesses, women-owned businesses and contractors performing in labour-surplus areas. This effort was expanded to the procurement of government contracts and the statute provided that civilian agencies as well as defence departments set aside certain contracts to ensure that five per cent of government contracts were awarded to small or disadvantaged businesses. The statute also created a five per cent women-owned business contracting goal. There are many other examples around the world of where this kind of action has been taken by a government. I raise this issue because I think it is well-timed, if this government is serious about tackling some of the problems in small business in this state. Members would all be aware of how many non-mining-related businesses that are not in the downstream or upstream line around mining are doing it tough at the moment. My friends in small business have used their savings or have used the money they were putting aside to send their children to university and they are really in a bad position.

The recommendation the government should look at is that we first collect data in this state about the number of contracts given to women-owned businesses. At least we will know what the starting point is and then we will know whether we have an issue, whether there is some way we can tackle it and whether there is some way we

can strengthen the work we are doing. There is currently no sex-desegregated data collected by the government. The collection of that data in respect to procurement will assist in forming policies and programs and will identify gender imbalances in the process. Although the data will not explain why women do not engage in the process, it will provide some guidance to help women participate in it. By analysing the specific number of contracts awarded to small business owners, governments can better understand the barriers to growth for women's business and instigate policies and programs accordingly. The other thing that needs to happen is for our female entrepreneurs to be educated on how to engage in the process, because, like many small business owners, they are probably terrified by the thought of getting online and looking at the government's online procurement services. It is a bit daunting. I did it myself, when I was a consultant for various services, with the first iteration of the website, which was called GEM—which I think stood for Government Employment Marketplace; I cannot remember whether that was the abbreviation—and I got the princely sum of one contact from the government. It was not my most lucrative experience in small business, let me tell members! We need to educate women on how to get government contracts and how to get into the market in the first place. I know I recommend this against all ideological rationale of the Liberal Party, but it would be oh so sweet if we could see a five per cent target in contracting to women-owned businesses, so when contracts are set, small businesses that are women-owned would be able to achieve just a small five per cent of the business that was being tendered, which is in line with other countries. This target is not rocket science; it is being used in many countries in the world.

I talk now briefly about why I am interested in small business and a bit about my background in this area, because it is something I have not really talked about or put on the record and I think it is appropriate that I do that. Those of us who were working in Western Australia in the late-1980s—I was only a child in those days of course!—may have noticed some women's business seminars were held in the city. I will not get much of this conversation in, will I? I will tell members the background and history. There were three women's business series seminars held. They were started by the Business and Professional Women's Association coming to me when I was employed in government at the time, working in the Department of Employment and Training. The BPWA had the idea that it wanted to do something for professional women and women's business in Western Australia and so we modestly thought that maybe if we were very adventurous, we could hold a seminar and invite women business owners or other interested women to come to it. We nervously advertised it, thinking we might be able to fill a small hall after a couple of weeks' advertising. In the first three days 700 women indicated that they were interested in knowing more about starting a small business. Another 700 registered for a follow-up. We ran three seminars, two weeks apart. In total, more than 2 100 women came so we had to use the Government House ballroom to run them. We were simply offering these women a chance to hear five other experienced small business women talk about their lives and how they started their enterprises. Women were given information on what the Small Business Development Corporation offered in small business support for starting up, and what TAFE offered in small business training. At the time, another program was being established called the new enterprise scheme to help disadvantaged and unemployed people explore avenues for unemployment.

That is all we offered; it was not something we saw as extravagant or anything very appealing. But 2 100 women turned up to them. That started a chain of commitments from the state government of the day—I think it was Peter Dowding's government—to fund research into women in business in Western Australia. We completed the first research into that topic that had ever been done in Australia. It was called the Hub project, on the premise that women are at the hub of families; therefore, their income-generating activities and their economic independence were vital. Some other time when I have more than about 40 seconds left, I will talk about some of the research outcomes we established and how it guided the development of women's enterprise courses and supported the funding we finally received from the government and the community to start the Women's Economic Development Organisation in Western Australia, which ran successfully for 10 years. It worked on the premise that economically independent women can support their families and can be major contributors to the community, if only they are given the information, advice and support they need to get their businesses going successfully.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr J.H.D. Day (Leader of the House)**.