

**CITY OF FREMANTLE AND TOWN OF EAST FREMANTLE TRUST FUNDS
(AMENDMENT AND EXPIRY) BILL 2013**

Second Reading

Resumed from 12 June.

Declaration as Urgent

MR A.J. SIMPSON (Darling Range — Minister for Local Government) [12.15 pm]: In accordance with standing order 168(2), I move —

That the bill be considered an urgent bill.

This bill, as I said in my second reading speech, was actually put in place in 1903 to oversee lighting and trams through a process of a trust account between the City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle. The trust account expired in 1961, so the urgency on this is to help local governments tidy up some loose ends with their trust accounts in a timely manner at the end of the financial year.

MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham — Leader of the Opposition) [12.16 pm]: I oppose this motion. The reason that we oppose it, as the minister just said, is that this issue has been around for 52 years. This is a 52-year-old issue—that is seven years longer than I have been alive! Suddenly, we learn it is urgent to tidy up trust funds based upon the fact that the City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle generated electricity to power trams in 1901! Obviously people are marching in the streets because we need to tidy up trust funds that are 52 years old. What a joke! This is a complete misuse of the urgency provision contained in the standing orders. The urgency provision is there so that legislation that is, dare I say “urgent”, can be dealt with. That legislation, as I detailed to the house last night in another example—the best I could come up with—may be because there is a national agreement between the commonwealth and the states, and if we do not pass legislation to line up with that agreement the state may lose an enormous amount of money. That is urgent. But to deal with an electricity-generating arrangement, established 111 years ago and wound up 52 years ago, because it is urgent is a complete misuse of the term “urgent” and the provision under the standing orders. This is happening because the government has completely messed up the management of the Parliament. The management of the Parliament is supposed to be about the government placing legislation on the notice paper, members getting an opportunity to read it, to be briefed on it and then to debate it. Hello, that is Parliament! That is what parliamentarians do. We do not come in here, without information, and rubberstamp whatever the government says is urgent. I do not know if the government is aware but that is kind of the way it has worked for the past 500 years!

We have seen the stamp duty legislation, a \$526 million imposition on businesses across Western Australia, declared urgent. Last night, the rebates bill was introduced and declared urgent virtually immediately; and now we see the government moving to declare urgent the City of Fremantle and Town of East Fremantle trust funds legislation. What is more, we will no doubt see the Insurance Commission of Western Australia legislation introduced and declared urgent as well! This indicates that the government cannot manage the Parliament. I do not recall ever seeing anything of this nature before whereby the Parliament is treated with such contempt. The government should think about that. If and when something goes wrong with this legislation and the government says, “Oh, my God! How could we have ever seen that there might be a mistake or a need for an amendment or the like?”, then maybe it will realise that it should have given appropriate time to debate and consider the bills.

I make commentary about the Leader of the House in the back row in the chamber. He is disappearing before our very eyes, but I do not blame him. I blame the Premier, because the Premier insisted on Parliament’s sitting timetable. Therefore, because the government did not have an agenda for Parliament, it has had to create one and abuse the processes. The government should have had a week’s sitting and at an appropriate time introduced the legislation that it wanted to pass in the first half of the year and then have Parliament sit at least three weeks after that and, bingo, it would not have had to do this. That would have been a simple way to manage the Parliament. It would have shown respect for the institution, for government members and for opposition members. But, no, it did not do that, because the Premier, in his snippy, arrogant and pompous fashion, always does these things. And here is another small example of it. We will oppose this motion because the bill is not urgent. The government is not telling the truth to Parliament when it says that it is urgent, because it is not.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [12.20 pm]: The situation that Parliament finds itself in this afternoon is almost unbelievable. As the Leader of the Opposition has highlighted, this is the fourth bill that the government has declared urgent since Parliament was convened after the election on 9 March. Because the government has been caught out so strongly, it has moved a motion to declare urgent a bill to deal with an issue that, as the Leader of the Opposition has highlighted, has not been addressed in over 52 years. Now, suddenly, it is urgent. This Parliament is being treated with contempt; there is no doubt about that.

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I have said in this place before that some members opposite remind me of some of the characters from *F Troop*. Everyone will remember the bumbling Captain Parmenter, who oversaw *F Troop*. We do not even have a Captain Parmenter in the guise of the Leader of the House; we have Vanderbilt leading the house now. For those who do not remember *F Troop*, Vanderbilt was —

Ms M.M. Quirk: He was sight challenged.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: He was sight challenged, but he was up on the lookout. At one stage he allowed the Indians in because he thought they were just bush turkeys coming in for a feed! We now have Vanderbilt in charge as Leader of the House, the controller of government business and the other business of the house. All that the Leader of the House needs now is a big hat turned up at the front and some of those Coke bottle glasses that Vanderbilt wore, because Parliament now has no direction at all. Quite frankly, I do not think the Leader of the House even knew whether his minister was going to be present for the debate on the bill until I asked him in the hall whether the minister was going to be here and he said, “I hope so.” Then, of course, the government Whip said that the minister was paired from 12 noon until two o’clock. “What? What?”, said the Leader of the House. Thank goodness the Minister for Local Government is here, but he will disappoint a wonderful group of seniors at the Seniors Recreation Council of WA annual ball. Because of the mismanagement of this chamber by the Vanderbilt-like Leader of the House—I cannot call him “Vanderbilt”—the Minister for Local Government will have to endure me for the next hour or more because I am very interested in this bill, which has been declared urgent.

These bills are not urgent bills. They should have been declared acts of desperation, because, quite frankly, that is what the government is now doing—clamouring for bills to declare urgent to give some reason why this house should meet at this time. That is the reality. We are meeting purely because the government has mismanaged its program. It has not introduced any legislation of any significance that was promised during the election campaign, but it has declared some bills urgent purely because it has nothing else on the agenda.

Ms M.M. Quirk: There’s the Dog Act.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I understand that the bill to deal with the Dog Act will be read in next week. That might be declared urgent too! This is very poor form by the Leader of the House and the Premier as the leader of the government. This is an appalling state of affairs. The Vanderbilt-like Leader of the House should be sacked. I am calling for his sacking now because he does not like the job. The Deputy Premier did not like the job and so he gave it to the bunny over there, and he hates it too. I would not be surprised if he were to be replaced next week.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [12.26 pm]: I also rise to oppose the motion to classify the City of Fremantle and Town of East Fremantle Trust Funds (Amendment and Expiry) Bill 2013 as an urgent bill. The first legislative act that the Minister for Local Government has brought to this house is the City of Fremantle and Town of East Fremantle Trust Funds (Amendment and Expiry) Bill 2013. It is an urgent bill. Surely, minister, the Dog Act is much more urgent. Surely the amalgamation of councils is a much more urgent priority on his agenda. I am very surprised that the minister would bring on this matter. I do not think the member for Fremantle has told us that people are rallying in the streets of Fremantle. No; I do not think there are placards on display in the City of Fremantle stating that this bill needs to be brought on in an urgent manner.

The member for Mandurah talked about Vanderbilt from *F Troop*, which is one of my favourite shows. But I wondered whether the Leader of the House is more like Sergeant Schultz from *Hogan’s Heroes*: “I see nothing, I hear nothing and I know nothing.” I think the Leader of the House knows very little about the legislative framework of this government because he is being told about it on a day-to-day basis by the Premier. That is how this government works—the Premier says and the troops do. I feel sorry for the Leader of the House that he has to try to carry a legislative plan when there is no plan. It is absolutely absurd that Parliament came back before everyone thought it would come back. Parliament will sit in three-week blocks, but the government has no legislative plan. No substantive bill has been brought before this house, yet we keep hearing about urgent bills. I am sure that the minister knows what “urgent” means. It may be an emergency or something that needs to be passed quickly because there could be a safety issue. What criteria is the minister using to classify the City of Fremantle and Town of East Fremantle Trust Funds (Amendment and Expiry) Bill 2013 as urgent? He has not been able to substantiate why this bill is urgent. I wonder whether the minister even knew that the bill would be brought on for debate today. The Leader of the House has no interest in the legislative framework and the plan of the government because he is told about it on a day-to-day basis by the Premier.

We should bring back the member for Hillarys, who had a far greater command of how this house should be run. As the member for Mandurah said, the Deputy Premier had no liking for the position.

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The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! There are too many audible conversations occurring in the chamber at the moment. I draw your attention to standing order 95. I need to be able to hear the speaker and so does Hansard.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Leader of the House is very busy in conversation with the member for Perth. It may be better for the functioning of this Parliament if he spent more time ensuring that Parliament has a proper legislative plan. The problem is that this government has no legislative plan. The only plan it has is to break its election promises. Since Parliament has come back, day after day the Premier, with the help of his ministers, led by the Treasurer, has tried to weasel his way out of election promises. The only legislative plan for this government is how it can break another promise. In the election, when did the minister talk about the City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle trust funds? I do not think that was mentioned once in the election. It certainly was not mentioned in the leaders' debate. Member for Fremantle, did the Liberal candidate for Fremantle have in his flyers anything to do with this bill? There was nothing at all. So I am not sure how the bill became urgent.

I know the minister has a very, very important and demanding job as the Minister for Local Government, particularly with the issue of amalgamations, so surely his time should be spent on that, rather than worrying about coming into this house and talking about a bill that is so insignificant. As the minister himself said, it was just to tidy up some loose ends. To tidy up some loose ends? Is that an urgent matter that this Parliament should be spending day after day dealing with?

We received a letter from the Leader of the House last week, saying that we would be sitting late on Tuesday. What time did we rise last night? It was about 9.30 pm, I think. What time did we rise last Tuesday? It was about 8.30 pm.

Mr J.H.D. Day: You were very well behaved.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We were very well behaved. I think the reason we are so well behaved is that we are so bored with the insignificant and inconsequential legislation that the Leader of the House has brought before this house. If it were not for this side of Parliament, we would probably rise about four o'clock each day. The government has no legislative framework. The only plan it has is how many broken promises it can achieve in its first three or four weeks of Parliament.

MS L.L. BAKER (Maylands) [12.31 pm]: I must say that I share the concern of my colleagues. The City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle established these funds back in 1903, and in 1961 it dawned on someone that it might be a good idea to change the way the funds are provided and the way in which the trust functions. I am not sure what happened between 1961 and 2013 to mean that this bill is now urgent. I find it very difficult to believe that the City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle could not survive past 30 June for yet another year. They have managed for the last—I am not sure how many years it is—30, 40, 50 or 60 years without this bill. I understand it is good to clean things up, minister, but I think the Leader of the House is pushing the bubble a little bit with this.

We have sat here and listened to an array of completely obscure and bizarre pieces of legislation that seem to have been dragged up from the bowels of the government's cellar, where they had been lurking underneath the chains, whips and whatever else the government might keep in its cellar for some time. The fact that they have been brought forward now for this house to debate is a complete insult. I understand the City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle wanting to tidy this up. I do not understand why this government brought us all back here so quickly after the election. Have we seen any light rail legislation?

Opposition members: No.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Have we seen anything of —

Ms M.M. Quirk: Any cancer legislation?

Ms L.L. BAKER: Have we seen cancer legislation? Have we seen any legislation that relates to what this government promised when it stood for re-election in March? No, nothing, nada, nil, forget it. There has been nothing. Instead, we have had a series of completely innocuous bills. The fact is that we have not had briefings until the last minute. Quite frankly, it is lucky we have had briefings because I had never even seen the title of most of these things. It was a complete surprise to me, in fact, that the City of Fremantle used to create its own energy. It probably should go back to doing that again, considering the cost of energy that we are all facing these days. Maybe we need the City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle to crank up their power again and start producing something else that we might spread around. That might be enough to power the light rail network.

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Acting Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Paul Papalia

Why we are spending time now debating whether this bill should be urgent is completely outside reality. I think the Leader of the House has pushed the boundaries a bit too far. I know we have only another week and a day left of this ridiculous behaviour, but I would really prefer to be in my electorate working on important matters, and I am sure that most of my colleagues, particularly new members of the backbench, would have welcomed the opportunity to get to know their electorates a bit better, rather than to come into this place and be told that a bill on the City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle trust funds was essentially an urgent bill. That is complete nonsense. It is offensive to our constituents, it is offensive to this Parliament and, quite frankly, it is embarrassing to the Leader of the House and to every one of those new members sitting on the other side of this house that this government does not have the intellectual capacity or the workload commitment to come into this place with a decent set of legislation worked out. If we have to pass this as an urgent bill, okay, I look forward to debating it, but, really, give me a break. The government is really pushing the limits with this one.

MR J.H.D. DAY (Kalamunda — Leader of the House) [12.34 pm]: I want to briefly put a couple of things on the record. I understand the arguments of the opposition, and they are not surprising. It is with a degree of reluctance that we move or ask that the various bills be declared urgent. I want to point out that the reason the City of Fremantle and Town of East Fremantle Trust Funds (Amendment and Expiry) Bill 2013 is being brought on for debate now is to accommodate the opposition being given a briefing commencing at 12 noon on the insurance commission bill.

Mr M. McGowan: It's our fault.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: No, I am not saying that, but there was a bit of fault on both sides, I think, in the preparation for that bill. It needs to come on today. The other point I make is that I have ensured that all the bills being debated are on the table for at least a week—it is not the ideal three weeks, but at least a week—and in that context I agreed to a request from the member for Cannington that the Petroleum and Geothermal Energy Legislation Amendment Bill not be debated this week. I think that was a reasonable request. It will probably be debated next week. But I am trying to ensure that there is at least a reasonable time for members to consider bills.

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Deputy Speaker casting her vote with the ayes, with the following result —

Ayes (33)

Mr P. Abetz	Ms M.J. Davies	Mr R.F. Johnson	Mr J. Norberger
Mr F.A. Alban	Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr S.K. L'Estrange	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr C.J. Barnett	Ms W.M. Duncan	Mr R.S. Love	Mr A.J. Simpson
Mr I.C. Blayney	Ms E. Evangel	Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr M.H. Taylor
Mr I.M. Britza	Mrs G.J. Godfrey	Mr J.E. McGrath	Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr T.R. Buswell	Dr K.D. Hames	Mr P.T. Miles	Mr A. Krsticevic (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr G.M. Castrilli	Mrs L.M. Harvey	Ms A.R. Mitchell	
Mr V.A. Catania	Mr C.D. Hatton	Dr M.D. Nahan	
Mr M.J. Cowper	Dr G.G. Jacobs	Mr D.C. Nalder	

Noes (17)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr P. Papalia	Mr P.B. Watson
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr D.A. Templeman (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr R.H. Cook	Mr M. McGowan	Ms M.M. Quirk	
Ms J.M. Freeman	Ms S.F. McGurk	Mrs M.H. Roberts	
Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr M.P. Murray	Mr C.J. Tallentire	

Pairs

Mr N.W. Morton	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr B.J. Grylls	Ms R. Saffioti
Mr A.P. Jacob	Mr P.C. Tinley

Question thus passed.

Second Reading Resumed

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [12.40 pm]: Having now been forced by Parliament to debate this very urgent bill, let us look at why it is so urgent. I remember that during the election campaign the Liberal Party considered a range of changes to law as being of the absolute highest priority. Those changes included a number of bills on law and order. We have not seen any of them. I remember that the “Liberal Plan for the First 100 Days of Government” of the last Parliament included the Prostitution Bill, which I think the member for Butler mentioned yesterday. It has not seen the light of day. A number of other bills in the law and order area were

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considered to be very important, as I said. Changes or amendments to legislation were proposed, but we have not seen them. They have not seen the light of day. Instead, we have seen absolutely crucial bills declared urgent, including this one, the City of Fremantle and Town of East Fremantle Trust Funds (Amendment and Expiry) Bill 2013. This is a very urgent bill. It is a very important —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Are you the lead speaker?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, I am the lead speaker. Do not worry; I will take my full time and we will also go into consideration in detail. The minister highlighted that this bill was so urgent that we needed to bring it on today. Another bill will be declared urgent after this bill—that is, the Insurance Commission of Western Australia Amendment Bill 2013. I think there is some urgency to that.

Mr J.H.D. Day: So you'll support that one being declared urgent?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Wait and see. It depends how we feel at the time.

When I read this bill and when I listened to the minister give the second reading speech on this bill, a wave of nostalgia flowed over me because this bill has its roots, if you like, way back in 1903 when the Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Act was passed. That act effectively created a board to oversee the provision of electricity tramways and passenger transport in Fremantle and East Fremantle. The interests of that board were six-sevenths Fremantle and one-seventh East Fremantle. Over the course of time we amend and abolish a lot of bills because they are no longer relevant. This is such a bill. There is a wave of nostalgia associated with the abolition of the origins of this bill. As the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, in 1961 the functions of the board established under the Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Act 1903 were no longer provided. The City of Fremantle and Town of East Fremantle Trust Funds Act dissolved the board and transferred those assets to a trust with the interests held in those proportions, and the 1903 act was repealed. As outlined in the second reading speech and detailed in the explanatory notes on the bill, a number of assets have been held in trust, Those liabilities need to be managed appropriately and are required to be reported on through a range of legislation, including this act and the Local Government Act 1995. The minister argues in his second reading speech that by passing this amendment bill we will streamline the process and get rid of duplication. That is what this bill will do.

I want to highlight a very important paragraph in the minister's second reading speech. I will read the sixth paragraph, because it concerns an issue that I want to raise now as part of this debate about East Fremantle and the City of Fremantle. The minister states —

This government is committed to ensuring that local government assets and finances are managed in a manner that ensures that the public gets the best value for money in the services delivered, but at the same time the community can be assured that public moneys are being managed in a safe and accountable manner.

The member for Darling Range is a new minister. I do not think I have formally had the opportunity in this place to congratulate him as the Minister for Local Government; Community Services; Seniors and Volunteering; Youth, but I do that now. I have known the member for Darling Range for a significant time and I think there is a general view in this place that he is a competent and likeable person.

Mr P.B. Watson: Not now he's a minister. We have changed our mind!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That can change. However, the minister has inherited a botched amalgamation process in local government. In 2008, when the Liberal–National Party alliance, as it was then known, came to power, one of the big priorities was local government reform. Indeed, that would be of great interest to the City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle, as it continues to be of great interest to all municipalities throughout Western Australia both in the metropolitan area and in the regions. The member for Bunbury, as the Minister for Local Government, was given the responsibility to roll out the proposed reforms by the Liberal–National government. Immediately the member for Bunbury got himself in all sorts of trouble when at a meeting early in his career as Minister for Local Government he made some statements about amalgamations and set the cat among the pigeons about whether local governments such as the City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle would be required to amalgamate or whether amalgamations would be achieved through a process of mutual discussion and negotiation. I think everyone would be aware that in four and a half years very little was achieved. A few amalgamations occurred; the City of Albany and the Shire of Albany, as it was then known, amalgamated. Greenough and Geraldton —

Mr P.B. Watson: We are still waiting for the money that the Court government promised us for doing it too.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The City of Greater Geraldton council municipality was born after an amalgamation in that area. Over that four and a half-year period there were lots of discussions and lots of money was spent by

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local governments on feasibility studies to look at the actual costs and the ramifications of any amalgamation, forced or otherwise. Fast forward to the second-last week of the election campaign when the now minister, but then only candidate for Darling Range, attended a business breakfast in Armadale with the member for Armadale. The minister—the candidate, not the minister—then made a bit of a blue. I understand a question was phrased about the status of local government reform as it would affect, for example, the City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle. He said, “We’ll be forcing amalgamations; the Liberal Party policy is to force amalgamations.” That was a bit startling.

Dr A.D. Buti: That’s why he got the minister’s gig!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Within 24 hours he was rebuked by the Premier and, embarrassingly, required to issue—I do not know whether it was in his name—a Liberal Party press release saying, “Sorry, I got it wrong; there will be no forced amalgamations under a Liberal-led government.” I think we can all be forgiven for making a faux pas. It was a pretty big faux pas, but as we have seen in this place, sometimes we can make big blues and still be promoted! I think that is what happened. The Premier was looking around at the quality of members at his disposal to anoint for ministerial positions and said, “We’ll give it to the member for Darling Range because he has some track record here.”

Fast forward now to the present day. I refer to the Robson report, which the minister needs to be careful about because he referred to the “Robertson report” a couple of times and I kept thinking there were two reports, and was looking for the Robertson report. We know the Robson report was released last year and made a series of recommendations focusing, of course, on the 30-plus councils in the metropolitan area. This is where it has all become very interesting because municipalities such as the City of Fremantle, the Town of East Fremantle, the City of Melville, the Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale, the City of Armadale, the City of Gosnells, the City of Joondalup and all the other councils that fit within the metropolitan region scheme that are constituted as metropolitan councils were, of course, all looking at what this new minister would do. I am sure people from the City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle, whom I am sure the minister has met with, were looking closely at the new minister and asking: where will we go from here?

I must admit that some of the things the minister has said have, in some ways, attempted to be a little clear, or at least give some direction, about where we might be going. As the minister will be well aware, until he delivers the maps, as he has promised he would do, in, I understand, the next month, a number of local governments in the metropolitan area are very unsure of their fate. It is my understanding that the new maps are the maps the minister will be presenting as the blueprint.

Mr A.J. Simpson: Yes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Perhaps in his response the minister can give places like the City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle an indication of exactly where he is going. We understand these maps redraw proposed new local government areas for the metropolitan area.

Dr K.D. Hames: You can’t comment on that because it has no relevance to the bill.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It has every relevance to the bill, and I will tell the Deputy Premier why. I highlighted paragraph 6 of the minister’s speech, which talks about local government assets. One of the big issues for local government, if and when they are forced to or otherwise amalgamate, is indeed about their assets and how and where those assets may be transferred. It has everything to do with this bill because this bill is in fact about the transfer of assets; that is, trust funds and other assets. In environments in which there is great uncertainty in local governments about a master plan, it has everything to do with this bill. I know the minister has been busy; he has been turning up at council meetings. I do not know whether he has been turning up unannounced or not; I am not sure.

Mr A.J. Simpson interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: He has been telling them. He has been turning up five minutes before the council meets, I think.

Dr A.D. Buti: They haven’t been urgent meetings though!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: He has been turning up, and that is good. I think the night before last Tuesday morning when we had the parliamentary breakfast for the Western Australian Local Government Association he had been to the City of Armadale.

Mr A.J. Simpson: Yes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I think they welcomed the minister because I think all the councils want some certainty. We are now in an environment in which that uncertainty is having a big effect on councils’ operations.

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I have talked to a number of mayors and councillors in the metropolitan area. Certainly for some of them the uncertainty means they have an incapacity to sign on new staff, for example, because they cannot give them security of tenure; they cannot sign them up for X number of years because they do not know whether they will exist as that entity in X number of years. It has had an effect on the hiring of staff and some of the strategic planning of local governments because many of them have medium to large-scale projects that they are seeking to fund as part of their operations or capital works programs. Again, the investment in major projects, whether they be a new recreational hall or whatever, is still at question given the issue of what will happen to that asset if, indeed, it is a council that is targeted for amalgamation.

In the case of the Town of East Fremantle I am certain, given its very small size, that it is in the minister's sights. I would think that East Fremantle is certainly in the minister's sights for amalgamation. The minister and his predecessor encouraged a lot of councils to talk among themselves about how best an amalgamation process could take place. I understand—I can be corrected—it is still his policy to not forcibly amalgamate any council in the metropolitan area.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, member! I think you are really straying from the bill.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No; I am talking about East Fremantle and its assets that are to be transferred by trust.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is what the bill is about—transfer of assets.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am asking on behalf of the Town of East Fremantle whether the minister will in fact respond. Is it still true that councils will not be forced into amalgamation—that he will not be forcibly requiring a council in the metropolitan area to amalgamate? Can the minister answer that now?

Mr A.J. Simpson: You will have to wait for the report, member. I will be coming back to announce the release of the Robson report and I will give out the detail of how it will unfold.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: When will that happen?

Mr A.J. Simpson: Next month.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In July?

Mr A.J. Simpson: Yes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is a pity the minister cannot do that while Parliament is sitting because it would be a very good debate. It would actually be an urgent sort of debate, but of course we have not had that opportunity. It is very coincidental that the announcements will be made in July when Parliament is not sitting.

Mr A.J. Simpson: It is a big report and it is taking a while.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I hope it is a big report and I hope the minister will answer that question because it will be the first question fired at him by councils such as the Town of East Fremantle. But I would be guessing, and I think my guess would be pretty close to the mark, that the Town of East Fremantle is one of the councils that is, indeed, in the minister's sights for amalgamation with its neighbour or neighbours.

We heard the former minister encouraging councils to talk to each other, but this minister's stance is different from that. I refer to the *Cambridge Post* of 15 June last week, with the headline titled "Simpson: Do as you're told!". I will quote from that newspaper article. I know that we are not supposed to read from newspapers, but I am quoting from a document. I am happy to table it afterwards. The article states —

Tony Simpson, the Minister for Local Government, has called a halt to the actions of councils such as Claremont, which voted last week to amalgamate with its neighbours, Cottesloe, Peppermint Grove and Mosman Park.

Mr Simpson made it clear this week that the government would only support the boundaries it wanted.

That is very interesting. The government would only support the boundaries it wanted. Despite asking councils to talk to each other and discuss regional cooperation and whether or not it would be an easy transition to amalgamate, we now know that the minister has made it clear, if this is correct—the minister can correct me if I am wrong—that the government would only support the boundaries that it wanted. The article also refers to the Dadour amendment and states —

But Claremont mayor Jock Barker says the council is not applying to swallow up its three neighbours just yet.

"Just yet"! I wonder whether it wants to swallow up the Town of East Fremantle and the City of Fremantle. I do not know. I am sure that they would be very interested if that were the case. The article continues —

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He said it would do so only if the government changed the Dadour Amendment to water down the voting powers of ratepayers who did not want to join up.

What is proposed here—again, correct me if I am wrong, minister—is that the minister wishes to water down the Dadour amendment or the constraints —

Mr A.J. Simpson: And make it more democratic.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: My understanding of that is that the 50 per cent threshold of the vote would take place across all the councils that are proposed to be merged —

Mr A.J. Simpson: Everyone would have a say.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: —rather than allowing, as the Dadour amendment currently does, one municipality within a collective voting over 50 per cent to oppose change and therefore vetoing any change. The minister, of course, is arguing that that is not democratic.

Mr A.J. Simpson: Just keep in mind that the poll provision only kicks in when you dissolve more than two districts.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Two councils?

Mr A.J. Simpson: Yes, two councils.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister's map will show that. Is the minister's map already done? Is it ready?

Mr A.J. Simpson: No.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Can the minister show me a copy of it? I would love to see it.

Mr A.J. Simpson: Patience, member!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is it finalised?

Mr A.J. Simpson: We are close.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Has it gone to cabinet?

Mr A.J. Simpson: We are in the process of finalising it now. We still have to hold some meetings with some councils. I have met with a number of them this week and I am meeting with a few more to finalise their points. We are getting close.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Has the minister met with the East Fremantle council?

Mr A.J. Simpson: I met with 30 people from councils on a particular date but I have not met with them one on one yet.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Are they happy to be amalgamated?

Mr A.J. Simpson: If they are happy to, yes. My door is always open to them and I will meet with as many of them as I can.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Have you met with your own council recently? It is totally opposed to being swallowed up.

Mr A.J. Simpson: Yes, two Thursdays ago I caught up with the shire president.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: How are they going down there?

Mr A.J. Simpson: They are struggling. Eight per cent growth is basically killing them.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister's view on the Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale has also changed. I want to highlight the minister's comments back in July last year when he said that super councils do not work.

Mr A.J. Simpson: Based on the Robson report.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: An article in the member's local paper, the *Serpentine–Jarrahdale Examiner*, on 12 July 2012 states —

“Super councils don't work: Simpson”.

Member for Darling Range Tony Simpson said he does not believe any of the three options ...

This is very interesting —

provided in the metropolitan local government review's draft ...

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Will the minister jettison all three options?

Mr A.J. Simpson: It will be different from that. I do not support the three options. You have to wait for the report and the map to come out. It will be different from what you have seen.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: They are the three options that were highlighted.

Mr A.J. Simpson: Yes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is the minister now saying that he will not go along with any of those three options?

Mr A.J. Simpson: Wait for the report. Super councils, no.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Does the minister not like super councils?

Mr A.J. Simpson: They're too big.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Has the minister settled on a minimum number of ratepayers?

Mr A.J. Simpson: No.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That will be very interesting to the Town of East Fremantle. From memory, it has a ratepayer base of a few thousand people. It is about 4 000 or 5 000.

Mr A.J. Simpson: You have to wait.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is important for the minister to tell us, and particularly the Town of East Fremantle and the City of Fremantle, what he has in mind and what he classifies as a super council and what is not classified as a super council.

Mr A.J. Simpson: Wait for the report, member. Patience is a virtue.

Mr D.A. Templeman: The minister is like Chris Tavaré; he is playing with a straight bat. The Town of East Fremantle would be particularly interested to know what he has in mind. I do not believe the City of Fremantle has too much to worry about because it is a regional centre. The City of Fremantle is probably okay. The likelihood is that it will probably grow. That is why I think our friends at the Town of East Fremantle will be looking at their assets. This is interesting because the Deputy Premier said I was not sticking to the topic. The Town of East Fremantle has only one asset, but it is worth some dollars. It has \$201 500 sitting in a term deposit, stashed away for a rainy day. It might have to use that money for the big party it will have to celebrate the abolition of the Town of East Fremantle. It may have to use that fund for a celebration when the minister brings out the map showing that the town —

Mr M.P. Murray: A big barbecue.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It could be a big barbeque; the town could invite the Queen, although I do not think she travels any more. That is what the town could do.

The reality is that there is an asset in the trust fund. I met and had a good chat with the Lord Mayor of Perth yesterday. We are very lucky to have that Lord Mayor and I am very impressed with Lisa Scaffidi. We talked generally about a range of issues, including, of course, the amalgamations. The City of Perth, through the Lord Mayor, has made suggestions about key assets that currently reside in adjacent councils. They include the Burswood Peninsula in the Town of Victoria Park and the University of Western Australia, which resides in the City of Nedlands. The mayor said that those iconic and important assets should come into the possession of the City of Perth. There was a difference of opinion between the minister and the Premier about this a few weeks back.

Mr A.J. Simpson: No.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There seemed to be differences between the minister and the Premier about that idea. The Town of Victoria Park is not at all happy about losing the peninsula, as the minister would be well aware. I am very interested in seeing the minister's map and where the City of Perth may or may not expand.

Let me finish on that aspect. The minister told us that super councils do not work and that he does not approve of them, yet he wants to reduce the 30-plus metropolitan councils down to between 15 and 20. They are the numbers that have been thrashed around. The minister does not want super councils because in his opinion they do not work, but he is not happy with any of the three options either. Is that still true?

Mr A.J. Simpson: Wait for the report, member.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is this true? Has the minister changed his mind since 12 July last year? The minister said then that he did not like super councils. He said —

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I don't want super councils.

...

The report needs more details.

Mr A.J. Simpson: Yes. It will all come out.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The Shire of Serpentine–Jarrahdale president, Bruce Moore, said Mr Simpson's comments were welcomed. I do not know whether he welcomes them now. He also said —

It is pleasing to see that our local member is getting behind us in trying to maintain our community identity ...

Mr A.J. Simpson: Yes, that's very important.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: But the minister will amalgamate the council, will he not?

Mr A.J. Simpson: Wait for the report.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister will amalgamate it. I will move away from that because I note that the Acting Speaker is about to suggest that I am straying from the bill.

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, this is all about that.

Mr M.P. Murray: Will this bill have any bearing on the Fremantle Dockers if it was under the trust fund?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Like Bruce Yardley, the member for Collie–Preston is well known for throwing in a googly. In fact, with his moustache, he looks like an older Bruce Yardley. He now comes to the crease and throws up a very interesting question. It is a good question. Members know that I am a supporter of the Fremantle Dockers and that they are proposing to move to Cockburn. In fact, when the Prime Minister was here last week she announced some federal money will be made available so that can happen. The member for Collie–Preston's comment is at the crux of the question of amalgamation. The whole matter of amalgamations is underpinned by historical aspects, and they are real issues. Some local government authorities, but not all, are more than a century old. Local government authorities, such as the City of Joondalup, are relatively new municipal entities. However, I understand that the Town of East Fremantle is more than 100 years old and the City of Fremantle—known simply as the Town of Fremantle at one stage—is more than 150 years old. A number of things come into play when dabbling with the amalgamation issue. History is enshrined in the town and the city of East Fremantle's identity. However, for some councils, such as the City of Joondalup, there is very little history. There are some significant historical Indigenous sites but very little historical significance in the built environment of the City of Joondalup, for example.

There is also an identity issue related to the historical aspects of a local area. There is also the provision of services—how and where services are delivered effectively. That would be of particular interest to councils such as the Town of East Fremantle which, under this bill, will be granted greater control over the assets it has had for X number of years. Everyone is holding their breath to see what the government's map is like. A range of issues need to be taken into account before the minister holds up the map and says, "This is the plan", but the minister has said, "You will do as you are told."

Mr A.J. Simpson: I did not say that.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: According to the *Cambridge Post* headline on 15 June 2013, the minister has said that—"Simpson: Do as you're told!"

Mr A.J. Simpson: I never said those words.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The article under that headline states —

Mr Simpson made it clear this week that the government would only support the boundaries it wanted.

I would say that "it" is the Premier.

Mr A.J. Simpson: The weekly updates, do you get them?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I do.

Mr A.J. Simpson: What does it say in there?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: "It" is the Premier. Is it true that the Premier has told you, "I'll draw the boundaries"? Has he not said that he will draw the boundaries?

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Mr A.J. Simpson: No; we are working on it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: He said to the minister, “You are a great fellow”—the minister is a great bloke—but the Premier has said, “This is how it is going to be. This is the map.”

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): The member for Mandurah’s comments have strayed from the bill again.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Have I? I am very sorry.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Yes. It would be good if he referred to the relevance of the bill, the principles of the bill and the matters relevant to the bill. Perhaps the member could suggest what should be in the bill and if he plans any amendments to the bill. The member’s comments must refer to the relevance of the bill and the principles of the bill.

Ms S.F. McGurk: You have strayed.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I think my mum used to think I was a bit of a stray, but I take on board the Acting Speaker’s suggestion.

Ms S.F. McGurk: Feral.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Some would say feral.

I will come back to the bill. I refer, for example, to the Town of East Fremantle and the excess balance of \$201 500. That money will be needed if the Town of East Fremantle is required to amalgamate, although the minister has not yet answered the question whether it will be forced to do so yet. During the election the Premier promised that there would be no forced amalgamations, but I do not think that will be the case. Members have seen the headline in *The West Australian* of 31 May 2013 “‘Bucket of money’ to aid mergers”. East Fremantle already has a bucket of money it will get from the transfer in this bill, but the minister is now saying there will be a bucket of money to aid mergers. If I worked in the Town of East Fremantle, I would whack that \$201 500 into a very long-term deposit so it cannot be touched, because the minister will be offering buckets of money.

I do not know where that money will come from. That is the real worry. I do not know if Mother Hubbard has been to the cupboard, but the cupboard is as bare as a baby’s behind. The government has made a range of promises on a range of projects, election commitments, election promises, and now Old Mother Hubbard, the Premier, has gone to the cupboard and the only thing in the cupboard—he has not come out of the cupboard yet, but he is in the cupboard—is the Treasurer. He is like a mouse that has been caught with all the cheese and all the cheese has gone. It is gone! The cupboard is bare. There he is; he has been startled. The Premier has been in the cupboard and has said, “Treasurer, what is in here? What is in this cupboard? Where is all the cash? Where are all the big bags of cash, the royalties for regions and the royalties from the mining industry, and all of that stuff? We promised all these things.”

Dr A.D. Buti: The Minister for Health has taken it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The Minister for Health has always been known for that. He reminds me of one of the Beagle Boys, who walk around in masks, from the Donald Duck cartoons. That is who the Minister for Health reminds me of. I do not know from where the government will get the buckets of money to help entice the Town of East Fremantle into a merger.

I will now move on because I can feel the Acting Speaker consulting the *Parliamentary Handbook* on how to control me. I am uncontrollable! I am going off on all tangents and am uncontrollable.

I return to the bill. I will raise this matter during consideration in detail of the bill, but the minister may want to refer to this when he responds in 24 or so minutes’ time. Also, I need more water. This speaking is thirsty work.

The second reading speech refers to the Local Government Act being the framework for the reporting element. One of the reasons for this bill is that the old act is duplicitous, irrelevant and is based upon old workings and functions. Under this bill the accountability and administrative elements will be dealt with under the Local Government Act and, according to the second reading speech, will provide a comprehensive regulatory framework for local government management of, and reporting on, finances and assets. Will the minister provide more detail on that at the appropriate time—in consideration in detail if necessary?

The minister also said in the second reading speech that this framework has been considerably strengthened by initiatives such as introducing the requirement for integrated planning and fair value accounting of assets. I would like more detail on that. Will the minister explain examples of the government’s introduction of a greater or better integrated planning process and the fair value accounting of assets that is mentioned in the second reading?

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The next paragraph of the second reading speech makes reference to the appropriate and necessary transfer of the assets, which, for the City of Fremantle, includes some significant assets. The minister's second reading speech highlights the current cash and receivables of \$3.7 million, and the freehold properties in Tapper Street in the City of Fremantle; I would think they would be assets of significant value. Those properties are currently a retirement village, so they obviously have a current and specific use. The heritage-listed property on reserve 34837 is the old Fremantle fire station, and it obviously has heritage issues and values placed on it. I understand it is currently leased for commercial purposes. When the minister gets an opportunity, I would like him to give me an indication of whether those assets appear on the assets register. I am not an accountant or local government officer, but does that mean that the assets appear on the respective balance sheets or assets registers of the City of Fremantle or the Town of East Fremantle, and that that is where they will formally sit after the City of Fremantle and Town of East Fremantle Trust Funds (Amendment and Expiry) Bill 2013 is proclaimed and the formal process of transfer has taken place? The minister can answer that in his reply or in consideration in detail.

The second reading speech includes a summary of what the bill provides for, which is the transfer of assets and liabilities and the formal re-vesting of reserve 34837—the old fire station—to the City of Fremantle. Then of course there are the abolition elements of the Fremantle fund and East Fremantle fund. Effectively, there are two funds, are there not?

Mr A.J. Simpson: Correct.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This bill will abolish them and transfer the assets. The process requires the registration of the documentation with the Registrar of Titles, and the provision of reports to the Minister for Local Government prior to ministerial notice of the expiry of the act. As to the formal aspects, I assume there will be a formal gazettal or tabling of some nature to notify of the abolition of the funds and the transfer of the assets to the appropriate entities. I assume—the minister can clarify this for me—that will be advertised or highlighted in the *Government Gazette* or somewhere appropriate; obviously, the registration of titles will be handled by the Department of Regional Development and Lands.

Mr A.J. Simpson: Yes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: After the formalities are completed, the ratepayers of the Town of East Fremantle, as it is currently constituted, will know that their council's assets now include the formal transfer of the \$201 500, for example, which is their asset that has been transferred; and the ratepayers of the City of Fremantle will know, with the passing of the bill and the completion of the formal processes, that the assets I mentioned before have been formally registered as an asset for their city.

The minister's second reading speech finished with the comment —

This bill represents yet another step in this government's strategy to improve legislation for local governments.

I am sure the minister has an officer who can find this answer, but I want the minister to give me a list of the other steps the government has taken to so-called "improve legislation for local governments". What has happened since 2008—the start of the Liberal Party's term of office—to substantiate the government's claim in this second reading speech that this is another step "to improve legislation for local governments"? I ask because some local governments would, of course, accuse the government of not necessarily assisting them in the job they believe they do well. I am interested in the minister's comments and I would like to see the list. It might be "this legislation" or "this amendment to this bill" or a new set of regulations or new set of planning guidelines, but I would like the minister to tell me honestly what steps, apart from this measure, this government has taken to improve legislation for local governments since it took the treasury bench in September 2008. If the government is going to claim it, it has to be able to demonstrate it. I hope the minister has not been caught out, and I will be looking at that one very carefully. I have given the minister's officers a bit of notice to do some work on that.

In all honesty, this bill should not have been declared urgent. I know it is not the minister's fault and I know what happened. The government said, "Wow, we need some bills, because I'll tell you what, we brought Parliament back early and the opposition is chewing through the legislation, and we need a few more to keep us here." It was so interesting that the Premier yesterday or the other day exclaimed loudly how much money was being wasted because we were moving some suspensions of standing orders regarding a particular matter. I will tell members what—if anyone should be accused of wasting money, it is the Premier. Quite frankly, the government brought Parliament back too early, and it has been found out. Unfortunately, of course, rather than copping it on the chin and saying, "Hey, we made a blue. Here are three bills we need to get through by 30 June because they are supply bills or money bills that have to be passed to ensure continuance of supply. The

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opposition will not oppose them or make a big deal out of them because that is naturally what has occurred”, the government has been found out badly and is now, of course, embarrassed because it has had to bring in a bill that has a history as far back as 50-plus years, as mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition earlier today. That is not the Minister for Local Government’s fault; he is just the unfortunate bunny caught in the headlights because of the poor handling of the house by the Leader of the House in a Vanderbilt-type way.

I am sure this bill is very important for the member for Fremantle, who I know has spoken to both councils about it. The member for Fremantle has been doing a great job; I hear great things about what she has been doing for Fremantle all the time. I am sure the member for Fremantle has some comments, but I conclude my remarks by saying to the minister that I am happy to support this bill, but I ask him to give us a bit of detail on some of the elements I raised. Also, we need some clarity and certainty on the future of local government, particularly in the metropolitan area, which is the government’s focus at this stage. Local governments have spent a lot of money trying to respond to what they thought the government was after or was on about in terms of a reform. Some local governments have spent thousands or tens of thousands of dollars on reports, proposals and submissions to the Robson inquiry and others, but they have not yet seen any tangible outcome. The minister says, “Watch this space.” Next month, when Parliament has risen and everyone is focused on the weather and how cold it is, I am sure the minister will find an appropriate day to slip out the maps—probably at a time when the Treasurer has done something inappropriate or announced another puncture in the fiscal outlook of the state. That would probably be the best time for the Minister for Local Government to suddenly whip out his map because people will focus on the Treasurer and his next black hole he has uncovered or highlighted. Given the problems with the state budget’s fiscal outlook, that is a good time to whack out the map. The Treasurer will be the diversion! The minister can roll out the map and then defend his proposal. I am looking forward to the minister’s proposal. I want to work with him—I do! He knows my views on some of these issues.

Mr A.J. Simpson: The *Hansard* is very clear.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I think we have got to look at all options, quite frankly. Look at the options; look at what is proposed. I will not allow without a fight the government to downgrade services to ratepayers. In all of this process, the benefit to ratepayers should be the driving force of any reform and any change. It should be based upon: how will this deliver to ratepayers better outcomes, better services and better transparency? That should be the guiding light. It should not be about what the Premier thinks looks good on a map because I think that is where we might be heading.

I conclude my remarks by thanking you, Madam Acting Speaker, for your guidance during this debate and your willingness to allow me to have some breadth—to let me off the chain, as they say—to pursue some of the matters I think are important to the City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle.

MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle) [1.31 pm]: I also welcome the opportunity to speak on the City of Fremantle and Town of East Fremantle Trust Funds (Amendment and Expiry) Bill 2013. I will reiterate others’ concerns about the bill being considered an urgent one, but I will address that later. As the member for Mandurah pointed out, I have spoken to both people from the City of Fremantle and the Town of East Fremantle who have no objections to the bill before us. I am glad to be representing an area in which the councils had such foresight—that is, that over 110 years ago, light rail systems were operating in their community, and, as has been canvassed, electricity was generated to power those trams. I am sure many residents wish that the light rail system was still in place. By the 1950s, these trams were no longer in operation and the electricity provision was sold to the state electricity provider, and in the early 1960s, a trust was set up to manage the proceeds of that sale. This legislation seems to make sense in that its objectives are to transfer the assets of those trusts to the councils proper, Fremantle and East Fremantle, and to stop any unnecessary duplication of reporting compliance; that all makes a lot of sense. What does not make a lot of sense is that both councils asked for this matter to be addressed in 2003—some 10 years ago—and this Parliament is now being asked to consider the matter urgently 10 years later. It has taken that long for successive governments to get organised and to bring this bill before Parliament; that is what is a little frustrating. I am wondering whether this means that my electorate of Fremantle will start to get some care and attention from this government it deserves. Some of that attention is urgent in nature because Fremantle needs a number of issues dealt with. I have had an opportunity to speak about many of these urgent issues in this Parliament in the time I have been here.

A few weeks ago I raised a grievance on the matter of the warders’ cottages. They are cottages that are owned by the Department of Housing, but 18 months ago residents were evicted from those cottages. The cottages were left to become derelict. I called on the government to act on that matter, and I am pleased to say that since the grievance was tabled in Parliament, the Minister for Housing responded confirming that negotiations were taking place between the department and the City of Fremantle, and that an offer has now been made to the City of Fremantle for the city to take responsibility for the management of those warders’ cottages. Significant funds will be required to restore and maintain the cottages, which is always an issue with heritage assets. That is

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something that the city itself will have to deal with—that is, whether it can justify borrowing some \$6 million to restore those cottages and then to make sure there is adequate provision for the cottages to be maintained. That is something that the council is considering at the moment.

I hope the matter is able to be resolved. As I have said before, the cottages are in the centre of Fremantle. They represent our heritage; they represent something we should be proud of concerning not only our built heritage, but also the inner-city rejuvenation for Fremantle. I hope that matter can be resolved, but it is frustrating that the local council is effectively bailing out the state government in maintaining its assets and making sure that its assets are put to good use. These are matters that could rightly be considered urgent by this Parliament.

Another issue the people of Fremantle would consider urgent is what will happen to the Fremantle police station, which is also a heritage building. It is the old courthouse with the police station next door. Recently, the police vacated the building and have moved to other premises in town. It is good for them as they now have a functioning centre they can operate from, but I am aware of no decision as to what will happen to the old police station. People might know the police station; it is alongside the cottages and opposite the Queensgate car park, but it is a courtyard leading around to the police station. One of the concerns is that there will be security around that building for only another couple months. After that, the building will be then left to its own devices. Unfortunately, if this state government's record is anything to go by, it could be an eon before any decision is made about what will happen to that building. Why not get that matter into play now? Why not decide what is going to happen with that building—namely, whether it will be sold, who will use it and how it will be restored? I think there are asbestos issues involved, so resources need to be considered. These are the matters that the people of Fremantle consider urgent, not the bill before us today.

Another issue that the people in Fremantle, particularly, in East Fremantle would consider urgent—I am glad that the Treasurer is in the house to hear this—is the final resolution of the High Street–Stirling Highway intersection. I have spoken on this matter in the house highlighting the point that I had spoken to residents during the election campaign and since then who have talked about their desperation to have the matter resolved. They want to see an intersection that is safe for the number of trucks that go through the intersection. They want to see traffic flow improved. But they want to make sure that it is a design that they can live with, and that it is not just cutting a swathe of bitumen through their community resulting in an outcome that prioritises trucks over the local community. The design has to be right. But it needs to be resolved, and I hope that the government does allocate the money in this state budget to make sure the upgrade takes place in a manner the community can live with. The federal government came to the party in its last budget and allocated some \$57 million I think. I hope this government allocates money and gets this matter off the books.

There are also other matters the people of Fremantle would consider urgent. I have yet to meet with the principal of the John Curtin College of the Arts, but from speaking to many parents who have students at that school, I know that they are frustrated at the state of the buildings and the work that needs to be done to maintain what is an important school. It is an important facility. It has a fantastic history, a fantastic academic record, a fantastic record in terms of its community engagement—all of those things, but it is in a very sad state and needs attention.

The people of East Fremantle could do with a bit of attention when it comes to the East Fremantle Oval precinct. Some people know the area as the East Fremantle football oval, and it is sometimes known as “Shark Park”. It is an A-class reserve that was bequeathed as a community asset to the community of East Fremantle by Sir John Forrest early last century. However, one of the prospects the community is facing is the possibility that parts of the asset will be sold off to fund much-needed restoration, and the community is firmly resisting that. I can say that it will take more than \$201 500, which the town will receive out of the trust fund allocations, to get the oval up and running to a proper amenity, and people are pretty frustrated by that.

I could speak about a number of other issues. They include attention to Fremantle health services, whether it be to maintain an emergency department in the centre of Fremantle or to maintain Kaleeya Hospital as a good community maternity hospital. I could talk about police resources, a very important matter in an entertainment precinct such as Fremantle. I agree with the Commissioner of Police's comments today—or the comments that he intends to make in a speech today—that although police resources in Fremantle are active and very committed, those resources are scarce and getting scarcer. Like many communities, Fremantle needs attention—some would say urgent attention—given to this issue.

Finally, another issue that the people of Fremantle and East Fremantle would appreciate this government giving its attention to is the extent of retail vacancies and assistance with the economic stimulation of central Fremantle. This issue has put a dampener on spirits. I know that Fremantle is not on its own as a shopping precinct with a number of retail vacancies, but it is a difficult issue and is very keenly felt by the people of Fremantle. The community would be very appreciative if the government turned its urgent attention to those issues on its behalf.

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I reiterate that I have no objection to the content of the bill. It is perhaps long overdue, although our side of the chamber has canvassed its views pretty well on whether there is justification for declaring the bill urgent before this Parliament.

The matter of council amalgamations is also a matter that the community wants to see resolved one way or another, but it wants it resolved in a way that maintains the community and the sense of like purpose in the community around Fremantle and East Fremantle. The prospect of those two councils amalgamating with the City of Melville is of great concern to people in Fremantle. These are matters that people consider urgent and it is their strong preference that the government give some attention to them as soon as possible.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro) [1.43 pm]: The note that the member for Fremantle ended on is the one that I would like to pursue at the outset. It is that the only possible justification for this City of Fremantle and Town of East Fremantle Trust Funds (Amendment and Expiry) Bill 2013 being declared urgent to rectify a problem that has been outstanding since 1903, when trams were running around East Fremantle and Fremantle, is the absolute absence of any legislative agenda on behalf of the government. It must be reiterated a number of times by everyone on this side of the house who speaks on this bill and others that come on for debate today that the Barnett government has had no agenda since taking office.

Ruling by Acting Speaker

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Member, debate on the urgency motion has been had and the question has been put and passed. This is the second reading debate on the City of Fremantle and Town of East Fremantle Trust Funds (Amendment and Expiry) Bill. Although the debate at the second reading stage can be quite broad, it still needs to be on the scope and principles of the bill. It could go to matters relevant to the bill. It could go to the necessity for the bill and its proposals. It could go to what should be in the bill and whether there will be amendments to the bill. It could look at recommendations and objectives of a similar nature in the bill. I note a reference I have been given today about the House of Representatives' practice in a bill to do with state government finances that it could go in some way to how the finances referred to in the bill are spent. But it cannot go to an issue that has already been resolved. If the member could get back to the relevance of the bill, it would be handy.

Debate Resumed

Mr P. PAPALIA: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker, for that fulsome guidance you have offered there.

I refer to the minister's second reading speech in continuing my discussion about the nature of this bill. Primarily in the second paragraph of that speech, the minister acknowledges that this bill is essentially about repealing an obsolete act and reducing red tape. That was the context within which I referred to the urgency. I will not labour the point any further than I already have, other than to acknowledge the obvious embarrassment of the minister and the government at having to introduce this legislation, which in no possible way could be defined as urgent just because it is filling a gap. It effectively puts some legislation on the daily business program. That is enough of that, I suppose, but it needs to be said and it needs to be repeated, because I am sure it will be the case with just about every bit of legislation we will encounter.

However, because the portfolio that we are addressing here is the local government field of endeavour, it is appropriate that we consider whether or not there might be some other more urgent local government legislation that the minister might introduce to this place in light of the fact that for almost five years the government has engaged in what can only be described as creating a sense of turmoil, uncertainty and unrest in the local government sector. From March 2009, the government has intentionally indicated to the local government sector that it would be subject to a forced amalgamation process or a forced change process. That is when the intent of the government was first articulated by the then minister and subsequently reiterated over a number of months by the Premier. In innumerable fora and other opportunities for discussions with local government representatives, local government has been told that it must hasten to change, that it must embrace change and that it must do it quickly. Unfortunately, ever since that time, there has been a complete absence of leadership. Now local governments are imploring the government to provide leadership in their sector and are saying to the government, "Enough of this silliness. Enough of this faux negotiation and consultation process. Just come out and tell us what you want to do." That is all it needs. I would have thought that would be far more urgent than this bill. No doubt this bill is worthwhile and no doubt it serves a purpose that has been in process since 1903 when the Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Act 1903 was first passed. No doubt this is an important piece of legislation and an important reform. It is an important step, as the minister has said, in reducing red tape and repealing an obsolete act. Nevertheless, I am certain that if the minister had sought the opinion of local government representatives across the state, or, indeed of the 13 000 employees within the local government sector across the state, they would have hoped that there would be something more urgent than this

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bill. They would have hoped that the new Minister for Local Government would have come into this place and provided them with the certainty that they have been seeking ever since the pin on the grenade was first pulled in March 2009 and thrown into the local government sector. I would urge the minister to consider that. I suspect that the minister probably had very little to do with the priority that has been accorded to this bill. Nevertheless, the minister needs to address the fact that the guidance and leadership that the local government sector is seeking is long overdue. The silliness of the government in introducing this legislation as an urgent bill will serve only to exacerbate and magnify the frustration that exists within the local government sector. I think the minister knows that, and I think the minister needs to drive the response.

The minister states in the last paragraph of his second reading speech that this bill represents “yet another step” in this government’s strategy to improve legislation for local governments. Would the minister please enlighten the house as to what other steps have been taken in the local government sector to improve legislation for local governments? We have had the Cat Bill. A huge debate occurred on that bill, and I was right into that debate, which was worthwhile and of great interest to many people across the state. But I am struggling to recall other legislation in this place in the last five years that has had anything to do with local governments, and certainly that has had anything to do with improving legislation for local governments. Maybe something has slipped by me. I notice that the former Mayor of the City of Belmont is probably giving the minister a couple of hints.

Mr A.J. Simpson: I have a list of stuff that we have done since 2009 when we first came into government.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Legislation?

Mr A.J. Simpson: Regulation change.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am not talking about regulation. I am talking about legislation. I am referring to the minister’s second reading speech. The minister said in his second reading speech that this bill represents yet another step in this government’s strategy to improve legislation for local governments. I am interested in what the other steps were prior to this “yet another step”, because all I can recall is the Cat Bill. Perhaps there was something else but it was so earth-shattering that it did not necessarily garner the attention of the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Member, please get back to the bill.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am referring to the second reading speech, Madam Acting Speaker. I appreciate your guidance, though; thank you very much.

That is something in particular that I am keen to find out from the minister. Regulation is going on all the time. I am interested to know what other improvements have been made to legislation.

In light of the fact that this legislation refers to the Town of East Fremantle and the City of Fremantle, perhaps the minister might enlighten those two councils on their futures. Perhaps the minister might give those councils some indication about whether they have a future, and whether allocating these assets to those councils is only one step in a process whereby all their other assets will be allocated to somebody else when the minister eventually gets around to letting the local government sector know whether it will exist in due course—after five years of turmoil and uncertainty, and after five years of embarrassment because of the government’s lack of leadership on this issue. That would be an interesting point to pursue. No doubt the East Fremantle and Fremantle councils are watching this debate with interest, and their ratepayers are watching, too—or they may not be, but they will hear about it. They probably share the interest of this house with respect to whether there will be a reduction in the number of local governments in the metropolitan area or indeed elsewhere. I say that because now that the National Party is just an adjunct to the Liberal Party and is the minor partner in a coalition ruled by the Liberal Party, there is no longer any reason that the amalgamation of councils will be constrained to the metropolitan area; that was only a short-term response to the difficulty imposed by the National Party having the balance of power in the last Parliament. Now that is no longer the case, surely the minister will be giving guidance and clarity to the non-metropolitan local governments. The local governments in the regions all know that it might start in the metropolitan area, but the government will be coming after them. Certainly they know that in the wheatbelt. They know that the nodding poodles no longer have any power. They know that their representatives in the National Party will not be able to stop the Liberal government from doing whatever it wants. It is undeniable that in these circumstances, the government can do whatever it wants with respect to the legislation governing local governments. There is nothing to prevent the government from implementing immediately any of the objectives that the Premier articulated as far back as 2009 when he said there should be a massive reduction in the number of councils across the state.

However, when the minister is telling us what the government is going to do, and when he is giving some clarity to the local government sector and to the thousands of employees in the local government sector, please also include the costs that will be associated with these amalgamations. It is undeniable that it will cost at least \$1.5 million to amalgamate these two councils. We know from experience in WA that that will be the cost. We

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have heard other figures. We have heard that in Queensland, it cost \$220 million for the amalgamations, and the ratepayers picked up that cost. We know that the government's budget is a mess and it has no capacity to fund any additional costs that have not been foreseen or have not been flagged. Therefore, if the government is going to impose those costs on local government ratepayers—which is what has happened in Queensland and elsewhere—the government needs to be upfront and tell them. It will be a bit daunting for the government, after five years of telling the sector what its intention is, to also have to explain where the money will come from to pay for that. I imagine that it will be quite challenging for the minister to go to the cabinet table and suggest that some money should be allocated for forced amalgamations. But that is the job that needs to be done, minister. It is undeniable. There is no more opportunity for prevarication on this issue. There is no other excuse. There can be no further delays. We cannot have any further consultations. We have had years of delay and consultation and uncertainty. People in the local government sector are unsure of their jobs. Local government elected representatives are unsure whether they should even bother nominating for the role and for their positions. It is now incumbent upon the minister to take the lead and provide these people with the certainty that they have been seeking. There are no more excuses, minister; that is all I can say.

With respect to this bill, it is good to see that Fremantle council has clearly invested wisely and has turned its allocation into a significant amount of money that will no doubt be welcomed onto its books. However, Fremantle council will be wondering about what will happen to the council and to all of its assets, not just the ones that will be transferred as a result of this bill.

The problem is that rather than divert attention from the government's lack of a legislative agenda for this sector, all this bill does is draw attention to it. All it does is demonstrate and confirm the government's lack of planning and leadership in the local government sector. It is ironic that the minister has chosen to introduce this bill as an urgent bill. Local government is the one sector that probably above all others is desperate for some guidance and indication as to where it is going. Only the minister and the government can provide that guidance. The government created this mess in 2009, and it has continued to add to the sense of chaos and uncertainty in this sector ever since. That uncertainty has ultimately been made worse by pronouncements by the Premier on a regular basis. The minister is now at the point at which there are no more excuses. The government has the power, in the form of a majority in both houses of this Parliament—without the Nationals, who are completely irrelevant—to deal with this matter. The government cannot hide behind the Nationals any more. The government needs to get on with it and sort it out.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.