



Parliamentary Debates

(HANSARD)

FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION
2023

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 22 March 2023

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 22 March 2023

THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts) took the chair at 12 noon, acknowledged country and read prayers.

PAPERS TABLED

Papers were tabled and ordered to lie upon the table of the house.

TRUE SPORT PROGRAM

Statement by Minister for Sport and Recreation

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Sport and Recreation) [12.02 pm]: The McGowan government recognises the unique importance and value of organised sport in Western Australia to build and connect our communities. Sport not only provides a gross benefit to the state of \$10.3 billion each year, but also plays an often unspoken role in developing life skills, building resilience, establishing friendships, encouraging teamwork and providing the setting for fun. Organised sport is a growing industry that requires supports and structures to be in place to allow it to flourish. But sport delivery and participation are ever changing, with increased expectations from limited resources.

There is a key partnership between the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries and SportWest, as the peak body for sport in Western Australia, which has grown significantly under the McGowan government. I was thrilled to announce yesterday that the McGowan government has invested \$440 000 into the future of the WA sport sector, funding the development of the True Sport program by SportWest. True Sport is a game changer for the industry and SportWest is uniquely positioned to deliver the initiative, with its strong links to industry and community. True Sport will enable a cohesive all-of-sport approach that will align values and culture for sport delivery across Western Australia and enrich the sport experience for all participants across seasons, across sports and across the state. Developed for the industry by the industry, True Sport takes a contemporary approach that recognises and supports the changing landscape and will continue to evolve and be guided by the needs of the industry, with a focus on welcoming environments, safe participation for children, support for mental health and much more.

But this is just the beginning. As we venture toward the 2032 Brisbane Olympic Games, True Sport will help to instil Western Australian sporting values and culture in children from the first time they lace up their boots or line up at the starting block, embedding values that all participants in whatever role they choose can benefit from. It will position the industry to leverage the legacy of participation and inspiration from opportunities such as the FIFA Women's World Cup and the Olympic Games.

VISITOR — ENZO SIRNA

Statement by Speaker

THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts) [12.04 pm]: Before I give the minister the call, I note that we have in the public gallery Mr Enzo Sirna, president of the Italo-Australian Welfare and Cultural Centre. Welcome. I also welcome the other visitors in the public gallery who I understand are from the Midland electorate.

RAMADAN

Statement by Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale — Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests) [12.04 pm]: The Muslim fasting month of Ramadan will likely begin on Thursday, 23 March 2023. For Western Australian Muslims, Ramadan is likely to end on Friday, 21 April, when it is expected the new crescent moon will be sighted. Ramadan takes place on different dates each year as it is based on the Islamic lunar calendar, which is 11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar. Because of this, every year the first day of Ramadan falls 11 days earlier on the Gregorian calendar.

Muslims believe that Ramadan is the month when the Koran was first revealed to the Prophet Mohammed and is a time of significance for Muslim communities across the world. It is a time of self-reflection and prayer, of abstinence from food and drink during daylight hours, and for increased charitable acts and donations. It is a month when, more than any other time of the year, Muslims open their hearts and homes to family, friends and community. Many families host iftar—that is, the meal that breaks the fast at the end of the day—inviting friends and extended family to their homes. Mosques often host open iftars for anybody who comes by to share the meal.

For members of the house, a highlight of the Ramadan period is always the parliamentary iftar dinner held here in Parliament House. This year's parliamentary iftar, organised by the Intercultural Harmony Society, will take place on Wednesday, 5 April. It is an excellent opportunity for cross-cultural interaction. I strongly encourage members to attend the dinner because it not only is an enjoyable and welcoming event, but also offers a valuable insight into the importance of Ramadan to our Muslim communities. Gatherings of different faith communities to share food

give us the opportunity to appreciate that we all share the same fundamental values whatever faith we may follow and whatever background we originate from. I also encourage members to make the most of any iftar invitations they receive from their constituents.

On behalf of the McGowan government and all members of the house, I send our best wishes to the Muslim communities of Western Australia for a peaceful and inspiring Ramadan. I also take this opportunity to wish Ramadan Kareem to our colleagues Hon Dr Anne Aly, MP, and Senator Fatima Payman, who represent Western Australia in federal Parliament.

CLOSING THE GAP

Statement by Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale — Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [12.07 pm]: I rise to inform the house that the Productivity Commission recently updated its national data dashboard showing how jurisdictions are tracking against nine critical Closing the Gap outcomes and targets. I am pleased to announce that Western Australia has recorded improvements in eight of these nine targets. The improvements span diverse areas, including employment, education, housing, and land and sea rights, and reflect the hard work that has gone into the implementation of the national agreement to date.

Western Australia's most significant improvement was a 5.1 per cent increase in the employment rate of Aboriginal adults aged 25 to 64 years. Economic participation is essential in providing strong and secure futures for Aboriginal families and communities, which is a foundation stone for Aboriginal empowerment. The latest data for Western Australia also shows a 3.7 per cent increase in Aboriginal people aged 20 to 24 years holding year 12 or equivalent level qualifications. This indicates that our schools are working well to create a safe environment for students to thrive and build pathways to tertiary education, training and employment. Western Australia continues to perform above the national average when it comes to native title. It will be important to measure the impact of native title agreements on other Closing the Gap targets as they continue to be settled and implemented at local and regional levels across the state.

The improvements that we have recorded in the latest updates to the Closing the Gap data are promising, although much work remains to be done. The WA government is committed to progressing the ambitious goals outlined in the national agreement. Strong and effective partnerships between government, the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, native title holders and other community-based Aboriginal partners will be key to this. Strengthening our partnerships will be a key priority in 2023 and that will be reflected in the update to Western Australia's Closing the Gap implementation plan to be delivered later in the year.

MULTICULTURAL AWARDS

Statement by Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale — Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests) [12.09 pm]: Speaker, as you alluded to at the beginning of the day, we have a number of this year's winners of the Western Australian Multicultural Awards in the public gallery. I welcome all of them to Parliament. I am sure that members here would also congratulate you on your awards.

I am pleased to inform the house that on 14 March, I hosted the Western Australian Multicultural Awards 2023. These awards acknowledge our great cultural and linguistic diversity and recognise the value that multiculturalism brings to Western Australia. Fourteen awards were presented across 12 categories covering youth, arts, sports, community service, the public sector, human rights, and response and recovery, as well as significant individual achievements. The Premier presented the Premier's Community Response and Recovery Award to the Organisation of African Communities in Western Australia. This award recognises culturally and linguistically diverse community associations that have directly supported Western Australian communities impacted by a crisis through response or recovery efforts. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Organisation of African Communities in WA used its extensive reach and networks to ensure that vital health information and access to vaccinations has been available to everyone.

Unfortunately, I do not have time to detail the many accomplishments of all of the award winners, but I would like to acknowledge them: Mr Surya Ambati for the Outstanding Individual Achievement Award; Mr Lueth Dengdit for the Youth Award; Mr Mararo Wangai for the Arts Award; Ms Sunday Aryang for the Sports person of the Year Award; the Centre for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees for the Community Organisation Award, CALD; Auspire—Australia Day Council WA for the Community Organisation Award, general; the City of Canning for the Local Government Award; the Department of Health cancer network for the Public Sector Award; Mrs Asha Bhat, OAM, and Mr Danny McEvoy for the Sir Ronald Wilson Leadership Award; and Mr Enzo Sirna, AM, for the Laksiri Jayasuriya Lifetime Community Service Award. Full details are available at omi.wa.gov.au. I encourage members to have a look at some of the outstanding work happening in our community.

I was also proud to present the distinguished service awards to three worthy recipients who have, sadly, passed away. These awards were presented to Connie and Keith Allmark for the work they undertook to support the Burmese

people, both here and in Myanmar, and Mr Salim Youssef, who was a member of my Ministerial Multicultural Advisory Council and founder of the Australian Arab Association. The loss of these titans of our community is felt and I am pleased we are able to recognise their contribution to the state. I am sure that members will join me in commending all the winners and nominees of the Western Australian Multicultural Awards 2023.

The SPEAKER: I congratulate those people, too, particularly Sunday Aryang, who is a proud product of Midvale Primary School.

NATIONAL YOUNG LEADERS DAY

Statement by Minister for Youth

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Youth) [12.13 pm]: I rise to inform the house of the National Young Leaders Day event that I had the pleasure of attending on Monday afternoon at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre. I was invited by Halogen to deliver a keynote speech about my personal leadership journey to 1 200 young Western Australians at National Young Leaders Day. Students were selected by their schools and community groups to attend National Young Leaders Day in recognition of their leadership potential. I enjoyed getting to meet some of the school captains from Serpentine Primary School, Coodanup College and Lumen Christi College. Other speakers on the day included former Dockers captain Matthew Pavlich, surfing legend Eliza Greene and published author and illustrator James Foley. The organisers set the bar high in the opportunity for me to present at the event. However, I was impressed by the audience members' engagement as they took the opportunity to listen and ask questions to help guide them on their own leadership pursuits.

Although I gave some insights and tips on what it takes to be a leader, it appeared that the audience was most impressed when I shared the fact that I met my husband in grade 1, which resulted in many of the students looking around the room nervously at their fellow classmates. As Minister for Youth, part of my job is to listen to young people about what issues in our community matter to them. Whether an issue is about the environment, mental wellbeing or negotiating the online world, young people always come with a forward-thinking and proactive mindset about ways we can work together to achieve positive change. I would like to give a special shout-out to Halogen and the master of ceremonies, DJ Raf, who managed an impressive game of Twister involving 1 200 students in a confined space. As members of Parliament, we are very fortunate to have such an impressive cohort of young leaders and events like National Young Leaders Day to underscore the importance of recognising this future generation of leaders and providing them with the opportunities to thrive.

PRINGLE VILLAGE — KALGOORLIE–BOULDER

Statement by Minister for Lands

MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Lands) [12.15 pm]: I rise to inform the house on the progress of the Kalgoorlie–Boulder aged-care accommodation Pringle Village. Pringle Village opened in 2019, supported by a \$9.8 million investment in state government funding, providing contemporary independent living in Kalgoorlie–Boulder. The village includes 49 units and helps to meet the high demand for independent living options in the region. Mid-last year, I announced that the state government was unlocking crown land for a major expansion of the facility. This expansion added an additional 15.6 hectares of crown land available at the site worth \$6.6 million.

I can now update the house that the McGowan government has amended the land-use purpose for the village precinct from “aged care” to now include “health and allied services”. Our government is committed to ensuring that regional WA has access to the services it needs. This move will allow for a wider range of community health services to be delivered from the site for the Kalgoorlie community. I congratulate Doug Daws, OAM, on his advocacy in this space, and I acknowledge the hardworking member for Kalgoorlie, Ali Kent, and the members representing Kalgoorlie in the other place, who I know are committed to seeing social housing delivered in their community and will be happy with the announcement made.

Local not-for-profit child health services provider Full Circle Therapies is proposing to sublease a portion of the reserve to expand its operations and support the delivery of a range of common-use facilities and allied health services for both seniors and children in the Kalgoorlie–Boulder area. The state government previously committed \$2.8 million towards Full Circle Therapies' plans to build a new multipurpose health services facility at the site. The provider will now work with Goldfields Masonic Homes and the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder to progress a formal proposal for the Pringle Village land. This is a great example of how our government is utilising our land assets to drive positive outcomes for the community in housing and service delivery. I look forward to the continued success of the site.

EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT SECTOR AWARDS

Statement by Minister for Early Childhood Education

MS S.E. WINTON (Wanneroo — Minister for Early Childhood Education) [12.17 pm]: On Friday, I had the great pleasure of attending the inaugural Early Childhood Learning and Development Sector Awards. Early childhood educators play such a huge role in supporting our young children's development and growth, so it is really important

that we have these types of events to recognise the amazing work this sector does. These new awards were organised and hosted by Child Australia, a not-for-profit organisation that supports and provides services to early childhood educators and professionals, parents, children and the community. I want to thank Tina and the team at Child Australia for putting on such a great event. Goodstart, Regional Early Education and Development, Ngala and YWA, supported by major sponsor BHP, and other sector organisations Xplor, CTAS Education, Wanslea and Busy Bees, also contributed to the delivery of these fantastic awards.

Eight individuals and organisations were recognised for their commitment and outstanding work in delivering quality outcomes for WA children and their families. The winners and finalists were selected from across hundreds of nominations in Western Australia, a testament to the many high-calibre professionals working in the early childhood education and care sector. They were assessed by an independent judging panel with respected sector experts. I extend my congratulations to Lee Peing Lim for the Outstanding Educator Award; Rachael Baker for the Rising Star Award; Rocky Beaton for the Excellence in Leadership Award; Corrine Bell for the Outstanding Indigenous Educator Award; Lara Bowler, who is doing her great work in my electorate, for the Outstanding Early Childhood Teacher Award; Sarah Mountford for the Outstanding Child Allied Health Practitioner Award; Pachamama Early Education and Childcare and Activity Centre for the Excellence in Innovative and Sustainable Practice Award; and Child Australia, West Pilbara Mobile Children's Service for the Excellence in Community Engagement or School Partnerships Award.

I would also like to acknowledge the finalists in these awards who have also made significant contributions to early childhood learning and development and to the lives of children and their families. I look forward to continuing to work with the early childhood sector and future opportunities to recognise and shout out to the world about the important work that they do—work that makes such a difference to the lives of children and families every single day.

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Membership Change — Motion

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Leader of the House) [12.20 pm]: I move —

- (1) That the member for Victoria Park be discharged from the Parliamentary Services Committee and the member for Hillarys be appointed in her place.
- (2) That the Legislative Council be acquainted accordingly.

In speaking to this motion, there has obviously been a change to positions within the Parliamentary Labor Party and this motion reflects the need to change the membership of this important committee of Parliament.

Question put and passed.

GUARDIANSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (MEDICAL RESEARCH) BILL 2023

Receipt

Bill received from the Council.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2023

Second Reading

Resumed from 21 March.

MR P. LILBURNE (Carine) [12.22 pm]: Today we are gathered here to discuss a bill that will deliver significant reforms for the local government of Western Australia. The Local Government Amendment Bill 2023 is a further example of the progressive nature of the McGowan Labor government's legislative agenda in this place. It is much-needed and long-awaited reform that will recognise the importance of collaboration between local governments, promotes accountability and transparency and acknowledges the unique perspective and experiences of Aboriginal Western Australians. Earlier this month, I was elected to the Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation, which scrutinises regulations and other legislative instruments made by local governments. As part of that process, the committee may seek an undertaking to amend a regulation or other instrument. For example, I am interested in the City of Joondalup's Waste Local Law 2017. As members of Parliament of WA move forward with this bill, it is important to keep in mind that these principles must be applied in a way that considers the unique conditions of each district.

Local governments must work towards involving First Nations people in decision-making and this bill will provide a platform for that objective. The inclusion of reconciliation action plans and engaging in native title and land custodianship matters is a step in the right direction. The development of the community engagement charter will ensure a stronger framework for engagement between local governments and the community. For instance, local governments across Western Australia are continuing to work to involve First Nations people in decision-making by recognising and elevating the voice of Aboriginal people in discussions about local issues, developing and implementing reconciliation action plans and engaging in native title and land custodianship matters.

Additionally, this bill will formalise the tiering of local governments to acknowledge the vast diversity of the 139 local governments governed under the Local Government Act. It is crucial to ensure that regulations are matched to the unique needs and circumstances of each local government. This is especially important for financial reporting requirements that reflect the size and complexity of their operations. One such reporting mechanism is the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal, an independent body with statutory responsibilities to inquire into and set remuneration for various senior public officers. This bill also delivers on formalising the tiering of local governments that recognises the immense diversity of the 139 local governments that operate under the act. There are huge differences in local governments across Western Australia, from metropolitan councils with more than 200 000 residents to rural shires with only a few hundred people living in the district. It is important that regulations can be matched to the size and complexity of local governments. Some local governments have more than 1 000 staff, while others are run with fewer than 30 employees. These changes mean that regulations can set different requirements for larger and smaller local governments. The tiering will again ensure that the financial reporting requirement reflects the size and complexity of a local government's operations. Rural shires do not operate with the same level of complexity that many metropolitan local governments do.

The bill will introduce council plans that simplify how local governments plan for future service delivery. These plans are important for local governments to consider long-term needs, risks, threats and trends when planning for services and facilities. The department will provide clear templates for local governments to use or adapt, and the time frame for a plan review will be extended. Council plans will replace strategic community plans and will need to be reviewed only every eight years, allowing local governments to focus on future service delivery. The option provided by the McGowan Labor government is an attempt to reduce red tape for local governments.

This bill will also introduce optional preferential voting that gives electors the greatest degree of choice to indicate their preferences at the ballot box. The use of optional preferential voting will bring council elections more in line with state and federal elections. Preferential voting has been used in state elections since 1907 and in federal elections since 1918. Voters understand preferential voting because they use it in all the other elections. Additionally, the bill includes provisions that will allow local governments to fill a vacancy on a council that arises within a year of election with the next highest polling candidate from the last election to fill a role or purpose. This option will save money for ratepayers because extraordinary elections are a significant cost. For example, a mayoral election can typically cost the same as a full ordinary election because a ballot must be mailed to every ratepayer. Recent local government elections conducted by the Western Australian Electoral Commission have cost on average about \$4.50 an elector. For instance, an extraordinary election of a mayor of a large metropolitan government area could cost more than half a million dollars. Extraordinary elections can also divert a local government's operating resources away from delivering public services.

This bill will also set limits based on a local government's population and recommend the number of councillors who should be present in each council. The proposed reform acknowledges that a council is more like a board than a Parliament, and councils work best when all members work through differences of opinion and find consensus to deliver for the local community. The bill aims to provide consistency of representation and formalise the link between the number of electors and council members. The bill before us will mandate that every council adopt a community engagement charter to provide a stronger framework for engagement between local government and the community.

The bill includes regulations to set requirements for how local governments engage with their community, including a ratepayer satisfaction survey, which is to be held at least once every four years for band 1 and 2 councils. The bill before us today will establish a statewide standard caretaker period for local governments. Caretaker periods increase public confidence and trust in the integrity of government. They maintain the separation between elected representatives and public service. Local governments should not be making controversial decisions during the usual election period. Caretaker periods are in place for state government elections and they work.

The bill includes provisions that will address the issue of dubious leases that support enrolment claims, allowing ineligible individuals to run for office or vote in the city's elections. This is an important step to ensure that the electoral process is fair and that the elected representatives truly represent the will of the people. As we know, a person must appear on the electoral roll for a district to run for election to the council of that district. However, the City of Perth inquiry has found that dubious leases were constructed to support enrolment claims, allowing ineligible individuals to run for office or vote in the city's elections. To address this issue, the bill includes measures such as minimum lease periods and exclusions for leases of a very small area to ensure that only legitimate property owners or occupiers will be able to appear on the relevant electoral roll.

Council communication agreements are critical for local government administration. They establish a professional relationship between council members, the CEO and other staff of a local government, which helps to prevent conflict and dysfunction. It is essential to provide council members with relevant information that supports them to perform their duties effectively. The bill will introduce council communication agreements that will set a clear standard for how council members are to seek and receive information. The CEO and council will have to agree on the terms of the agreement, providing local governments with the flexibility to put in place their own agreements or use the default.

Parental leave is an essential part of supporting families and people with children. The bill will provide council members with the ability to take parental leave from their duties on the council to focus on being with their family. The provision of specific parental leave is intended to support a diverse range of people to serve on their local council.

In conclusion, this bill will deliver significant reform that will help local governments to work better for their communities. These reforms will ensure that local government authorities remain accountable, while also creating efficiencies that will ultimately benefit all members of the community. I encourage all members to support the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.A. Munday): The member for Murray–Wellington.

MRS R.M.J. CLARKE (Murray–Wellington) [12.34 pm]: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker, and welcome back.

The McGowan government is continuing to deliver the most significant reforms to the system of local government in Western Australia in over 25 years. The Local Government Amendment Bill 2023 will deliver a range of reforms to give greater transparency for and accountability to ratepayers, as well as cost savings and efficiencies for local governments. These reforms will introduce a number of principles into the act, including recognising that Aboriginal Western Australians should have a greater involvement in local decision-making; formally recognising tiering of local governments in the act based on the existing salaries and allowances framework; reforming council planning to streamline the way local governments plan for their future service delivery; reintroducing preferential voting to better align local governments with state and federal elections—this is a great outcome as the community will now have a say in who leads their shire and more people will be given the opportunity to put their hands up for such an important role; the implementation of reforms to the size and structure of local councils, including ensuring that council size is better aligned to the size of the local population; and establishing community engagement charters to set a clear standard for how local governments engage with a diverse range of people within their district.

A local government area with a population of fewer than 5 000 will be able to choose to have between five and seven members on the council. In my electorate, that would be the Shire of Waroona. A local government area with a population between 5 000 and 75 000 will be able to choose to have between five and nine members. For me, that would be the Shires of Murray and Harvey. A local government area with a population above 75 000 will be able to choose to have between nine and 15 members. In Murray–Wellington, I have three shires and a small part of the City of Mandurah. The Shire of Murray is in band 3, so a change for that council will be that it will have a directly elected mayor or president—we have a president in the Shire of Murray—but there will be no change to the council's numbers as it currently has only eight members. The Shire of Harvey is a band 4 council. It will need to reduce its council representation by at least four and also have a directly elected president. The Shire of Waroona is a band 5 council. It has already reduced its number of council members contingent on this legislation coming into place, and it will not need to have a directly elected president as it is a small shire with a population of fewer than 5 000 people. The City of Mandurah is a band 7 council. It already has a directly elected mayor and this legislation will have no impact on its council numbers.

These changes are remarkable because they will make councils more transparent in their community engagement with their constituents. There will also be more transparency in the reporting from the CEOs, council members and staff. I know that with the diverse communities in the four shires in Murray–Wellington, it can be challenging to ensure that regional shires meet the needs of everyone. There is a mix of rural and suburban–type living in all my shires, and it can make for very difficult decisions on how to deliver infrastructure and services to the region. I have worked closely with all my shires over the past six years and have seen the difference in the way they communicate messages to their wide community within their own shires.

I particularly like the introduction of the principles in the act, including recognising that Aboriginal Western Australians should have a greater involvement in local decision-making. This is a great step forward towards reconciliation for our First Nations people.

Establishing community engagement charters to set a clear standard for how local governments engage with a diverse range of people within their district is a great policy. I have seen throughout the region that some councils do community engagement well, while others do not do it as well. I believe that bringing the community along on the journey is an important part of local planning for services and infrastructure. It is important to keep members of the community informed and engaged in decisions that will affect them.

I will talk about some projects on which I have worked closely with the community and my shires to deliver for Murray–Wellington. In the Shire of Harvey, we have had achievements of \$10 million for the establishment of rail access to Kemerton Industrial Park and a \$10.5 million investment into Kemerton and Shotts Industrial Parks to create opportunities for business. We opened 19 new drug and alcohol dependency beds at the Palmerston Association facility in Brunswick Junction. We put \$1.75 million into the new Yarloop Community Centre. We have built stages 1 and 2 of the Brunswick River Cottages. We have created female facilities at both the Harvey Brunswick Leschenault Football Club and the Harvey Bulls Football Club. We have done a maintenance blitz and added science labs at all primary schools. There are outstanding commitments for which the Shire of Harvey received funding, but it has not delivered. One is the upgrade of the Harvey Senior Citizens Centre. There is also funding for

the Leschenault Leisure Centre in Australind and the Harvey trails and adventure precinct. I hope that as a result of the local government reforms, the Shire of Harvey will start to listen to the community and get on with these projects, which are much needed but are sitting dormant, with the community left in the dark on the progress of these vital services.

In the Shire of Murray, we have invested \$45 million in the Food Innovation Precinct Western Australia and \$33 million in the Bushfire Centre of Excellence, the first of its kind in Australia. We also made a \$10.3 million investment in Pinjarra Senior High School for its performing arts facility and sports hall, which will be opened next term; I am looking forward to that. Other projects have included the extension of Munday Avenue at the back of the Pinjarra industrial park, the South Yunderup sporting pavilion, the Dwellingup Trails and Visitor Centre—millions of dollars have gone into that—and the Bedingfeld Park aged accommodation, with 25 beds for dementia patients. The only commitments outstanding at the moment are the Pinjarra heavy haulage deviation, which is going through planning and environmental processes, and the Ravenswood Community Centre, which is currently being constructed offsite and will be brought in on a truck. Those are the only outstanding commitments in the Shire of Murray, so I am very proud of the Shire of Murray. Over my six years, with every project that we have delivered on, it has got on with building them. All the projects that we have delivered were based on community feedback that those projects were needed. The Shire of Murray does a lot of community engagement. I am very proud of what it does.

In the Shire of Waroona, we have the achievements of the Preston Beach Community Centre, the \$1.8 million funding contribution to the Waroona housing options village aged-care accommodation, the Waroona Community Men's Shed, the Waroona West fire station and the Drakesbrook Weir upgrades. Again, when the Shire of Waroona got all its funding, it just got on with all its projects—there was no hesitation. There was lots of community engagement. Again, I am very proud of what this small shire of fewer than 5 000 constituents has achieved. Commitments that are outstanding but which we are finally getting on with are the Waroona community precinct revitalisation—that is starting right now—and the Preston Beach all-access ramp. This is why I really love small shires like the Shire of Waroona. I suggested that we get a community reference group together to come up with the best idea on how to deliver that project, and it will have its first meeting next week with residents of Preston Beach and the council to come up with what the community wants to see in Preston Beach. I love small shires that get out and speak to their communities, rather than just doing things off their own bat. Obviously, we have all the slip lanes along Forrest Highway into Binningup, Myalup, Preston Beach and Forestry Road. I am really proud of my great working relationship with the Shires of Murray and Waroona. They deliver and listen to their communities.

I would like to commend the bill to the house. These reforms are long overdue, but I believe they are going to make a huge difference, particularly in regional communities that have a diverse group of residents, from rural to residential. Shires need to be held accountable. I believe these reforms are going to do that for us.

MS M. BEARD (North West Central) [12.43 pm]: I rise as the shadow Minister for Local Government and confirm that I am the lead speaker for the opposition on the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023. I note that the opposition will not be opposing this legislation. I first want to acknowledge all councillors and council workers for the enormous contribution they make to our communities, our towns and our regions across Western Australia; it is definitely not an easy job. What was highlighted in the speeches of many members yesterday is that local government is probably the hardest, least well funded and most highly regulated level of government. I have seen that as I have travelled throughout my electorate and gone to council meetings at which councillors have been confronted by groups of people who really have a lot to say, and they have had to manage that. It is a difficult challenge; I do not envy them at all.

Shires and councils are one of the major employers in many towns and regions. Especially in a lot of smaller towns, they are the employer of choice for a lot of people. They provide lots of opportunities and pathways for local people and, in many cases, are the glue that holds it all together. They are a critical part of the community, particularly as we move further away from the metropolitan area. They are often the place where people start their careers. As members would know, regional councillors are definitely the heartbeat of their communities and they are all things to all people, so I commend them for that.

I think we also need to remember that councillors are often faced with making difficult and contentious decisions. As they say, you can never keep everyone happy all of the time. However, it is particularly difficult for the cohort of people who live in very small towns, because there is only one supermarket to do their shopping or one post office, and if they have just announced something that they need to do but people are not going to be happy about, they cannot escape any of their constituents in any way, shape or form. There is a fair bit of pressure on a lot of people who sit on councils, especially when there is a lot of work to do and a lot of difficult decisions to make. Just last night, I spoke with the council CEO of one of the towns in my electorate, who said that he would be playing "Fireman Sam" that night. He was going to help out with training for the bush fire brigade after work. These are the kinds of things that happen; people go above and beyond when they work in local councils throughout our state. That is a credit to them.

Another thing we need to note is that councillors often run small businesses and have limited staff, so they are multitasking, especially as we get further out of the metro area. Many councillors are also the ambulance drivers,

fire brigade crew or officials at the yacht club—they wear multiple hats across their communities. This makes it difficult for them in terms of managing their time and the challenges of the decisions they make or direction they may or may not take within their shires. Their workloads are definitely increased. A reduction in the number of councillors across smaller communities will potentially result in an increase in the workload of councillors. Despite having smaller populations in these areas, people really are spread out across large geographical areas.

It is no secret to anyone that it is getting harder and harder to get people to put up their hand for local government in a lot of cases. It is difficult at election time. One aspect that I think is a challenge for that cohort of people, and it is something that we do not often consider, is their mental health and the support for our councillors in that space. A lot of them are very busy people who may have their own businesses, work in the education system and have another half a dozen hats, so it is often difficult for them to make decisions during difficult times, especially when dealing with situations like natural disasters. There have been many examples—Yarloop, the Kimberley, Kalbarri—when they have had to not only deal with their own personal disasters, but also work on behalf of the community during what are usually very volatile times. It is a tricky time. I sometimes question whether there is enough support in that space, when they may feel like they are the only ones with their backs against the wall and that they are not getting the support they need from their communities, for lots of reasons. We know how challenging and relentless public scrutiny can be. There is no reprieve from that public pressure, especially when one lives in a really small town or small community. It can be relentless.

Review and reform is always important and should lead to improvements in efficiencies; I believe this bill will achieve that. However, in our very large and diverse state, we need to be very conscious that one size does not fit all. Flexibility is definitely needed to avoid a cookie-cutter approach for different regions and requirements. There are 17 towns and 13 councils in my electorate, and they are spread across 800 000 square kilometres. The geographical distances are incredible. We have Carnarvon, Cue, Exmouth, Meekatharra, Murchison, Northampton, Sandstone, Shark Bay, Upper Gascoyne, Ashburton, Wiluna and Yalgoo, going out to the Ngaanyatjarra lands on the border. These communities are hundreds of kilometres apart, so when I heard the member for Cockburn saying yesterday that he doorknocks every weekend, I was a little envious! It is definitely a totally different landscape and I think that highlights the vast differences we have in our state and the need to cater for that when we are making decisions and developing legislation that will have to fit across the whole state. Many of these places are remote and do not have the services and facilities that larger centres often do. Many of the shire councils are one-stop shops; they are the resource centre or they might have the post office attached. They wear multiple hats, so it is a very different landscape.

I touched on this before, but in some respects it is difficult. There is no anonymity when you live in a small town. In some of the larger councils, councillors can actually escape if they make a decision to do something that people will eventually realise will have a positive long-term impact; they can actually travel to the next suburb and do their shopping, or whatever they need to do, and there is some relief! But there is definitely no anonymity in some of the smaller towns. That, I think, goes back to my earlier comments about mental health.

There have been comments made around the population sizes in the regions versus the very large metro councils. Although on the surface it may make perfect sense, we need to remember the geographical locations and remoteness of some of the smaller towns. Some of my friends and family in Perth have no idea who sits on their council, whereas in the smaller towns even the kids living there know who the councillors are. There is a different dynamic; there is a totally different make-up in terms of where the council sits in the community. In smaller towns, the council building is the main building in the town, which is very different from the city. If I were to ask some of my friends or family members in the metro area where the council building is, they would probably have to think hard about which building it might be. I guess it is just the case that councils often have a much higher profile in smaller locations. My point is that shires in the regions are sometimes more visible and are directly involved at a grassroots level. Those shire councils take on many different roles, particularly in community development and taking the lead on many of the things that other groups take the lead on in larger communities.

There are 110 clauses in the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023, and it is the government's first tranche of local government reform under Minister Carey. There are some non-electoral reforms included in the bill—specifically, standardised meeting procedures, parental leave entitlement for council members and the requirement to publish annual performance indicators for CEOs. Some people have expressed reservations about this when I have travelled around. Although people understand these reforms and definitely support the transparency measures, there is a view that some of this information is generally kept between employers and employees, but I guess the devil will be in the detail. In terms of attracting strong candidates, I guess they just hope that the publication of that information over and above the norm will not deter anyone from wanting to apply for those positions. That is a concern that has been raised in the comments that have been made to me.

There is also a requirement for the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries to establish a panel to approve members to perform the role of the independent person on the CEO recruitment panels. The suggestion was made to me by a few people that that could possibly be contentious, or used for ministerial intervention in some way. I guess there is a bit of a lack of understanding around what that might look like. I understand

that the second tranche of legislation will be due in December, or early next year, after the October elections. I also understand that when the Leader of the House was local government minister, he suggested that a green bill for the second tranche be made available; perhaps the current minister might be able to clarify that for me.

For me as shadow Minister for Women's Interests, the provision of parental leave for councillors is a big win for women and families. I really welcome that change. I assume there has been consideration of and provision made for these roles to be backfilled while councillors are on parental leave, to allow continuity of council business, but I think parental leave is a really positive step. The member for Collie-Preston noted yesterday that that is particularly hard in towns; there is no childcare or family support to enable people to step up and take on council roles.

A greater level of transparency for communities will be provided. That is a definite positive, but I imagine that with it will come greater administrative burdens and costs. That is also something that people have been grappling with, but it is offset by the fact that a greater level of transparency will be provided to communities. Online registers and video and audio streaming for smaller communities will also provide more transparency. There is a remote council in my electorate that has already installed videostreaming equipment; the only issue it has is that it still only has 3G, so it cannot hook up any of it! Council members are disappointed, because they are ready to rock'n'roll, but they just do not have the ability to do so from a technology point of view. I guess the regions will ultimately catch up with the technology, which is where we want to get to.

I thank the minister for listening in respect of optional preferential voting and taking that path, which has become the norm for all local government elections; popular votes for mayors and presidents in the larger, band 1 and 2 local governments, will not change. Some councils have noted to me the potential for factions or alliances to result from this change. I refer to a 2014 article in *The West Australian* about the Council Connect forums; I am not sure whether they still exist. The article states —

In a move that could heighten the level of overt party politics in local government, a party email advertising the WA Labor Council Connect forum says it is for “all interested WA Labor members who are committed to working through local government to see the ideals, platform and policies of WA Labor applied and realised at a local level”.

That was in 2014; I guess that is where those comments and concerns come from, but whether that forum still exists, I am unsure.

People have also raised with me whether there will be costs incurred by the Western Australian Electoral Commission and councils. Clearly, councils are stepping up to deal with matters that have not been provided for by the state government, including housing; medical professionals, in places such as Quairading; crime patrols, such as those in Belmont, Cockburn, Carnarvon and Halls Creek—a number of councils are providing their own security and crime patrols; childcare services; sporting and recreational facilities—a lot of shires need to step into that space; mid-tier transport proposals; transport planning; and e-scooter regulation management. There are a number of councils making decisions in those spaces, and their workload is large.

The financial implications are worth noting for some of the proposed reforms, such as the live streaming of council meetings, the publishing of various registers, the costs associated with independent members of the CEO recruitment and audit committees, and the impact of the introduction of preferential voting.

Regarding the proposal for mandatory public elections of mayors and presidents of larger local governments, some smaller communities believe it is best for a council to select their president or mayor, and they are worried the change will potentially discourage people from putting their hand up and be afraid to step up into that role. That is one of the fears that they have.

The other issue is backfilling vote counts. I understand that an election is a snapshot in time. The situation that occurred with the upper house member Dawkins is an example and I gather that we will be putting this system into local government. If there was a count back at some point in time, there may be a reason that the person is not suitable for that position anymore, no-one was next in line or the person who would have filled that position may not be available. I am interested to get some feedback about that decision-making process.

Standardising meeting procedures is a positive step, but, in summary, some of the councils that I have spoken with are not happy about some elements.

Generally speaking, however, everyone can see that this legislation is moving in the right direction and will create greater transparency. I understand that the time line to pass this legislation and the new rules should make it effective for the next election in October. A few of the people I spoke with pointed out that implementing those changes in time for that to occur may cause confusion for local governments.

Regarding the removal of wards and the effect on local councils, questions were asked about hamlets, particularly in my area. Kalbarri has a shire office in the Shire of Northampton. Northampton has a shire office as well. Coral Bay has a representative 240 kilometres from Carnarvon. These places have a very small population of residents, but a large number of visitors. Wards also cover off some Aboriginal communities that may have different needs and requirements.

Regarding the protocols around relationships between councillors and staff, we need to understand the detail around that, what that might look like moving forward and how it will fit.

This bill has highlighted that there is a need for greater transparency in communities. It will streamline the reporting process and, hopefully, allow some synergies to occur across the local government space. I want to thank the minister for his work towards the proposed changes to this legislation, and I look forward to the consideration in detail stage, which I think will be later today or tomorrow.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [1.03 pm]: I rise to support the member for North West Central and make a brief contribution on the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023. In general terms, I am relatively happy with it. The minister has done a pretty good job in bringing things together. In general terms, his communication with the council sector has been pretty good over the last couple of years. I caught up with him in Tambellup a year or so back. I think it was good that the minister was out and about getting to know those particular councils. Certainly, many members—including the Leader of the House walking through the chamber—have come through the world of local government.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Noted, Minister for Local Government!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Many members on either side of the house have come through the ranks from local government. In some ways, it is not a bad training ground for potential state or federal politicians. I have not had that experience, I have never been in local government myself, but my dad was the deputy president of the Shire of Katanning in the mid-1970s. I remember his level of involvement. Some of the local people who came down on him were not happy with whatever issue it might have been at the time and I remember some of that grief. It is important to recognise, as the member for North West Central pointed out, that councillors put themselves out there. They are generally trying to do the right thing by their community, as I think most members in the chamber are as well. At times we receive that criticism and, at most times, we have to grin and bear it. People in the community need to recognise the sacrifices that have been made to people's families and friends and the amount of time that they put in. I thought I would point that out.

My electorate of Roe has 41 towns and 18 local governments that I work with. As I always point out, it is 106 000 square kilometres, which is 5 910 times the size of the member for Mount Lawley's electorate. Like the member for North West Central's electorate, we have our challenges dealing with local governments and communities spread far and wide.

While we are talking about consultation and so forth, it gives us a chance to reflect on what this government has done for representation on a local level. Once again, I want to express my concern about the way the Premier and the Attorney General, who is in the chamber right now, came in here after the 2021 election and said that electoral reform was not on the agenda. They came in here and barged through electoral reform, which was not on the agenda prior to the 2021 election. I was disappointed in the way the government did that because constituents were saying to me that there was no way the government would do that, as we have remote communities out in the lands and there is no way that they could get genuine representation with reform. There is no way the member for Kalgoorlie or the member for North West Central could cover it all; it is not humanly possible. Those remote communities will not be getting a fair deal. I want to once again express my disappointment. The Premier was in Albany prior to the election, and when he was interviewed by Daniel Mercer, he said seven times that electoral reform was not on the agenda. Sure enough, it was well and truly on the Attorney General's agenda, and electoral reform was one of the first things that he came through with. That is very relevant when we talk about representation. We will end up with a challenging situation. Where will the delineation be for members in the upper house? Where are they going to cover? Will it all be about legislation and so forth and not so much about representation? I know that our members of the Nationals WA, who represent the Agricultural Region very well, will continue trying to do the right thing, but I worry about what will happen in the space of the next 10, 12 or 15 years. Maybe the conservative side of politics will get control of both houses and unwind that legislation, because I think that would be better for representation—better for the people of our remote communities and the like. I wanted to make that point before I start.

As I said earlier to the Minister for Local Government, I generally feel that most of these changes are reasonable. From my perspective, it is important to recognise that councillors, like us, are democratically elected. On the optional preference voting, I was interested to hear the member for Cockburn give us a bit of history from 1918. Apparently, the Country Party and the Nationalist Party brought in optional preference voting. I must admit that I was not aware of that. It was interesting to hear his contribution. As many members have pointed out, our state system generally is going down that pathway, so there is probably no real reason why our local government cannot.

I want to point out some of the demands that I think have significantly increased over recent decades. When we look at the provision of local government services, we see that there has been a significant increase in liability for the maintenance and renewal of ageing infrastructure as well as the provision of a range of new services. These increased demands really require increased funding over time. That is the challenge for this government. I remember we had the puppy farming legislation and it was basically, "No problem. We'll bring in the legislation and then we'll

hand it over to local government to implement.” It is fine to put through the legislation, but if local governments keep being loaded up, there will come a point at which they cannot absorb it. They will not be able to sustain all the increased costs that go with it. That is one thing I want to point out. Some of the other things this government is loading on local governments include climate change and environmental issues. That is fine but remember there is a cost involved. Our local governments seem to be where the buck stops. They are the ones that have to front up and put one of their officers out there at the coalface. They are the ones that have to incur the extra expense.

Another thing that local governments do is provide a link when state governments fund various projects. Local governments have to implement them. As members know, in my past I was the chairman of the Great Southern Development Commission. That gave me the opportunity to be on the Regional Development Council, which is the nine chairs of the development commissions. We worked closely with our local governments. I was also on the Western Australian Regional Development Trust, which oversaw the quality spending of royalties for regions funding. Our local governments were very important in putting those projects in place. There was \$20-odd million in royalties for regions funding for the Esperance foreshore, but the local government was very much involved. It is now still very much involved with the maintenance of it. That project was a fantastic piece of royalties for regions spending, but the maintenance and upkeep of it continue with the Esperance local government. It is a great thing for that community and all our tourists who come through. They love walking up and down the foreshore. As the member for North West Central said, there are now scooters, which is another thing that local government has been drawn into in some ways. All these things add to the package.

I want to reflect on my local town of Katanning. The multicultural flag project was another great royalties for regions project. Once again, the project was implemented by the shire. We have 42 different nationalities in Katanning. As people drive into town, it is great to see the flags of all the different countries represented in our town. The multicultural Katanning Harmony Festival is on this weekend, and the minister and I will both attend. It is a great celebration of our multicultural community. From that perspective, once again, local governments do a great job in implementing these projects.

I am looking at some statistics that I am sure other members have run through over the last couple of days. There are 138 local governments. They vary in size from 1.5 square kilometres to 370 000 square kilometres. Their populations range from just over 100 to 220 000. Members of the joint alliance of the Liberal and National opposition were out at the City of Joondalup, City of Wanneroo and City of Stirling last Monday. It was interesting to see the size of those local governments, the projects that they are dealing with and the fact that those three large local governments represent nearly a quarter of the state’s population. They have a lot of responsibility. Those three local governments represent a quarter of the state’s population. We had a great day, getting a handle on what those three local governments deal with. It was very interesting. The number of staff ranges from fewer than 10 to over 1 000, depending on the local government. That is one thing I want to point out to the minister. We have had all these discussions about amalgamations and all the rest of it, really before my time, but I think local government is the most important employer in not only every local government area, but also most regional towns. Local governments provide stable employment, whether it is for a grader driver, a surveyor or whoever it might be.

Local government does a great job in providing stability and it really is a key element of our regional communities. That is another element, from my perspective. When we have our zone council meetings, it is great to see the way that our councils work together. It is great to see the way that Main Roads Western Australia and our local government advisory committees generally work together well, but the funding has to go with it. All our councils work hard, as does Main Roads, to identify projects, but, unfortunately, sometimes the funding does not come through. We must recognise the good work that regional road groups put together information on and some of the issues they are dealing with.

We have discussed CEOs. As the minister knows, they are very important to our local governments. We know that CEOs can wield influence over their elected members, but I think in general terms that it is encouraging that the extra training and skills our councillors are gaining help them to work with our CEOs and not necessarily be overly influenced. I think it is really important. I noticed recently that there are now CEOs coming from outside the local government circle. They are starting to appear from commercial businesses, the mining sector and all sorts of places. I think that is a good thing. It is good to have a bit of diversity in that circle.

I think it is really important that councillors cannot just turn up to a council meeting and read the agenda while they are sitting there. They need to be prepared, just like we are when we go to a meeting or when we want to talk about legislation or whatever else it might be. They need to prepare themselves because they are representing their community. They need to read their agenda a few days before and ask questions. It works from both angles, from my perspective. Of course, there is more to being a CEO than just knowing the Local Government Act. That is why it does not hurt to have some CEOs who come from outside the sector.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What I have seen lately from some city council’s is red tape. I talk to a range of people in meetings and the like who are slightly exasperated at different times by their dealings over a property development,

rezoning or whatever it might be. There is a certain level of exasperation about all the layers that sit below the actual councillors and the CEO and about how hard it is to cut through, I suppose you could say. I think that sometimes wears down people and sometimes it shuts down development. People can sustain it for a few months, 12 months or 18 months, but after a couple of years they just cannot handle it anymore and they say, “Oh well, I’ll go off and spend my money somewhere else. I’ll go and buy some shares or do something where I just have to bank the dividend cheque rather than do a development that might actually help out the community.” From that perspective, I think it is important that the minister, the department and everyone involved is always keeping their eye on the red-tape scenario.

Certainly, the other part of it that I want to mention is this evolving scenario whereby our regional councils especially are now having to delve into issues that are not really within their remit, but they do not have a choice. They have to look at supplying a doctor. We saw on the front page of *The West Australian* a few weeks ago the situation in Quairading. The Quairading council was out there advertising with a \$1 million price tag to retain a doctor. I have several shires in my electorate that are doing the same sort of thing. They provide housing, funding, subsidies and all the rest of it. It is a bit of a challenge, when, really, to be honest, it is not actually the core business of a council, but it has evolved that way, just like accommodation. I am sure that we will speak about that further this afternoon in our private members’ business motion on housing, but certainly it seems to be falling more so onto our councils to provide accommodation at different times. That is an issue that I would like to see change over time. Our councils are getting loaded up with those different elements.

Obviously, we have our table of the way councils have been affected and which councils have been affected by the change to having a directly elected mayor or president or changes to wards. Obviously, the wards system is not as prevalent as it used to be, but I think the member for North West Central made a couple of good points, and that is that where we have smaller areas, localities or hamlets, the ward system was actually good in a way because the representative could go in to bat for that locality. As I said before, my dad was a councillor. He was on the west ward of the Katanning shire council. I remember clearly that he was there to represent those people to the west of the town, I guess. But, at the same time, I think wards are probably not as required as they used to be, so I can fully understand that. Having spoken to a couple of my local presidents and the like, I know that many of them have already adapted. This legislation will not really affect their lives because they have already adapted. They have reduced the number of councillors and they have rearranged things. They are quite comfortable with many parts of this legislation. From that perspective, personally, I am quite comfortable with the people electing their mayor. I think it is a good way to go. There cannot be any accusations of branch stacking or factions or whatever you like so I think that is good.

I have just a couple of final comments. The issue about council meetings and videostreaming is fine. I agree. I think it was handy in COVID times, but never underestimate being face to face. I think that is the number one priority, if possible. Of course, once again, internet connectivity is the challenge we have out there in the regions. Once again, especially in an area like the North West Central electorate, that is a real challenge.

Mr D.R. Michael: Maybe you shouldn’t have voted for Tony Abbott with the mess they made of the NBN.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I think the member is branching out to a fairly large subject.

Mr D.R. Michael: You brought it up.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am sure, having been in government for six years and having a surplus of \$6 billion in the last budget, it would not do the government any harm to maybe put some money towards improving connectivity in regional areas. I think I will leave Tony Abbott out of it and focus on this government and its \$13 billion of surpluses over the last three years. Quite frankly, our connectivity is not much better in the regions and, in some places, it is actually getting worse. Anyway, I digress.

I think the transparency and accountability measures, which was the eleventh point of the minister’s second reading speech, are important. I think that the twelfth point, setting a new requirement for publication of performance indicators, is a reasonable step, from my perspective. But I would like to make one other point about the spilling of a council that the minister made at the first point on page 3 of his second reading speech. I suppose, once again, the cost is an element that is going to be a bit of a challenge. I suspect that will not be required too often, minister.

But, in general terms, as the minister would understand, I am in favour of a majority of these changes. I also look forward to seeing, I guess, the second tranche of the legislation, but most of my councils are relatively comfortable with the changes and therefore I am comfortable. As the member for North West Central said, we will not be opposing the bill, but, as always, we look forward to just asking a few questions along the way. In general terms, we are relatively comfortable.

DR K. STRATTON (Nedlands) [1.28 pm]: I stand today to speak in support of the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023. I welcome in particular its purposes for greater transparency and accountability for us, as ratepayers. I also welcome the facilitation of good culture in local government and greater consistency that, in some councils, will require, and even perhaps force, outward-focused leadership. I also welcome the cost-saving measures and

other efficiencies for not just local governments themselves, but also the stakeholders and ratepayers with whom they engage. Ultimately, these reforms are designed to strengthen how local governments work to deliver services to local communities across Western Australia.

I want to focus on three particular aspects of the bill; namely, the introduction of the principles in the act, which includes the recognition that Aboriginal Western Australians should have greater involvement in local decision-making; the reintroduction of preferential voting to better align local governments with state and federal elections, but also to ensure there is a greater say for those ratepayers who participate in voting in local elections; and, finally, the reforms to the size and structure of local councils, in part to ensure that a council's size is better aligned to the size of its local population. Serving as I do inside the golden triangle, many of my local governments will be impacted by that. Those reforms to size and some of the responses of local councils indicate that these reforms invite us to consider what leadership and service looks like for the councils that will be required to make those changes.

I want to start with an introduction of the principles of the bill, which include a recognition that Aboriginal Western Australians should have greater involvement in local decision-making. This might include actions and responses such as recognising and elevating the voice of Aboriginal people in discussions about local issues, developing and implementing reconciliation action plans, and engaging in native title and land custodianship matters. The suburbs in my electorate are served by five key local councils. Like all my parliamentary colleagues, I attend citizenship ceremonies with each of those councils. It has been heartening, even in two years, to see the embedding of the practice and the offer of a welcome to country in most of those ceremonies. Over the past two years, I have observed a consistency in welcome to country being provided and not just as an acknowledgement, as important as they are for us all to make and provide.

I acknowledge the leadership of the previous Mayor of the City of Subiaco, Penny Taylor, for ensuring that there was consistently a welcome to country at all the city's citizenship ceremonies, not just on the specific January date—noting the irony of that being the only citizenship ceremony that had a welcome to country. She felt it was important for all new citizens in our community to connect with a welcome to country, and to experience it and to see it as being usual best practice.

At the last Town of Cambridge ceremony I attended, the elder who provided the welcome to country talked about some of the significant local places and what they meant to his family, including some of the lakes and waterways in the Town of Cambridge that my colleague the member for Churchlands is well familiar with. It was a wonderful and important connection to make. Even as a local, I learnt lots of new things about the traditional meanings of those places. The Town of Cambridge elected this year to shift the date of its January citizenship ceremony, noting that it wanted to ensure that the ceremony was held on a day that could both acknowledge and celebrate what it means to be a new citizen, while recognising the difficulty and complexity of 26 January. I said to Mayor Keri Shannon at the time, and I repeat it here, that I acknowledge and appreciate the town's leadership and courage in making such a decision, which it made relatively late when it understood that this was a possibility, keeping both new citizens and traditional owners at the heart of that decision.

It would be wonderful to see all local governments create and adopt a reconciliation plan. The Town of Cambridge is in the process of forming a working group to develop its very first reflect reconciliation action plan. Last year, the Nedlands council agreed to start work on a reconciliation plan to overcome past perceptions: in the words of one councillor, the council was racist and needed to be encouraged and supported to work harder to be a place that is inclusive and welcoming to all. It is unfortunate that this was not passed unanimously, with one councillor not in support of the City of Nedlands developing its first reconciliation action plan. However, despite his protestations, the reconciliation plan is now in progress, with a RAP report expected in the coming months. Changes that have been suggested for the city are an acknowledgement of country at the beginning of council meetings and other city events—that is, an acknowledgement as its starting point, not necessarily a welcome to country—and the flying of the Aboriginal flag outside council buildings.

It might be true that the seat of Nedlands has a very small Aboriginal population. We are home to the University of Western Australia, including Dandjoo Darbalung at St Catherine's College, which is an Indigenous support program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who reside in Perth while they complete their studies. In Noongar, Dandjoo Darbalung means "mixing together" and it is symbolic of the way that freshwater and saltwater mixes in the Swan River estuary across from the college. I have been a frequent visitor to St Cat's and I congratulate it on how inclusive it is. The physical space itself includes a fire pit, communal study spaces, room for arts and creativity, room and space for family to visit and stay, and a diversity of living spaces to meet students' cultural needs, as well as dedicated staff to ensure that students are welcomed and supported. With my previous university academic hat on, I know how important those measures are to ensuring that we retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in tertiary education.

Nedlands is also home to many statewide health services, including Ronald McDonald House Charities, providing services to many Aboriginal people and families from remote communities. It is important that all our civic institutions, including local councillors and councils, make residents and visitors to our community know that they are welcome and that reconciliation and inclusivity is at the heart of that welcome. Reconciliation action plans are

always relevant and always meaningful. I welcome the invitation that these reforms make to all local governments, wherever they are, to show inclusive, consistent leadership when creating structures and systems that ensure that Aboriginal voices are included and welcomed.

This bill provides for the introduction of optional preferential voting. Optional preferential voting gives us as ratepayers, as electors, the greatest degree of choice to indicate our preferences at the ballot box. The optional nature of this is for the voter, not the council. Voters will be able to choose to preference as many or as few candidates as they wish. There will not be any preference flows other than what electors put on their ballot paper. Of course, voters already understand how this system works because it has been used in state elections since 1907 and in federal elections since 1918. This change will bring greater consistency, this time across three levels of government. My colleague the member for Cockburn spoke yesterday about some of the benefits of preferential voting. I want to add briefly to that and indicate some of the benefits of preferential voting, with my social work hat on, I dare say. Preferential voting will be good for ensuring a diversity of candidates. It will improve the diversity of representation and ensure that our councillors are more representative of the entire community and not just people with perhaps a one-platform interest or a particular social standing. To be honest, really, the only concerns that have been expressed about preferential voting are by current councillors. If they were truly representative, we could perhaps argue that this should not be of concern to them. It certainly will not increase partisan politics—that already exists in local government—but, rather, will improve representation and diversity, which is currently being perverted by how easy it is for people to run tickets. We have heard that preferential voting also provides us with the ability to backfill positions instead of having extraordinary elections. From 25 November last year to 16 March this year, nine extraordinary elections were held for the local government areas of Stirling, Swan, Canning, Wanneroo, Albany, Cottesloe, the Cocos Keeling Islands, South Perth and Northam. As a ratepayer, I have voted in two extraordinary elections in the past 18 months—one for mayor and one for a ward councillor.

The third point I wish to talk to is the implementation of reforms to the size and structure of local councils, including ensuring that council size is better aligned to the size of the local population. This impacts on one of my local councils. The bill will deliver on the proposed reform to better align the size of councils across WA with the population of the local government's district, providing us with more even and equal representation. As we have heard before, the bill will set limits based on local governments' populations. For a population of up to 5 000, there will be five to seven councillors, including the president. For a population between 5 000 and 75 000, there will be five to nine councillors, including the mayor or president. For a population above 75 000, there will be nine to 15 councillors, including the mayor. This change was a recommendation of a panel report to government in 2020, and these values were refined through the multiple opportunities that were made available for public submissions, public comment and local government comment.

We see, of course, that councils typically work best when all council members can work through differences of opinion and find consensus on how best to deliver for the local community. Unfortunately, we do not see that on this issue. The City of Nedlands, as reported in *The West Australian* of 16 February, blocked a full council spill from occurring at the upcoming council elections in October this year. Instead of the council making a decision on what is, of course, acknowledged to be a very complex and difficult decision—I do not take away from that—it instead leaves that decision to our very able local government minister, who will decide how and when the council sheds four of its elected representatives. The council agreed to keep its four-ward structure and reduce its numbers, but it did not support an officer recommendation to put all 12 councillors and the mayor up for re-election this October as a means to cut the number of elected positions and let ratepayers make a decision about who would fill those positions. As a ratepayer and someone who votes in local council elections, I find this disappointing, as I will not necessarily get a say in who will represent me either as mayor or at a ward level. It is fair to say that that decision is perhaps a little bit more about self-preservation than leadership or representing the ratepayers. One councillor noted that councillors were being asked to sacrifice their own council on the altar of the minister. I want to be very clear that this bill is based on a very significant, extensive and long body of consultation. There was public consultation and workshops with sector peak bodies, the Western Australian Local Government Association and Local Government Professionals WA. The opportunities to participate and shape the principles and details of the bill have been numerous.

I also briefly note that the introduction of specific requirements and changes that will make councils and council proceedings more accessible and inclusive is welcome. The requirement to video stream council meetings for bands 1 and 2 and make audio recordings of council meetings for bands 3 and 4 is welcome because it will make council meetings more accessible to ratepayers, including those of us who are sitting in Parliament on the days that councils meet. This will serve to broaden the number and diversity of people who will watch and, therefore, participate in council processes and decision-making. It will also enable complaints and disputes about conduct at meetings to be investigated and resolved more quickly and fairly, because video and audio recordings are a definitive reference source. It will mean much less ambiguity about the facts of any complaint. This is an important measure to support the establishment of the new inspector in the second tranche of local government reforms.

Similarly, the standardisation of meeting procedures for all local council meetings across Western Australia will make meetings more streamlined and more accessible for ratepayers, because council meetings will have greater consistency, known standards and inclusions, and set parameters. Currently, it can be confusing when local governments have

different rules and processes, including for how residents can raise issues at local council meetings. It is inconsistent and confusing, and different rules can make council meetings seem mysterious or unwelcoming, and it is unclear how people can participate. This reform will provide ratepayers and stakeholders with greater clarity on how meetings are to be conducted and will establish one set of rules for raising questions and making deputations at meetings. This will be of benefit for everyone, particularly people and stakeholders who might engage with different council areas.

Finally, the inclusion of parental leave will mean that the make-up of councils can be more diverse, inclusive and welcoming to people with caring responsibilities.

I have a couple of examples of great leadership culture and service by local government that I would like to now highlight. These are things that the reforms will work to embed. I would like to congratulate the Town of Cambridge for its decision to decline the rezoning application from Christ Church Grammar School for the Mt Claremont playing fields. The council declined the request to rezone the fields from parks and recreation to residential, and that means that the playing fields will remain as open, active space. Girls' sport and participation in sports is growing in the western suburbs, and retaining those playing fields will mean that sport is much more accessible and inclusive for girls and women.

[Member's time extended.]

Dr K. STRATTON: Of course, last week in this place, I raised a grievance with the Minister for Planning to ensure that the council's decision was enshrined. It will be, and those playing fields are now safe for the community and sporting participants to continue to use.

I would also like to provide an example of what happens when local leadership is at its best. On Monday, I had the honour of being invited to tour and meet some of the service providers and participants at Ruah Community Services' Northbridge branch. That centre highlights the very best possibilities of what happens when local government serves the entire community, including the most vulnerable in our community, and does so with dignity and respect, which is exactly what the Ruah Northbridge centre does. I was provided with a tour of the building, which has many physical symbols of how people from diverse backgrounds are welcome. Ruah flies the Aboriginal flag, the Torres Strait Islander flag, the rainbow flag and the transgender flag. We were made to feel very welcome as we entered the building. It has a wonderful sense of space and is welcoming and homely. The staff are very experienced and compassionate, and they provide a wonderful voice for the people they serve. The services they provide the participants in that building provide some of the daily dignities that many of us perhaps take for granted—a hot shower, fresh clothes on our backs, a hot cup of tea and a biscuit to go with it, and access to the essential services that co-locate at the Northbridge centre, such as Services Australia. Of course, they provide assistance with housing support and the intersecting issues that have an impact on people's lives. As I said, everybody is welcomed, and I certainly witnessed this to be true. Participants spoke with a great sense of pride, belonging and welcome. They feel that their dignity and privacy are upheld, and they demonstrate a great respect for the space. This is, of course, how I have always known Ruah to work. I had the privilege of partnering with some of its research staff in the 100 Families WA project. It is a very inclusive, problem-solving and human-centred organisation in the way it delivers services. I would like to pay my respects, too, to the CEO, Debra Zanella, who has created that culture at Ruah. She has extended its long history of providing very inclusive and compassionate services.

I will also make a shout-out. I ask for a little liberty here, the day after World Social Work Day, because many social workers work at Ruah. Yesterday was an annual celebration of the contribution that social workers make to creating change for individuals, families, communities and nations. They do all they can to make the world a more inclusive, more accessible and kinder place.

I will finish by saying that, of course, as well as introducing the reforms in this place, the government is continuing to work on the practical implementation of the reforms through the development of guidance templates, public information and transition plans. Again, it is an invitation to our various local governments to demonstrate their outward-facing leadership and create and maximise the opportunities being offered to them.

MS C.M. ROWE (Belmont) [1.49 pm]: I rise today to also make a contribution to the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023. The element of this bill that is of particular interest to me and I will be talking about is the reform to introduce principles within the Local Government Act 1995 that recognise Aboriginal Western Australians and the fact they should have greater involvement in local decision-making. That is particularly timely given that we are no doubt going to a referendum, hopefully in October this year, to decide whether we will provide Indigenous Australians, our First Nations people, with a Voice, and place a lens on the legislation that impacts their community, which I think is right. I am deeply committed to seeing that outcome. I truly hope that that is the outcome. It will be a great disappointment if the referendum does not succeed. When I saw that that provision had been included in the reforms in this bill, I decided that I would speak about it because it is an opportunity to highlight how important it is.

I am lucky to have rich diversity of people in my community of Belmont. Fantastically, a large group of Indigenous Australians call Belmont home; indeed, they have done so for many, many generations. I regularly meet with a number of different elders throughout my community, and I have spoken with them about their views on the referendum. I cannot say that I was shocked when they indicated with great bitterness that they did not hold much

hope for change as a result of the referendum. Knowing their stories as I do—many of them are members of the stolen generation—I completely understand their point of view, but they are 100 per cent adamant that change has to happen. It is important to them that change happens. They want to see deeper acknowledgement of the problems they face within their community and better outcomes for their community. Equally, they understand that this is a very significant moment in our history, which signposts the Labor government’s commitment to righting historical wrongs.

Bringing my contribution back to my local community, after I was first elected to Belmont in 2017, I went to my first citizenship ceremony and was horrified to learn that there was no formal welcome to country. I thought that was pretty outrageous. I contacted the chief executive officer of the City of Belmont and pointed out that it was incredibly inappropriate and, to his credit, he rectified the situation immediately. I am glad to say that welcome to country is a staple at all City of Belmont events, as it should be. I take this opportunity to point out that the City of Belmont works very closely and collaboratively with many of the elders in our community. Recently, I was really lucky to be invited as a community member to observe our Aboriginal advisory committee group that is part of the City of Belmont. It was wonderful to be present and to listen to some of their concerns. The fact that the advisory group meets regularly and that the City of Belmont takes its role seriously of walking down the path of reconciliation hand in hand with the elders is fantastic. At the meeting, I referred to the yes vote in the referendum, about which we had a discussion. A lot of the elders said, “We can’t see why people would be voting against it, Cassie.” I told them that I agreed, but with great disappointment I pointed out that our local RSL was advertising that it would be running a no campaign. I told them that the community needed a counterargument because the local RSL was blatantly—I have seen its email—running a no campaign. That is appalling and it reflects so badly on the RSL. It ought to be ashamed for running that campaign, quite frankly. The silver lining is that the wonderful women who are part of the group and the elders who I have subsequently met are really galvanised to run their own campaign. I look forward to inviting people from my community to hear why we should be voting yes at the referendum. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and we have an obligation to make sure that it succeeds. If we fail this time, it will be many generations before this opportunity again goes before federal Parliament.

I refer to an article that I printed this morning in which Indigenous advocate Noel Pearson said that a no vote would be catastrophic and would prompt him to “fall silent”. He said —

If the advocacy of that pathway fails, well, then a whole generation of leadership will have failed, a whole generation of Indigenous leadership will have failed because we will have advocated coming together in partnership with government and we would have made an invitation to the Australian people that was repudiated.

I ask members of this house to take on board what Noel Pearson said. As a member of state Parliament, I know that this is a federal matter, but I feel very strongly that we all have a duty and an obligation to speak to our community about how necessary reform is. I will be making it very clear how I will be voting when the time comes.

I was pleased to see today that the federal government has come to an agreement with a very reluctant coalition—no surprises there. Labor has had to make concessions around pamphlets being distributed on the no vote, which is quite disgraceful, but, of course, no surprises there. This morning I did some perfunctory internet research on who would be opposed to this, and, of course, the Liberals are opposed. In fact, the federal shadow Minister for Education, Sarah Henderson, has likened public support of a Voice to Parliament in the schooling sector to a form of indoctrination. Needless to say, she is not Indigenous, but she is adamant in her views. An article states —

Henderson said she was “concerned” about reports on the debate in schools, arguing its public backing wasn’t “consistent” with the national curriculum.

That is very disappointing, but, again, it is really not surprising that she would say that schools, public universities and the like should not be involved in this debate. I would argue that it is beholden on each and every individual in the community to talk about how vital it is to have this debate and a positive outcome for the community.

At the same conference at which the shadow Minister for Education spoke, Professor Megan Davis from the University of New South Wales was a keynote speaker. As a member of an expert panel of advisers to the federal government on the referendum, she said that it is absolutely the role of universities to support the Voice campaign. As stated in an article, she said —

“I don’t really stomach that we are mere facilitators of the debate ... universities say they don’t want to be political, but the decision not to take a stance for Uluru and the referendum for a voice to parliament is a political decision,” ...

I wholeheartedly agree with those comments.

It was interesting that one of the original people involved in creating the Uluru Statement from the Heart recently came to Western Australia and spoke at a Labor Party event. He said that we all really need to think about how we will feel the day after the referendum, if it fails.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 1312.]

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS*Statement by Speaker*

THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts) [1.59 pm]: Before we move on to question time, I would like to acknowledge some guests in the Speaker's gallery. I would like to acknowledge the guests of the President of the Legislative Council: Mr Simon Coveney, TD, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, from the government of Ireland; His Excellency Mr Tim Mawe, Ambassador of Ireland to Australia; from the consular corps, Mr Martin Kavanagh, honorary consul, Honorary Consulate of Ireland in Western Australia; and their accompanying party, Dr Orlaigh Quinn, secretary general of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in Ireland; Ms Laura McGonigle, special adviser to the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Ms Jennifer Smyth-Shanahan from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in Ireland; and Mr David Eccles, director, Australia and New Zealand, Enterprise Ireland. We are very honoured to have our Irish guests here today.

On behalf of the member for Kalamunda, I also welcome to the Speaker's gallery the executive of the Mundaring and Kalamunda Chambers of Commerce, who are visiting Parliament today.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**GOLD CORPORATION — GOLD BAR CONTENT****167. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Premier:**

I refer to the revelations exposed by *Four Corners* on Monday, 6 March, regarding gold doping, and the Premier's claim that he was not aware of the issues raised until the exposé went to air. Given that the Premier was asked directly by the ABC about concerns regarding Gold Corporation on 14 February 2023, did he relay those questions to his office or the Minister for Mines and Petroleum and his office to test the veracity of the questions; and, if not, why not?

Mr P.J. Rundle interjected.

The SPEAKER: Deputy Leader of the Opposition, your leader asked the question. We did not need an additional comment from you.

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

That is a very strange question, but it is par for the course, because the Leader of the Opposition has been out there trying to create turmoil in relation to this matter and not listening to any of the facts whatsoever. He just ignores the facts, goes out there and tries to create turmoil in order to ensure that there are negative stories about the Perth Mint to try to keep the story going. That is all he is trying to do.

All these questions have been answered. I answered a question at the press conference in relation to someone going to the Mint and buying some gold; I think that is what it was. I did not know anything about it, but the question was in front of a full press conference. That was the question I was asked, as I recall, on that day. Whoever heard it would have heard it.

GOLD CORPORATION — GOLD BAR CONTENT**168. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Premier:**

I have a supplementary question. How is that believable when the Premier was asked questions by the reporter on the front steps of Parliament and read from a piece of paper to answer those questions?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I answered some questions at a press conference. Go and have a look at what I said! What I said at the press conference was accurate to the best of my knowledge at that point in time. All the Leader of the Opposition now does is come in here and try to stir up an issue and ignore the facts, as many people do, about this matter. The facts are clear. The minister himself and Mr Sam Walsh did a press conference for an hour yesterday answering questions on this matter. I have answered questions at half a dozen press conferences on this matter.

The Perth Mint is a fine institution. Every bar of gold it has ever sold has been above 99.99 per cent gold. That is something the Leader of the Opposition does not seem to be able to understand. Every single bar of gold is above the international standard. That is a fact. The Shanghai Gold Exchange has bought tonnes of gold since the issues were fixed back in 2021. It has bought tonnes of gold from the Western Australian mint. That is the situation.

At all points in time, we have answered the questions that have been put to us if we were available in the country. Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition launched an attack on the minister because he was overseas selling the state. The Leader of the Opposition moved a motion attacking the minister, accusing him of absconding. He does not even understand the English language and what that word means.

Mr R.S. Love: I do!

Mr M. McGOWAN: No, you do not. You do not even understand the English language and what it means. The Leader of the Opposition accused him of absconding. He said "absconding". Do members know what absconding

means? It means disappearing off without notice; that is what it means. The minister put out a press release before he left to say that he was going! He actually outlined where he was going. It seemed to pass the attention of members of the opposition; it seemed to pass them by, because they ignore all the facts of this matter and they do it day in, day out. It is no credit to members opposite that they do that sort of thing. When Colin Barnett and the ministers of the last government used to go overseas to seek investment, jobs and opportunities for Western Australia, we used to say good on them. Members opposite come in here and just try to make political capital out of it in a pathetic, tawdry way.

Distinguished Visitors — Ian and Peter Laurance

The SPEAKER: Just before I give the call to the member for Mount Lawley, I also acknowledge in the Speaker's gallery today guests of the member for Willagee, Mr Ian Laurance, a former member of Parliament representing the Gascoyne region, and his brother Mr Peter Laurance. Welcome to Parliament today.

NAZI SYMBOLS — LEGISLATION

169. Mr S.A. MILLMAN to the Premier:

I refer to the abhorrent displays of bigotry and racism over the weekend on the steps of the Victorian Parliament. Can the Premier advise the house what measures this government is taking to stop similar displays of hatred in Western Australia?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for Mount Lawley, who represents a large part of the Western Australian Jewish community in his electorate, for that question.

Obviously, like most right-thinking people, I was shocked and appalled by what I saw at the Victorian Parliament the other day. A group of men were dressed in black basically presenting with the Nazi salute at a rally in Australia in 2023. Many of them were doing so proudly. Many of them were cowardly in that they had their faces covered, and others did not have their faces covered, so they were quite proud of what they were doing. I found that shocking, as someone who has studied the history of that era in great depth and continues to do so. The fact is that Australians and our allies fought and died against people who promote that sort of ideology. I find it shocking that Australians would do that, and do it proudly, and do it in an area in which there are still men and women alive who experienced those events. I actually know people who experienced the Holocaust. I know people who went through it—who were in concentration camps—who are actually still alive, and their children and grandchildren. The fact that these people are out there is shocking. It is un-Australian and it has no place in our society.

We will bring in legislation to criminalise the display and possession of Nazi symbols. We know it is offensive to people; we know they are used in association with anti-Semitism; we know they are now used to marginalise groups, particularly Muslims and people from the LGBTIQ community. We will prohibit the display of those symbols in certain circumstances as part of this legislation. It is not appropriate that people engage in that sort of conduct. We will watch very carefully for that sort of conduct and whether it occurs in Western Australia. All those people are doing is trying to spread fear, hate and division in our community. We want to have a harmonious community in which people can live free of fear and hate. Those people who served and continue to serve our country against people who promote those sorts of things deserve our support and do not deserve to see that sort of conduct occurring within our great country.

GOLD CORPORATION — GOLD BAR CONTENT

170. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Mines and Petroleum:

I refer to the *Four Corners* exposé on 6 March 2023 on issues including gold doping at the Perth Mint, and the board having raised those issues with the minister in January 2022. After the board made the minister aware of these gold doping revelations, did he inform the Premier—yes or no?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

No.

GOLD CORPORATION — GOLD BAR CONTENT

171. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Mines and Petroleum:

I have a supplementary question. How is it that the minister failed to notify the Premier of this significant issue, noting that he was the minister responsible at the time of the doping and is the guarantor of the gold?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

Leaving aside the inaccuracies in the question, I just want to drive at the answer. I have repeated this a hundred times, and I will repeat it for the 101st, and, eventually I hope, the Leader of the Opposition will listen: all the gold

bars produced by the Perth Mint were always compliant. They have always contained 99.99 per cent gold. That is what is stamped on the bars. I know this is confusing for the Leader of the Opposition and I know there has been confusion in the community, but we must not misunderstand the issue here. The issue was never the content of gold; it was the question of what the non-gold content of the bar was. It was not whether there was a short delivery of gold. The Perth Mint does not actually charge for the 0.01 per cent that is not gold; it charges for the 99.99 per cent that is gold. I know that that confuses the Leader of the Opposition, but it does not confuse anybody else. The reason the Shanghai Gold Exchange continues to deal with the Mint is that it has satisfied itself with the approach the Mint takes. At no time did the Shanghai Gold Exchange ask for any of the bars to be returned, for example. That never occurred.

I know that an internal report that was never provided to the board or to me was given to *Four Corners*. I am not going to speculate on who gave that to *Four Corners*. The fact that the author of the report was subsequently terminated because of her failure to implement the changes from the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act I am sure is not related to the story getting to the ABC. I just make the point that that report was in error. It said that the Mint might have to buy back 100 tonnes of gold. That was never correct. We know it was not correct because two and a half years later, we have never had to buy any gold back. But let us assume that we had to buy the gold back. The gold would still have been a hundred tonnes of gold. We buy 260 tonnes of gold every year. The Mint buys over 15 tonnes of gold every month. The idea that gold is not a valuable commodity is mind-blowingly stupid.

Let me make it clear: there was not, and is not now, anything to report to the Premier about the gold-manufacturing process at the Mint because on every day that this government has been in power, all gold bars sold by the Mint have met the 99.99 per cent requirement, which is what the Treasurer guarantees. The Treasurer does not guarantee 99.96 per cent. I know that is confusing to the Leader of the Opposition, but it is not an issue for me. Every day that we have been in government, Gold Corporation's gold bars have contained the amount of gold given in the guarantee. There was never an issue to raise with the Treasurer because every gold bar was compliant with the standard that is stamped on the gold bar, which, as I said to the Leader of the Opposition yesterday, is on the website and is public to everybody.

SOCIAL HOUSING — GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

172. Ms M.J. HAMMAT to the Minister for Housing:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's record investment in social housing and homelessness services in Western Australia.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how this government is responding to the demand for housing, including through the use of alternative construction methods and the spot purchasing of homes?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house whether he is aware of any alternative proposals to increase the supply of social housing in Western Australia?

Mr J.N. CAREY replied:

I thank the member for her question.

- (1)–(2) As I have said before in this house, we are acutely aware of the significant housing pressures that are facing both construction and the rental market. Of course, Western Australia is not alone; this is being experienced across Australia right now. But as a government, we take this responsibility very seriously. That is why we made a record investment, with a record injection of \$875 million, of \$2.4 billion over four years into social housing and homelessness. To date, despite the toughest construction market in our state's history, we are delivering. We have delivered 1 100 new homes to the system. That is a fact. We have just under a thousand under contract or construction. In February alone, we delivered just under a hundred new homes.

We have achieved that by trying to think outside the box about how we can accelerate the delivery of social housing. I know I have talked about it—it is one of my favourite programs—but we have done the timber frame program, as well as the modular home program. That faces constraints, but it is still delivering. Currently, we have 90 under contract or construction. It does have an impact for regional communities. I give two examples. For Collie, we have announced seven modular homes, four of which have arrived in Collie and three are due in the next month. Two modular homes have been completed in the goldfields, with another 11 to come. The modular program is having a direct effect on these regional communities. We have also brought in a spot purchasing program. We brought forward \$60 million out of our social housing fund. I am pleased to report today that since July 2021, 492 homes have been spot purchased and brought into the system. This is real reform. It is real change that is happening right now. It demonstrates our ability to accelerate the delivery of social housing.

I note that the opposition—I say this seriously—has not released one housing policy in six years. That is a fact.

Ms L. Mettam: You idiots! We had an election in there.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Yes.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please, members!

Mr J.N. CAREY: I thank the member for her interjection. Please state a housing policy from the last election.

Ms L. Mettam: We had them.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please, members!

Mr J.N. CAREY: I find it interesting that the member for Vasse interjects —

Ms L. Mettam: I find it interesting that you boast about two houses in Kalgoorlie!

The SPEAKER: Member for Vasse, you did not ask this question. I appreciate that the minister has responded to your interjection, but I would ask the minister to move on and complete his answer, please.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I thank the Speaker. I note that the member could not state one housing policy. When the shadow housing minister was asked, he said, “I think that we should do maintenance.” That is the opposition’s public statement. There has not been one policy statement. The Leader of the Liberal Party cannot name a housing policy when pressed.

It is very clear from this data that we have accelerated the delivery of social housing in Western Australia and that our modular and timber frame programs and our spot purchasing program are having an effect in boosting social housing supply.

HOMELESSNESS — CENSUS DATA

173. **Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Housing:**

I refer to census data released today that highlights that Western Australia has had a 114 per cent increase in the number of people living in improvised dwellings or tents or sleeping out under the minister’s watch. What comfort can the minister provide the now 2 300 people who are sleeping rough in Western Australia, given that the Northern Territory, Victoria and New South Wales all managed to reduce the number of rough sleepers, irrespective of COVID, over the same period?

Mr J.N. CAREY replied:

I thank the member for the question.

I have said on the public record that Western Australia, like every other state, faces significant housing pressure and challenges, and that we have a tight rental market. That rental market is reflected in every state in this country. What the Leader of the Liberal Party has omitted or failed to say from that data is that Western Australia has the lowest rate of homelessness in the country at 37 per 10 000 people. It is the lowest rate of homelessness in the country. Also, the data showed that the boost to transitional accommodation beds was 143 per cent. That is two pieces of data that the opposition omits. I can point to the huge investment that we are making into homelessness. This year \$225 million is funding more than 130 organisations in Western Australia. I last year announced new initiatives, boosting homelessness outreach to seven days a week in the city, a new 100 homes program for helping rough sleepers off the street and also purchasing the Murray Street lodge. When I made those announcements, I know and noticed that it was welcomed strongly by the homelessness sector. In fact, one leading advocacy group said that there was momentum behind our policy changes. I note that when I made those announcements, the opposition attacked them. It does not support me buying a hotel for transitional accommodation and it does not support the 100 homes program, so what does it support? I cannot tell members, because it has no policies.

HOMELESSNESS — CENSUS DATA

174. **Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Housing:**

I have a supplementary question. How will \$420 million for social housing sitting in a bank account address these issues?

Mr J.N. CAREY replied:

I already outlined in my previous answer the amount of investment that is rolling out. The figures do not lie: 1 100 new homes into the system with just under 1 000 under contract or construction. I will come back to the data that the Leader of the Liberal Party referred to. We understand the complexities of the data in our system. In fact, the state government committed \$1.3 million to boosting data collection relating to homelessness. We fund the by-name list, an independent source of information run by the WA Alliance to End Homelessness. From February last year to February this year, it shows a reduction in homelessness and rough sleeping in the Perth metropolitan area. The feedback that I am getting from the sector is that our reforms are working. The new programs that we are introducing, 100 social homes and Boorloo Bidee Mia, which has been an outstanding success, are making a real impact to assist the most vulnerable who are homeless.

AIRFARES — REGIONS

175. Mr K.J.J. MICHEL to the Minister for Transport:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's initiatives to make regional Western Australia an even more vibrant place to live.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on how the McGowan government is boosting regional aviation services, including the delivery of its election commitment to cap regional airfares?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house whether she is aware of any alternatives to these successful initiatives?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:

I thank the member for Pilbara for that question.

- (1)–(2) The issue of very high airfares for regional residents has been an issue that has plagued regional Western Australia for many, many years. That is why we are very proud of our initiative that we took to the last election to cap the price of airfares for regional Western Australians so that regional residents have, in a sense, a two-zone fare—either \$199 or \$299, depending on where they live. It is important to note just how successful this program has been. Between October and December, more than 37 800 capped airfares were flown. That was a 33 per cent increase from the quarter before it. We started this program on 1 July last year. In the first quarter, there were 28 000 airfares, and over 37 000 airfares in the next quarter.

Members can see how successful this program is throughout regional WA. Karratha–Perth has been the most successful route, with 8 500 one-way capped airfares flown between October and December. The third most popular route is Port Hedland–Perth. For the member for Kalgoorlie and her constituents—we know exactly how big an issue it was in Kalgoorlie—there was a 62 per cent increase in usage of this capped airfare in just one quarter. As members can tell, it is very successful. No other jurisdiction in Australia is implementing a scheme like this.

The question was: was there an alternative to this program; in particular, was there such an alternative or any type of program implemented under the previous government? The answer of course is no. Although it talked about it, it did nothing to put pressure down on regional airfares in this state. It did nothing. It had royalties for regions and it did not tackle probably one of the most basic issues out there, in particular in the regions through the Kimberley, the Pilbara, the midwest and goldfields, and that was airfares. Maybe one of the reasons the former government did not tackle that is that it is now the “MetroNats”. It is now the party that is chasing the vote of the densely populated areas. Of course, where Nationals members choose to live means probably the only initiative they will be using will not be capped airfares, but Metronet itself.

SKILLED MIGRATION

176. Ms L. METTAM to the Premier:

I refer to one of the Premier's first decisions as Premier to slash the skilled migration list and remove Perth as a region for the regional sponsored migration scheme, and his subsequent boast at the time —

No longer can overseas workers be fast-tracked into bricklaying, tiling or electrician jobs.

Given the impact of this decision, which saw skilled migration fall by 51 per cent in the first three years of his government —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please, members!

Ms L. METTAM: Shall I start again?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I am guessing that most of you do not want to hear the question from the start again, but that is where we will end up having to go. It seems that everyone else is very keen to answer the question; it is a question to the Premier. Member, you can start from the beginning, you can start halfway through—wherever you think is relevant.

Ms L. METTAM: I will start from the quote —

No longer can overseas workers be fast-tracked into bricklaying, tiling or electrician jobs.

Given the impact of this decision, which saw skilled migration fall by 51 per cent in the first three years of his government, does the Premier still believe this was the correct policy given the massive skills shortages we are now experiencing across the state?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I am very pleased to answer that question. We can understand that it is now 2023. Back in March 2017, when this government took office, we inherited an economy that was in recession. It was actually in recession. We had an unemployment rate of 6.4 per cent. I cannot remember the exact numbers, but the best part of 200 000 or so Western Australians were out of work. That was the situation we inherited from the former government. We had a set of finances in which debt was climbing to \$44 billion across the forward estimates. The former government inherited debt at \$3.6 billion when it arrived in office. We had a situation in which particular tradespeople, and a whole range of occupations, did not have enough work. There were not enough jobs out there for Western Australians. That was the situation that we inherited when we arrived in office.

That is one of the reasons the former government lost office, because the Liberal Party cannot manage finances and cannot manage an economy these days. That is now beyond the Liberal Party. Every time we do something to promote economic activity, it opposes it. That is now the reality of the modern Liberal Party. The modern Liberal Party is just a group of people who oppose what Labor does. That is all they do. That is all they are now. There is nothing else to them—just oppose what Labor does. It is a strange philosophy to just oppose whatever someone else does. As I said yesterday, Hon Peter Collier is now taking the side of rioting people who assault people, and because they are against the government, he is on their side. That is the way the Liberal Party acts. It is in cahoots with the Nationals WA that basically has no respect for public finances and basically hates the Liberal Party, in my experience, and the Liberal Party hates the National Party. They actually hate each other more than they hate us, but for some reason they are in an alliance with each other! It is an unusual phenomenon.

I must say, I have talked to other Premiers and other leaders of political parties in the eastern states who are of your persuasion and they confirm that. It is a very unusual thing how the whole model of conservative politics works these days. That was the situation we inherited. What did we do? We took action. Then what happened? Job creation happened and we started reducing the unemployment rate and our public finances improved. Then COVID came along, obviously, which was two and a half or the best part of three years of the most unusual economic circumstances I think the world has seen since the Great Depression, really. We had to manage that. What did we do along the way? We amended the initial policy we took because circumstances changed. What did John Maynard Keynes say? It was words to the effect of, “When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?”

SKILLED MIGRATION

177. Ms L. METTAM to the Premier:

I have a supplementary question. Given that this was one of his first actions as Premier and given the significant impacts it has had on other sectors as well, will the Premier take any responsibility for the significant skills shortage that is now adding to the housing crisis?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I do take responsibility for having the strongest economy in Australia and one the strongest economies in the world. I will take responsibility for that if the member insists. If she insists I take responsibility for that, I will take it. We now have a situation in which our average annual unemployment rate is down at around 3.4 per cent. It was 6.4 per cent when members opposite were in office. That is the reality. It is now at about 3.4 per cent and it was at 6.4 per cent when members opposite were in office. The total number of jobs created under this government, again from memory, is around 206 000. That is what has happened. Members opposite are attacking us now for creating 206 000 jobs, for halving the unemployment rate from when they were in office, for reducing debt contrary to any other state in Australia and for going through the pandemic with the least economic disruption and the strongest economy of anywhere in the world. That is what they are now attacking us for. That is the situation. Currently, we are building out there 30 000 homes because we took action at the height of the pandemic when members opposite called for it. A few weeks ago, there was some criticism about our housing initiatives at the height of the pandemic in April or May 2020, when the whole housing industry stopped. We joined the commonwealth government in a scheme to ensure that people signed up for building. I announced that scheme with Mathias Cormann. The commonwealth government was putting in \$25 000 and we were putting in \$20 000 a house. Do members know what the then Liberal opposition said? They said it should be \$50 000. That is what they said. A couple of weeks ago I heard them saying it was a disastrous policy that the government should not have done.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: We have got it. We have got you in Parliament saying it! You said there should be a \$50 000 benefit to new home buyers. That is what you said at the time. Just because you want to get a cheap media hit, you reverse your position. That is the nature of the Liberals and Nationals these days. Their whole philosophy is now just to oppose what Labor does. That is it. That is their philosophical underpinning on everything. It is no way to run a political party—just oppose what someone else does. What do you stand for? There is nothing. They do not have any policies. They do not write any. All they do is go out there, seek cheap political hits and just oppose what the government does.

SEXUAL OFFENCE LAWS — REFORM

178. Ms C.M. ROWE to the Attorney General:

I refer to the McGowan government's commitment to ensuring Western Australia's sexual offence laws are fit for purpose.

- (1) Can the Attorney General update the house on the review of sexual offending laws and processes in Western Australia currently being conducted by the Law Reform Commission?
- (2) Can the Attorney General inform the house how this important review will ensure the best support and protection is provided to victim-survivors in Western Australia's justice system?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY replied:

I thank the member for Belmont for the question.

- (1)–(2) In February 2022, I and the then Minister for Women's Interests announced two concurrent inquiries into the multitude of issues surrounding sexual offending in Western Australia. The purpose of these reviews was to ensure the laws and practices deliver justice outcomes for victim-survivors in our state. The Law Reform Commission of Western Australia is chaired by the Honourable Justice Lindy Jenkins, a retired Supreme Court judge. She is considering whether there is any need for law reform, including specifically to the laws surrounding the concept of consent. I know that the Honourable Lindy Jenkins has been attending criminal trials to observe them as an observer. She has presided over many of these sorts of trials herself. She has recently published volumes 1 and 2 of a discussion paper inviting public submissions. Those discussion papers are available on the Law Reform Commission's website.

At the same time, the Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime is leading the other review, which looks at the end-to-end criminal justice process for victims of sexual offending, from the reporting of an offence to the release of the offender at the final outcome. The Commissioner for Victims of Crime, Ms Kati Kraszlan, plays an important part in advocating for and supporting victims of crime in our justice system. Ms Kraszlan has helped facilitate the state's new family violence laws, delivered the National Redress Scheme in WA for victims of institutional child sexual abuse, helped develop a fund for the funerals of homicide victims, and the introduction of the state's landmark revenge porn laws. As part of her review, Ms Kraszlan is looking at, amongst a whole range of issues, the experience of adult victim-survivors in the criminal justice system, the factors that contribute to the under-reporting of sexual offences and alternative mechanisms for receiving, investigating and resolving sexual offence complaints that best meet the victim-survivors' interests and the interests of justice. The Department of Justice will complete its review and provide the government with a copy of its recommendations, scheduled for 1 May, 2024 and I expect the commission will provide its final report to government in July this year. The findings from these important reviews will inform the development and implementation of the sexual violence prevention and response strategy. It is important to note that we allow both the Law Reform Commission and the Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime to carefully undertake and complete their reviews, listen to the community and provide their recommendations.

I encourage all victim-survivors to get involved in this process, to have their say and help guide our government so that we can deliver updated sexual offence laws that are fit for purpose and make the experience of interacting with the criminal justice system as respectful and empowering as possible. We want our laws to support and protect victim-survivors as well as to ensure the effective prosecution of offenders. The McGowan government is determined to ensure that victim-survivors feel supported in coming forward to police and can have confidence that the justice system is working effectively to keep them safe. I look forward to considering the recommendations of both reviews.

MANDATORY BUILDING INSPECTIONS

179. Dr D.J. HONEY to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Commerce:

An article in *The Sunday Times* titled "How the Wild West was Built" written by John Flint outlines how the absence of a requirement for mandatory inspection of houses under construction is contributing to the stress and financial burdens on new Western Australian home owners. Furthermore, the article also explains that every state other than Western Australia has adopted mandatory building inspections. When will the minister's government also introduce mandatory building inspections to ensure that builders in Western Australia are complying with appropriate building standards?

The SPEAKER: Members, I see a few quizzical faces about the parliamentary secretary being asked a question. Under the standing orders, it is permitted for a question to be asked of a parliamentary secretary. However, it is appropriate that some notice is given and I understand that some notice, in this instance, has been given because the concept behind the standing order is that the parliamentary secretary has the opportunity to speak about the issue with the minister concerned before responding on that issue. I give the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Commerce the call. I think you are the first parliamentary secretary in this Parliament to be asked a question, member for Riverton.

Dr J. KRISHNAN replied:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the member for his question. I provide this answer on behalf of the Minister for Commerce.

The Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety's Building and Energy division has been reviewing ways to modernise and improve the state's building regulatory framework. This is in line with the recommendations of the *Building confidence* report, which was a national review. The mandating of inspections is recommended in that national review. Significant work has been undertaken by the state government to thoroughly consult with the stakeholders and industry on the recommendations made in the *Building confidence* report and we expect to make a further announcement on this soon.

MANDATORY BUILDING INSPECTIONS

180. Dr D.J. HONEY to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Commerce:

I have a supplementary question. Thank you very much, parliamentary secretary. Do we have any idea of the time line for that, given that home owners need protection?

Dr J. KRISHNAN replied:

The matter is under active consideration and the state government is consulting widely. This is public knowledge. I also note, Madam Speaker, that I am answering this question on behalf of the Minister for Commerce. The longstanding convention for questions without notice of which some notice has been given is for the member to provide adequate notice of a supplementary question to allow the minister to provide a response.

The SPEAKER: That is right. I am interpreting from that that notice was not given of the supplementary, so that is also to be noted.

YOUTH COUNSELLING SERVICES

181. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to supporting victims of family and domestic violence. Can the minister advise the house what initiatives this government is providing to young people affected by family and domestic violence, including its election commitment of providing specialist counselling services?

Ms S.E. WINTON replied:

I thank the member for Bicton for the question and her strong commitment to preventing family and domestic violence.

Since 2017, the McGowan government has committed an additional \$160 million to addressing family and domestic violence. That is a record investment. Of course, we know our focus has been on keeping victims safe, holding perpetrators to account and also ensuring that domestic violence does not happen in the first place. Our 10-year *Path to safety* strategy to tackle family and domestic violence identifies the need for a greater focus on supporting our young people. That is why we made the election commitment to establish two specialist youth FDV counselling services in Rockingham and Northam.

Last Friday, in the great electorate of Rockingham, I met with local service providers to see the dedicated family and domestic violence counselling services for young people, which is now up and running in Rockingham. It is called OpenSpace, and is operated by Communicare. This forms part of the McGowan government's \$60 million commitment package of reforms and programs towards preventing family and domestic violence. For young people, we know that the trauma of family and domestic violence can impact their health, mental health, education and, of course, their ability to establish healthy relationships themselves. We need to break the intergenerational cycle of family and domestic violence, and programs like this are critical to that. Communicare, which will be running the service in Rockingham, has a great track record of working with young people, and this service will provide assistance to over 200 young people aged 10 to 24 in Rockingham per year. Work is also underway to appoint a service provider for a second counselling service for young people, in Northam, and I look forward to providing the house with an update as that project progresses.

Violence in the home is never acceptable and these counselling services are a critical and important step to help protect our young people to disrupt the cycle of family and domestic violence and to support them to recover and grow. Our government is committed to supporting people impacted by family and domestic violence to recover and rebuild their lives, and this service, as well as the many other initiatives of this government, will serve that purpose.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition with the last question.

GOLD CORPORATION — PERTH MINT GOLD TOKENS

182. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Mines and Petroleum:

I refer to the Perth Mint Gold Token, the recent announcement from Trovivo that considering recent allegations, it has decided to no longer support the product, and the fact that the minister claimed yesterday that it was a Perth Mint

decision to step away from this crypto trading. Does the minister maintain that position, given Trovio's press release unequivocally states that it was its decision to step away from the Perth Mint; and, if so, can the minister explain to the house why the Perth Mint withdrew from the arrangement?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

Yes. As I said yesterday, we made the decision some time ago to withdraw from the Perth Mint Gold Token. I remind the Leader of the Opposition that it is not a product of the Perth Mint. Even though it was branded in the Mint's name, it was the product of a commercial partner. The Mint was negotiating the arrangements for the closure of the product. I note Trovio's media statement. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to ask me about that, of course, it is not in accordance with the standing orders. I cannot be asked about its behaviour; I can be asked only about matters under the control of me, as the minister. But, yes, it was the decision of the Mint to withdraw from the product. The Leader of the Opposition asked why we decided to do that. Ever since I took on the portfolio, I have been urging the Mint to simplify its business, and that is exactly what both Sam Walsh and Jason Waters told the media conference yesterday when they were asked a very similar question.

GOLD CORPORATION — PERTH MINT GOLD TOKENS

183. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Mines and Petroleum:

I have a supplementary question. Can the minister inform the house what date that decision was arrived at?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

I am happy to provide that at a later date. I cannot tell the member now, but Jason Waters told the press conference yesterday that the decision to withdraw from the Perth Mint Gold Token was made prior to him becoming chief executive officer. He became chief executive officer in April last year. Therefore, by definition, it had to have been done before April 2022. That is all on the public record. That is not news. That was said in the press conference yesterday. A number of questions that the Leader of the Opposition has asked referred to things that were said at the press conference. I would have expected the member to have known that answer, given that it was given by the both the chair and the chief executive at yesterday's conference.

The SPEAKER: Members, that concludes question time.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2023

Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MS C.M. ROWE (Belmont) [2.47 pm]: I just wish to reiterate my comments prior to question time on the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023. Principally, I just want to highlight the importance of the introduction of the principles in the act, including recognition that Aboriginal Western Australians should have greater involvement in local decision-making. I would like to stipulate again, just for the record, that I believe the City of Belmont has been doing a commendable job to date in terms of its engagement with local elders. I have seen that firsthand over six years. It is really remarkable and I really commend it on its efforts in that regard. I think there is a long way to go for other elements within our community, as I mentioned, especially with the local RSL running a campaign for a no vote for the Voice referendum.

I guess, with your indulgence, Madam Speaker, I would like to reiterate the comments I made just prior to question time. Recently, Thomas Mayor was here in Western Australia. He was one of the Indigenous men who was part of the original group that was consulted around the establishment of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. When he was over here in Western Australia speaking at a Labor Party event, he wanted to get everyone in the room to consider the notion of a failed vote at this referendum and how we would all feel if we had not all put our shoulder to the wheel to achieve the outcome of the yes vote. I was not even at that event but hearing about it really made me stop and think. As a member of Parliament with a significant number of Aboriginal people in my community, I thought: what am I doing to help ensure that we do get that outcome for Aboriginal people right across this country?

I would like to read the Uluru Statement from the Heart. We really are lucky here in the state Parliament to have the member for Kimberley, Divina D'Anna, who was part of the group who we consulted in the establishment of the statement. I asked her whether it would be okay if I read it out because obviously I am not an Aboriginal person. She said—I hope she does not mind me quoting her—that she would be delighted because the more people that we have supporting this cause, the better. I would like to read to the chamber today the Uluru Statement from the Heart —

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a *spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty.* It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is *the torment of our powerlessness.*

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a *rightful place* in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: *the coming together after a struggle.* It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

I, for one, want to walk with our First Nations people, and I will be voting yes. I hope that everybody else here in Western Australia will join me.

MS E.L. HAMILTON (Joondalup) [2.54 pm]: I rise today to make a contribution to the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023. Local governments play an important role in our democracy and in our Westminster system in which each of our three levels of government has a specific and important role and function. Our McGowan government continues to deliver the most significant reforms to the system of local government in more than 25 years. I would like to commend the Minister for Local Government for bringing these reforms to this place, and I know that this legislation will be welcomed by my community.

This bill will deliver a range of reforms focused on delivering better outcomes for ratepayers. This legislation illustrates our commitment to ensuring that the local government sector has all the tools it needs to operate and govern in the modern world, with all the opportunities and challenges that this presents. Local governments need to be open, transparent and accountable in representing their ratepayers, whilst being responsive to the needs of our communities. This is what our communities expect and deserve.

The reforms proposed in this bill will, I believe, provide further confidence amongst our community in the local government sector, in the major policy decisions that are made, and in the community's locally elected representatives, and it will strengthen the current framework. This legislative reform is much anticipated, long awaited, and has been a wholly consultative process. It is based on a large body of prior work and was subject to a public consultation process. This reform will provide better efficiencies and cost savings for local governments, with standardised procedures for council meetings across the state, simplified council planning, the introduction of optional preferential voting as well as other changes to make local government more consistent and efficient while providing the best outcomes for local communities.

Many contributions so far from my colleagues in this chamber have been from the perspective of having served as local councillors. That has not been my experience, although I have been working in my electorate for almost 20 years now —

Ms C.M. Rowe: Hear, hear!

Ms E.L. HAMILTON: I have been in touch with residents throughout that time. I know! I reflected on the 20 years and thought: gee, there have been a lot of things that have happened locally during that time. But it has been a great opportunity.

The Joondalup electorate is unique. It is one of the few electorates that has a dense urban city centre, an active business park and a large residential segment that covers the suburbs of Ocean Reef, Heathridge, Edgewater, Connolly,

Iluka, Joondalup and half the suburb of Currambine. The entirety of my electorate falls within the boundaries of the City of Joondalup, whose local government serves over 160 000 people across 21 suburbs. Collaboration with local government is essential for me, representing the state government, as well as the over 13 000 small businesses, education providers and other organisations in our connected and engaged community.

I want to begin my contribution today by providing somewhat of a snapshot of the experiences in Joondalup and then talk about how the bill will address current concerns in my community and provide better outcomes. Although rates, roads and rubbish are the core business and most basic of functions of local government, local governments have an important and extensive role at the grassroots level of our community, from delivering services and running local libraries to providing and maintaining local parks and facilities. The City of Joondalup has an operating expenditure of around \$165 million in the current financial year, and has an important role in taking a long-term view of what services and facilities will be required in the future. This is particularly relevant for the City of Joondalup given it is located in the northern corridor and is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia. It has a renewed focus on participating in a global economy. Joondalup is rich in opportunity as it matures and becomes the second CBD of Perth. Having an effectively operating local government is an essential driving force to grow our local economy and to service the northern corridor.

I attend many local government events and activities, and am regularly communicating with residents—be it by knocking on doors, manning the phones or attending events. The majority of local matters raised with me and my office concern issues with local government. This makes sense as local government is the level of government that is closest to local residents. But I have formed the view that local governments can and should do better. Changes in the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023 will benefit all community ratepayers as regulation and transparency increases.

Some of the day-to-day local government issues that come through my office can include correspondence regarding problems with local roads; access to rubbish bins when locals are out walking their dogs; residents associations being concerned about inadequate streetlighting, which causes safety concerns; sporting groups inquiring about adequate facilities; requests for more bench seats at local parks so the older members of our community can rest while out walking; access to water fountains at Heathridge Park; and the need for barbecues at facilities and locations like Bonnie Doon Gardens in Connolly, which was a recently raised issue by the Connolly Residents Association. Issues can also include local parking matters, playground upgrades at local parks and I could go on. There are many issues that I can raise with the city on behalf of locals, but it requires action by the local government. My office and I are regularly in touch on major policy setting issues, like planning reform, as we meet the issues of density and infill and the most recent proposed charges for kids to use playing fields. I think the city can do a little better on all these issues. This bill is designed to provide a more consistent framework for ratepayers and stakeholders, and it will work to ensure that important information is always available to the community, holding local governments accountable to their ratepayers. It is what our community wants and deserves.

A major reform in this bill relates to council planning and streamlining local governments as they plan their future service delivery. This is a significant and important function of local government in the oversight and implementation of planning policy, which is particularly relevant for a growing city centre like Joondalup with a wide variety of commercial and residential demands. Good planning policy is at the heart of a connected and cohesive local community, and the pursuit of medium-density infill should adhere to these principles.

But as I mentioned, I want to highlight some of the community challenges and how this bill will assist. In 2016, the City of Joondalup jumped the gun in trying to implement an infill and density strategy. The creation of housing affordability areas by the city in 2016 was an attempt to increase density around what it termed high-frequency transport corridors and train stations. It was plagued with issues from the beginning, and a disappointing lack of community consultation took place prior to the city implementing its plan. It caused significant angst across my electorate, particularly in the Edgewater community. As part of the zoning changes, apartments were built in small residential streets in bushfire-prone areas with limited road transport options.

Poor planning outcomes that resulted from the housing affordability areas policy, which was instigated by the previous Liberal–National government, have had real-world consequences locally. In March 2019, a significant bushfire occurred in the Yellagonga Regional Park near Edgewater Drive in Edgewater. With only three access roads in and out of the suburb, and all those roads being used by and prioritised for emergency service vehicles during this incident, that 2019 fire highlighted the significant risks to community safety that can happen when poor planning decisions are made. Minister Saffioti and I urged the city to reconsider its approach to the housing affordability areas policy. We included suggestions that the city should engage in broad consultation with residents across the entirety of Joondalup about the future of their community, and that the HAA be further reformed to better support infill. The challenge was that the city was pursuing a density agenda ahead of the state government's planning reform process, which was well underway by this stage and was working to develop a statewide framework on how to achieve medium density.

From the time of my election to this place, I have been strongly advocating for improved planning outcomes for local residents across my electorate. During my extensive correspondence with the Minister for Planning, Rita Saffioti,

and the City of Joondalup, I noted that the role of local governments in strategic locations such as Joondalup should be to pursue a thorough and considered planning policy that is informed by the needs of our local community. Local government must orient its delivery of planning policy to deliver long-term economic and community benefits.

We know that we cannot continue to increase Perth's urban sprawl and we need to look at quality infill. Opportunities for density should be pursued in appropriate locations. For example, we have a multistorey development located within the Joondalup CBD—just across the road from my electorate office. Formerly home to a now-demolished 40-year-old basketball stadium that had reached its end of life, the site is now planned to be a mixed-use, multistorey development to support people at all stages of life. Aged-care facilities will exist alongside family apartments and affordable housing. A mix of commercial, medical and retail facilities are on the ground floor. This will create a vibrant and active site directly opposite a shopping centre and the Joondalup train and bus station in the heart of our CBD. It is a prime example of our state government providing quality infill in a strategic location. Good infill that supports healthy communities is in keeping with community expectations for the area.

This bill's introduction of community engagement charters will go a long way to supporting improved local government outcomes for our community. As members of Parliament, we are constantly engaging with our community. Whether we are at local sport events, during school drop-offs and pick-ups or trying to make unnecessarily quick trips to the shops, it usually turns into a chat with a local member of our community to understand their needs or concerns. However, this same consideration is often lacking within the processes of local government, and this has been a particular concern. We have a connected and engaged community up in Joondalup, with several active residents' associations and a large number of people who want to be involved in the decision-making process of local government, with the underlying reason that they want to achieve positive outcomes.

On numerous occasions in this place, I have raised issues that my constituents have experienced in being unable to have meaningful engagement with their local government—both elected officials and the administration. These issues are mostly about poor consultation with residents, despite this being a core function of local government. One of the major reforms of this bill is with regard to greater accountability of local government to the community. We are adding a requirement that local governments create a community engagement charter that sets out the principles for receiving a diverse range of community views and increasing the participation of a wide range of community members in the council's decision-making processes. By creating greater consistency in how local governments operate across WA, as a state government we can further facilitate resource sharing through common practice. Common standards will also support the prevention and early intervention of dysfunction within local government.

One of the most significant elements of this legislation is the reintroduction of optional preferential voting for local government elections, which will be particularly relevant for the upcoming 2023 local elections in October. Previously, councils were the only body of government in WA to use the first-past-the-post voting method, and this bill will correct that undemocratic anomaly. Preferential voting is one of the most democratic ways to cast a ballot within the Westminster system. It encourages voters to consider a number of candidates and allows voters to ensure that their voice is heard, even if their first-preference candidate does not win a position. Preferential voting also forces candidates to address their campaigns to a broader section of the community, rather than to an often small but highly motivated interest group that can deliver a winning plurality for a candidate. Instead, candidates in local government elections will have to pitch to the wider community to win their trust and will be required to understand the needs of particular ratepayers.

We must continue to encourage more people to participate in local government elections. It is currently a non-compulsory postal vote. It is a privilege to be able to participate in free and fair elections here in Western Australia. In the City of Joondalup at the 2021 local government elections, there were 115 048 eligible electors, yet just 30 296 ballots were cast, with a turnout rate of just 26.44 per cent. The Joondalup community elected half a council and a mayor to a four-year term. Mayor Albert Jacob won a majority of the ballots cast, but I must note that he received the vote of just 10 per cent of the electorate. In his first tilt for mayor in 2017, the numbers were quite similar, although a little lower at just 8.2 per cent of the vote. I am willing to say that the candidates who receive such a vote would also like to see this system amended.

Preferential voting would allow winning candidates to produce stronger vote counts, larger margins, but, most importantly, a more decisive mandate for policy change. No elected official can form a strong mandate when just eight per cent of the community registered as supporting them. I note that, in fact, just two out of the six candidates elected in the 2017 City of Joondalup local government elections received a majority of votes. Two councillors won their seats with a vote count of around 20 to 30 per cent. I commend the minister for reforming this system that has allowed a candidate to be elected with a third of the ballots cast. The use of optional preferential voting is all about choice. Ratepayers will have a much wider array of voting options available to them, with more candidates whom they can choose to support. Providing choice is all about providing access to democratic norms that we take for granted at all other elections. We have used preferential voting for this chamber since 1907, and it is about time we did so for local council elections, too. We must motivate more people to have their voice heard in local government elections, and allowing preference flows, while ironing out the issues of local government, is sure to go a long way to achieve this.

Other significant matters of public trust relating to local government elections have been addressed in this legislation. We need to ensure that there is confidence in elected local government officials. That is why we are strengthening the regulations relating to candidate nominations and candidate information on accessible local government websites. Ensuring we have good candidates, and that our community knows about them, is critical. We will also crack down on offences relating to the misuse of electoral rolls. As candidates and elected officials, we are privy to a huge amount of data through the electoral roll. I take great care in safeguarding this information in the electoral roll data that I have access to, and it should be a basic requirement that all other elected officials operate with integrity and maintain the confidentiality of this privileged information. By introducing new offences for the misuse of electoral rolls and introducing statewide caretaker periods during ordinary council elections, we will take a firm step against tactics that potentially have been used during local government elections.

Significantly for our northern suburbs, the bill includes provisions for vote recounts in the event of a seat vacancy. Last year, the City of Wanneroo undertook a costly and lengthy extraordinary mayoral election following the election of Tracey Roberts to the federal Parliament as the member for Pearce. This was necessary, as no countback mechanism was in place, and a new mayor had to be elected by ballot. Subsequently, a second extraordinary ward election had to be held to replace councillor Linda Aitken, who had successfully contested the special mayoral election, again adding further expense and delay to the process. It took from May 2022 to Christmas of that year for that process to be resolved. Our reforms will greatly reduce the need for extraordinary elections, saving costs for ratepayers and reducing the administrative burden for local governments and the Electoral Commission.

Some of the other reforms in this bill will introduce specific requirements for the videostreaming of council meetings and the standardisation of meeting procedures. In the world we now live, it makes sense that we provide every opportunity for people to participate, view and engage with all levels of government. Just as the proceedings in the state and federal parliaments can be viewed through electronic means, for the purposes of this bill, Joondalup will be considered a band 1 local government and regulations will be made to require the live streaming and recording of meetings, providing greater transparency into the decision-making process at council meetings.

An area that I am particularly pleased to see included in this bill is providing council members with specific entitlements to take parental leave. It is an important part of supporting families and people with children. In our chambers, we want to ensure there is representation from every part of the community. This means we need to have people from all walks of life, from different backgrounds, fields and at different stages in their lives. This is an important part of gender equity. Just like we are working to achieve gender equality in our Parliaments, it needs to be done at every level of government, at the board table and in every organisation.

The final area of focus for my contribution today is to acknowledge that this reform will recognise the principle that Aboriginal Western Australians should have greater involvement in local decision-making.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms E.L. HAMILTON: I am pleased that the City of Joondalup has established a reconciliation action plan as a framework for the city to realise its vision for reconciliation by creating actions built on relationships, respect and opportunity. The city is currently undertaking a process of recruiting new members to the RAP community reference group and I encourage interested community members and organisations to get involved.

The city annually hosts and facilitates a number of cultural events focused on Indigenous storytelling. This was the case at last month's opening of the Perth Festival held at Yellagonga Regional Park, by Lake Joondalup. There was an amazing light and drone show telling the story of Djoondal, which is the Noongar dreaming story about the birth of the stars and the Milky Way. It prominently featured Djoondal—the woman with the long white hair—Lake Joondalup and their importance to Noongar people and their culture. It was a beautiful event that explored some of the ancient Indigenous stories that gave our home its name in such an innovative way.

Just last week, I attended the opening of the Joondalup Festival at Hillarys Boat Harbour and watched Boola Djarat Wardan. It means "Many lights across the sea" and it was a kaleidoscopic cacophony of lights and sounds, showcasing the story of the land on which we live, with input and storytelling from a local Noongar group South West Kinships.

This bill is all about improving democratic participation and consultation for all local residents. It would be remiss of me to not mention the ongoing Voice to Parliament discussions that aim to do just that. Later this year, we will have a referendum on enshrining an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in our Australian Constitution. I am proud to support the Voice to Parliament. Local government is all about providing residents with a voice in their community, to give them a say in how they live their lives and manage the shared resources and facilities of their community. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to the federal Parliament is a great first step to increasing the formal dialogue with Indigenous people about the issues that impact them most, while working with the community to develop the best possible policy with practical outcomes. Today it was announced that a path forward has been found for the legislation through the federal Parliament. This is great news, and I welcome the forthcoming referendum and will be working with my community in Joondalup to deliver a positive outcome.

This is the biggest piece of local government reform for some time and is the first step in the changes that need to take place. Work is continuing on the next tranche of local government reform, which will establish the new local

government inspectors and monitors. The inspector will overhaul the oversight of local government across WA and will have strong powers to investigate and respond to dysfunction in local governments. We will continue to work on the practical implementation of these reforms, through the development of guidance, templates, public information and transition plans.

The McGowan government is continuing to deliver the most significant reforms to the system of local government in WA in more than 25 years. It really is a milestone piece of legislation. The reforms are focused on bringing about more transparency and accountability for ratepayers, as well as cost savings and efficiencies for the 139 local governments in Western Australia. Having a government that works for the community makes sense, which is why our government is introducing changes that will ensure that local governments across the state are focused on serving their ratepayers.

With the cost of living as it is today, ensuring that residents see the full value of their money invested into their community is very important. As the local member, it is important for me to hear from our community. Aside from responding to many constituents who email me, I spend a great deal of time out and about, talking to local residents whenever I can. Like I mentioned, that may be on the doors, the phones, at a community forum, at a mobile office in a park, coffee shop or after hours in my office. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has shared their views on this issue with me. What we are doing as a state government through this bill is ensuring that we are providing a solid, modern, transparent and achievable local government framework that ensures the best interests of ratepayers are met. I commend the bill to the house.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe) [3.15 pm]: Deputy Speaker, how are you?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am great.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is good to see. I want to make a brief contribution on the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023. The Minister for Local Government indicated that he was looking forward to my contribution. It perhaps might not be as colourful as I otherwise might be. However, I did want to go to a few matters on this bill. I might just initially comment on the member for Joondalup's comments about the City of Joondalup. What a fantastic city! I think it is probably an exemplar, certainly the inner-city part, of good planning, with wide boulevards, tree-lined streets and the like. It is such a contrast to the suburbs that are being built now. I encourage members in this place to drive along Armadale Road from the freeway and have a look at what is happening in those suburbs. I think in nearly all of those developments, certainly those close to the freeway, I could literally walk across an entire block from roof to roof. The houses are so close together. I might remark that the City of Joondalup and those other excellent councils in Stirling and Wanneroo were all developed under the existing arrangements for local governments. It is quite clear that local governments have been able to succeed under the existing laws. I think all those three councils did an excellent job.

I just wanted to touch on a couple of points on this bill. First and foremost, the Western Australian Local Government Association has effectively given its endorsement for the majority of the recommendations, or at least the majority of the parts of this bill. I understand that the only area it was concerned about was the optional preferential election, otherwise they accepted it. In this case, the opposition has not opposed the bill, and is not likely to.

I think there are some aspects about which I will ask the minister to consider unintended consequences. I might say that the first is the abolition of wards in the smaller local governments, particularly in regional areas. The reason I say this is that in many regional communities, the townships absolutely dominate in terms of numbers. I am not sure whether there is some other plan around this. An unintended consequence of this bill's provisions to abolish wards in smaller local governments could well be that, in fact, Aboriginal representation councils will be reduced.

I will give the minister a specific example. In Broome, the Dampier Peninsula is a ward. There are two Aboriginal representatives elected to the council from the ward. I will go on another tangent—well, it is not, but it is related to this—the Broome council has abolished wards and also agreed to the changes to the voting systems. I might say that it did that under duress because it was told that if it did not do it—some councillors had two years remaining and some had the majority of their term remaining—the council would effectively be compelled to recontest all positions at the next election. In any case, at the direction of the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, I assume coming from the minister, it has eliminated the wards system and the two positions held by representatives of the Dampier Peninsula on the Broome council. I am told by local people that that will probably result in those two councillors not being re-elected because the town will completely dominate that election.

The councils in my electorate are geographically small. I have said in this place before that I can literally walk the entire length and breadth of my electorate in part of a day. It is not a particular challenge for me to get around my electorate and to know the matters that affect my constituents. I can see where the minister is coming from when he says that council members need to represent a whole area, and it is reasonable that members of a council in my electorate could. But, of course, in regional areas that is not the case; geographically, it is hard. This is not an issue just for Broome, particularly in relation to Aboriginal people who are elected to councils. In a number of regional communities, wards effectively guarantee representation from smaller Aboriginal communities on the council because the wards are dominated by their numbers. But when the wards are combined, those numbers are diluted

substantially. I do not know whether there is a clever fix for that, but I genuinely feel that that is a risk for people in not just Aboriginal communities, but also very large local government areas. In one sense we could say that they are the same, but in reality they are quite diverse, especially in terms of geography.

It is an issue that we are going to have to face in the Parliament with the changes to the upper house voting system. How will upper house members properly represent the whole state? We do not know what those arrangements will be, and it is not going to be a major point of discussion today, but in reality, with the statewide electorate, every upper house member should have a travel allowance that will allow them to travel the whole state; otherwise, they will not be able to do their job properly. It is going to be problematic. Members of Parliament are reasonably well paid and they have a travel allowance that the government can amend, but councillors typically travel by their own means. When a council covers hundreds or even thousands of kilometres, it becomes impossible to get effective representation. I have heard a number of members in this place talking passionately and with a great deal of satisfaction about how they have been able to represent their communities. Having wards in regional areas gives councillors the opportunity to meet their electors and represent them. I know that the numbers are small, but for them it is very important.

In regional communities in particular, local governments pick up a lot of the activities that we in the metropolitan area take for granted because those activities are done by the state government. I never cease to be impressed by the passion and the depth with which councillors in regional and remote areas take on their role to deal with not just roads and rubbish, as the old saying goes, but also the economic development of their community, care for people and the like. I know that that happens with city councils, but in regional councils there is another level of responsibility and care. That also will be affected by the reduction in the number of councillors. The councils in my electorate do not need to have 20 councillors because they can easily get out and represent their constituents. In remote regional areas in which travel is such a big factor, having a large number of councillors might seem excessive in comparison with a metropolitan council, but the people in those areas say that they need to be represented and to be able to talk to their councillor. These days we have all these modern methods of communication, but, as pointed out, a lot of those areas have only 3G and that complicates the live streaming of council meetings. A lot of places are not able to communicate with other areas. Those are probably the main issues I wanted to cover.

I can see the argument around the move to optional preferential voting taking two directions. A couple of members in this place have said that this will go against ticket voting and the like. I actually disagree with that, in part at least, for the same reason that people have said they agree with it. Because it is now hard to get a group up, it will be only large organisations, such as political parties that have the capacity, the intellectual wherewithal and the ability to work out the split on tickets in terms of who is first and second et cetera, that will be able to get up. As was correctly pointed out, we cannot just put “1” at the top of every ticket. I heard the argument that people’s self-interest will make sure that they always do that, but I think that it risks drawing more political organisations into the councils because of the complexity of organising it. When a group of people want to get up, they will ultimately do that through a political party because the political party has not only the ability and experience, but also the resources to organise that and to organise people to hand out how-to-vote cards and the like. Time will tell. The minister has said that he is going to look at this and see whether there are long-term issues. I take him on good faith in that regard.

A number of people in this place have commented that political parties are already involved in council elections. As someone who has been involved in the Liberal Party at the most senior level, I can tell members that there was never ever discussion at any senior level in the party around council elections or supporting candidates. I was the state president of the party and otherwise involved at a very senior level. There might be a group of friends from the Labor Party or the Liberal Party who are interested in public affairs and governance and the fact that they are involved in a political party or in a council is no surprise, but there is definitely no high-level coordination in that regard. I would hate to see that happen in local government. That would confound local government. When a person gets involved in a mainstream political party, the trouble is that they get bound up in issues at a higher level. The way a council behaves will get bound up in how its party is treating an issue at the state level.

We have seen it happen in this chamber, and I have heard about it today, at a state level. We see the confounding of issues in the state Parliament. For example, the federal Labor Party might have a view on something and at a state level people may feel obligated to support their federal colleagues on that issue. I hope that that does not have a mainstream effect in local councils. We will always have people who are genuinely interested in politics and get involved in local government, and we have seen that happen, particularly on the Labor side. I do not know how many Labor members have come through as local councillors, but it must be a fair whack based on the speeches given about this Local Government Amendment Bill 2023. I do not see that as a conspiracy; I see it as no surprise because the type of person who is interested in local government will be the type of person who is interested in state or federal politics.

I will finish on this point. I will not go through all areas or veer off into a discussion of infill and all those things as we will have plenty of opportunities to talk about them at other stages. However, if I look at all the changes that will be made to local governments, I am concerned that we are trying to make councils too sterile. If we look at this chamber, we see that sometimes we are unruly, sometimes we say things we should not say and sometimes we are quite rowdy. We barely hear from some members of this chamber, whereas we might say that other members

are a pain in the neck because they are always causing a problem. Labor probably has members in its own caucus who always cause a bit of a fuss and a ruckus. That is obviously not unique to either side of politics; it happens on both sides. One thing I have found from my considerable involvement in volunteer organisations is that those pains in the neck who irritate everyone are the people to whom we should always listen most keenly because they are the canaries in the cage; they are the ones who are prepared to stand up and raise an issue or concerns when everyone else sits back feeling uneasy about it. It is the so-called pain in the neck who will stand up and cause a fuss. That person can be irritating and frustrating and you can feel like they are wasting time, but I think the people who are prepared to stand up and take another view when everybody else is heading in another direction are the key to our successful democracy.

One future reform will involve the role of the inspector, who will be able to direct and investigate, and will have the ability to sack individual councillors. I understand the logic of that—that is, if someone who is not a well-meaning pain in the neck but a destructive person is causing chaos and making a council dysfunctional, we do not want to have to go through all of the palaver of having to dismiss the whole council to deal with that individual. However, I hope that councils will remain places of really robust debate. I hope those pains in the neck who are actually critical for our democracy will not be singled out, and that these changes will not be used to bully those people out of local government. I hope that councillors will sometimes get rowdy and passionate and have different views on issues and be allowed to flesh them out, and then ultimately do what is in the best interests of their constituents.

That is the end of my comments. As I said, I understand that the Western Australian Local Government Association broadly supports these recommendations. I reaffirm the position of the opposition that we will not be opposing the bill.

MS L. DALTON (Geraldton) [3.33 pm]: I rise to speak today on the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023, which will provide a range of reforms that will deliver greater transparency and accountability for ratepayers, as well as cost savings and efficiency for local governments.

I am the member for Geraldton and there is just one local government in my electorate. I would like to take this moment to congratulate the City of Greater Geraldton for its response to the reforms, its proactive stance in abolishing wards over two years ago and its considered approach to implementing these new reforms by advising the Minister for Local Government, Minister Carey, of its intention to take a voluntary pathway. In January this year, the current elected councillors agreed to reduce the number of councillors from 12 to eight, not including the directly elected mayor, over two elections. In 2023, voters will elect 10 councillors plus a directly elected mayor, and in 2025, voters will elect an eight-person council and a directly elected mayor, meaning that in 2025, the City of Greater Geraldton will have nine representatives at the local government level, which will be the maximum number of councillors for a band 1 local government. As a band 1 local government with a population between 5 000 and 75 000, the City of Greater Geraldton has chosen a voluntary pathway. It undertook consultation, which then guided the current elected councillors in making this decision. I applaud them for genuinely engaging with the community and allowing it to guide them in the adoption of these reforms.

The reduction from 12 to eight councillors, plus the directly elected mayor, will deliver reductions in council member expenses, reduce the length of time and debate needed for reasonable decision-making and mean that a quorum is more likely to be met. However, these reforms will not reduce regional representation. That is a complete myth. Local governments are governed by the council, and the mayor or president is the main spokesperson for the local government. Councils make decisions that become policies of the local government. Councils are probably more like boards than they are like Parliaments. They work best when everyone on council works to find consensus on decisions to benefit their local community. It is widely recognised that once councils adopt a policy or make a decision, that decision is owned by the whole council. Aligning the size of each council with the population of the district will not change the fact that councils will continue to make decisions. Local governments advocate for local interests. In doing so, local governments sometimes take a different view from state and federal governments. That is part of democracy. The reform will provide a cost saving to ratepayers who have been over-governed by local governments. Local governments will still be a voice for their communities. Unlike the previous Liberal–National government’s reforms, these reforms do not involve trying to forcefully amalgamate local governments.

Circling back to my comment about community engagement, I am pleased to see that the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023 will introduce community engagement charters. This standardised approach will set a clear standard for how local governments engage with the diverse range of people within their district, ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to be informed about and engaged with local government processes, decision-making and investment. I understand that many local governments have in place their own robust engagement practices and processes, including undertaking regular resident satisfaction surveys. Those surveys are great, but that data lives only locally or with the private consultant or company engaged to carry out the survey. To assist all local government councils going forward, the state government is working to introduce a requirement that all local governments in bands 1 and 2 must hold a ratepayer satisfaction survey at least every four years. To make the data collectable and more valuable, specific questions will be asked so that results can be compared between local governments across Western Australia. I think this is an absolutely brilliant addition to the reform.

I talk a lot about engagement and meaningful discourse, and about ensuring that diverse voices are heard and lived experiences considered. The same can be said for the bill itself. This bill is based on a large body of prior work and consultation. The reforms were subject to a public consultation process that indicated broad support for the reforms and enabled some of them to be refined to ensure that we deliver the best possible outcomes for ratepayers and local governments.

The McGowan government is continuing to deliver the most significant reforms to the system of local government in Western Australia in more than 25 years. At the heart of these reforms is the intent to facilitate good culture in local government. Critically, these reforms are designed to strengthen how local governments deliver services to their local communities across WA. Council members are elected to serve on the council. It is the council and not any individual council member that makes decisions. It is also important to recognise that council members do not do the work of delivering the day-to-day operations of the local government; it is the role of the CEO and staff to deliver services for the community. To say that reducing the number of council members will somehow reduce service delivery just does not make sense.

People regularly contact my electoral office with queries about how to raise issues with their local government. It seems that many local governments have different options or pathways for people who want to raise an issue, from anonymous apps to formal meeting presentations. As many members on this side will know, we regularly have mobile offices. When I have held a mobile office, many of the issues that have been presented to me, as the local member, have been local government issues. We have discussed putting out the call to our councillors to see whether they would also like to attend the mobile office alongside me so that they can hear from the electors themselves. It is pleasing to see in the reforms the implementation of standardised meeting procedures that will provide ratepayers and stakeholders with greater clarity on how meetings are to be conducted, establishing one set of rules for raising questions and making deputations at meetings. This means that when a resident moves from one local government to another, the process of engaging with local council and attending meetings will be the same across the state, which I think will make it a lot easier for people.

Staying on the topic of meetings and accessibility, it is great to see that these reforms acknowledge that not everyone can attend a council meeting in person and that, with the adoption of video meetings in daily life during the height of COVID restrictions, this bill will also provide regulations to be made to require the live streaming and recording of meetings, providing greater transparency into the decision-making process at council meetings. The government intends to establish a tiered requirement for band 1 and 2 local governments to live stream video, while band 3 and 4 local governments will be required to publish audio recordings of meetings at a minimum. This is a fabulous move forward to ensuring that local councillors have the same amount of scrutiny that we as elected members of Parliament do. Just as people can watch Parliament sitting via the web, so too could ratepayers. Establishing video and audio recordings of all council meetings will also enable complaints and disputes about conduct at meetings to be investigated and resolved more quickly.

I have talked about the reforms' benefits to ratepayers and community and I will also talk about changes that will affect councillors themselves. Local government councillors are often driven to represent their council as their public service. It is their way of giving back to their community. They are voted in by neighbours, peers and associates who entrust them to act in the community's best interest and be the best at it. Councillors need to be supported as individuals. It is pleasing to see included in the bill a support measure to grant parental leave to council members. When we implement parental leave for elected councillors, we will further cement our support for gender equality. Quorums could be altered in the councillor's absence to allow councillors the time to spend with their family. These allowances will create greater diversity on local councils and reflect a fairer representation of society.

Another benefit to these reforms will be the introduction of educational allowances for council members. It will be up to individual councils whether to establish this policy, but the option will be there to create a policy to pay fees and expenses relating to training for continuing professional development that relates to the role of a council member. Again, like the parental leave policy, this option supports diversity on council, particularly for younger people who may be working towards a qualification related to local government. For all elected members, this measure will support them to continue to advance their knowledge and learning, even in later life. This is an important part of public service.

There are 139 local governments in Western Australia, which operate under the Local Government Act, with differences of geographical size and population across them. The changes that the state government proposes mean that regulations could set different requirements for larger and smaller local governments. This is most evident in financial reporting requirements for large metropolitan councils that employ over 1 000 staff, compared with our smaller rural shires that may only employ 30 or so staff. The proposed tiering of local governments across Western Australia is important so that regulations can be matched to the size and complexity of local governments.

Something that will not change is that all decisions made by a local council are to be based on the interests of all people within the district. This is why the bill proposes to abolish wards. Since 2016, 13 local governments, including the City of Greater Geraldton, have abolished wards and a further two have reduced the number of wards. This is an important reform, as at the 2021 elections we saw individuals being voted in with less than five per cent

of the vote. Ward elections are also a costly exercise, as each ward requires separate elections, with separate ballot papers, rolls et cetera. To improve efficiency and ensure equal representation, it will benefit smaller local governments and their communities to remove wards.

Sometimes, as with state and federal elected positions, the person elected is no longer able to fulfil a role. This creates a vacancy that previously may have required a whole new election—an unexpected and imposing expense outside the local government election cycle. When a local government election can cost as much as \$4.50 per voter to undertake, having to run an election outside the four-year cycle diverts operating money away from delivering services in our community.

That brings me to the topic of optional preferential voting and backfilling. Voters understand how preferential voting works. Preferential voting has been used in state elections since 1907, and in federal elections since 1918. By introducing preferential voting at local government level, voters can choose to preference as many or as few candidates as they wish. The outcome of this means that a local government can turn to the next eligible highest polling candidate from the last election to fill a vacancy, making significant cost savings whilst still meeting the wants of its community. Another positive reform related to voting for councillors is proposed regulations for the larger band 1 and band 2 local governments to hold a public election to directly elect the mayor or president. For some larger metropolitan councils, local government operations are far removed from daily life. There is a strong possibility that ratepayers are not familiar with individuals running for council or leadership. I cannot say the same for regional areas, particularly mine. Sometimes it feels like our mayor is the most infamously known person in the region. Like preferential voting, this practice is not unknown to voters and at state and federal elections, having a distinction of who is running for mayor gives people a better understanding of the values and policies of the people who are running to lead governments.

Also mirroring state and federal election processes is the introduction of caretaker periods to increase public confidence and trust in the integrity of government. This statewide standard will mean that elected representatives will be given the time to directly engage with the people in their district, whilst operational staff carry on the functions of government. This distinction between the elected representatives and members of the public service will be maintained. It makes sense that local governments with a similar population have around the same number of council members. There are more than 1 000 council members across Western Australia. There are numerous examples, especially out in the regions where councils operate with a vacancy unfilled because there are no candidates. At the 2021 ordinary elections, the Western Australian Electoral Commission observed eight unfilled vacancies, all in non-metropolitan councils, because there were more vacancies than candidates. In this situation, local governments have to hold extraordinary vacancies, at a further cost to ratepayers.

To conclude, the Western Australian Local Government Amendment Bill 2023 will bring several benefits, particularly to my electorate of Geraldton. It will empower the community, provide more autonomy to local government authorities, streamline bureaucratic processes and strengthen financial management. All these are fundamental aspects of good governance, and they play a crucial role in creating a prosperous and thriving community. I commend the bill to the house.

MS J.J. SHAW (Swan Hills — Parliamentary Secretary) [3.47 pm]: I am sorry for startling the member for Kingsley! I did not mean to seek the call quite so vigorously, but I have good reason to because today we are debating the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023. This is a particularly interesting topic for me. Local government is a hot topic in the seat of Swan Hills, which has two local governments: the City of Swan and the Shire of Mundaring. Let me just say that it is night and day between the volume of complaints I receive about one as compared with the other, and that is reflected in the statistics produced by the authorities monitoring local government; I will come to that in some time. I know how important this is to the people of Swan Hills. It is very, very important. A whole heap of people are sick to their back teeth of the dysfunction we see in the City of Swan. It is my sincere hope that the reforms that I will discuss today will make improvements to the City of Swan, but I say to voters that their most powerful way of affecting change in the City of Swan comes to them in October this year, during local government elections. New brooms sweep clean, and if nothing changes, nothing changes. If you keep electing the same people and expect them to behave differently, in some quarters that is considered the definition of madness.

With that opening statement, I am now going to talk about some interesting and moderate parts of the bill, then I am going to wrap it up and bring it home. I want to commend the Minister for Local Government. He is particularly passionate about local government reform, as was Minister Templeman. This has been a years' long process in the making. Extensive consultation was undertaken for the formulation of the reforms. There are tranches of reforms. The reforms I will discuss today go some way and then there are a whole heap of reforms in the pipeline that again, I want to assure the people of Swan Hills, will go some way towards addressing some of the appalling behaviours we have seen at the City of Swan.

The McGowan government continues to deliver the most significant reforms to the system of local government in Western Australia in more than 25 years. As I say, this bill will deliver a number of reforms. Other members have spoken about those reforms so I will keep my comments to about half a dozen that are very material to my electorate. The first one is the introduction of principles in the act for local governments to frame their activities

and priorities. The second one is new requirements for all local governments to publish information online through public registers, such as leases, grants and significant contracts. The third is to reintroduce preferential voting to better align local governments with state and federal elections. The fourth one is the direct election of mayors for local councils. The fifth reform is standardising meeting procedures for all local council meetings across Western Australia and then introducing specific requirements for the videostreaming of council meetings. As I said, this program of reform is the subject of a large body of prior work and consultation, and extensive processes with all sorts of stakeholders. At the heart of these reforms is the intent to facilitate good culture in local government and God knows we are crying out for that in the City of Swan. Critically, these reforms are designed to strengthen how local governments work to deliver services to local communities; that is what they are there for. They are not about the prosecution of individual grudge matches around particular projects. They are not there to zombie-like revisit arguments that are long gone. They are not there for people to pursue bitter personal vendettas. There are actually about delivering for ratepayers. I think that some City of Swan councillors have lost their way in that regard. Not only have they forgotten how to function as adults in the confines of the council, they and previous councillors have and those who aspire to a second coming in local government have also demonstrated a manifest inability to work with the other adults in the room at state and federal levels. We have to improve that culture and I very much look forward to the implementation of these reforms to try to help us because the City of Swan is one of the largest metropolitan councils. Tens of thousands of people rely on us at a state, federal and local level to deliver for them, and the City of Swan has proven itself over and over again incapable of functioning properly. That absolutely has to end.

On the key items in the bill, I would firstly like to discuss the principles and objects. Several are very relevant to us in Swan Hills. The first is the recognition of Aboriginal Western Australians. The second is the importance of considering sustainability, climate change and intergenerational issues. The third is about promoting collaboration between local governments. These principles have been drafted in recognition that every local government must consider these important principles in the unique, specific conditions within their districts. Elevating the voice of Aboriginal people in the seat of Swan Hills is very important. It is great to see local governments develop and implement their reconciliation action plans and engage in native title and land custodianship matters. In the most recent census data, Swan Hills has the second-highest proportion of Aboriginal constituents in the metropolitan area after the seat of Midland. We have a high proportion of First Nations Western Australians, so this is important for us. I want to congratulate the current mayor, David Lucas, on the release of the City of Swan's *Reconciliation action plan (Innovate RAP): Mar 2022–Mar 2024* in May 2022. I note the considerable change of tone in the language and approach of the City of Swan under his leadership. It is fantastic to see. I congratulate the City of Swan—the staff who put the time into developing that reconciliation action plan and the City of Swan for now implementing it. The Shire of Mundaring's council endorsed its reconciliation action plan at the November 2022 meeting.

In the hills, we live the effects of sustainability and climate change every single day. We are very bushfire prone. I am sure this Parliament is very well aware of the Wooroloo fires that tore through our homes in February 2021. It destroyed 86 homes. The fire was so bad that we had to evacuate Ellenbrook. It is not an issue that is only confined to the hills. It extends down into the flats of my electorate and it is incredibly important. Intergenerational issues are also very important to us. Swan Hills has a particularly young population. No matter what measure of youth—whether we are looking at proportion of babies and toddlers, proportion of primary schoolers, or proportion of secondary schoolers—Swan Hills is much higher than the state average. We have a very young population, so the decisions we make now on the ways that local governments choose to prioritise things like youth centres, community facilities and swimming pools and is getting on and delivering projects affects children. It will affect them for years to come because our kids do not necessarily move away. They stay because it is a great place to live. We need to think about intergenerational issues and it is great to see these principles enshrined in legislation.

Collaboration between local government authorities is pretty interesting because the Shire of Mundaring part of my electorate is next door to the Shire of Kalamunda and the seats of Kalamunda and Darling Range. Our local government authorities all share the beautiful Perth hills region, which is an aspiring critical tourism destination for the Perth region—for Destination Perth. If we are to make the most of that, our local governments need to collaborate.

They were the nice things I had to say about local government! I can see Hansard bracing herself!

Several members interjected.

Ms J.J. SHAW: Yes, exactly!

Now for the aspects relating to councils. In my comments, I want to draw a very distinct difference between councils and city administrations. In the course of my six years as a local member, I have had the great privilege to work with some incredibly committed, very dedicated officers of both the City of Swan and the Shire of Mundaring. Gee—do they go above and beyond? They are great. They often face great adversity when trying to deliver projects for their communities because of the dysfunction that we see, particularly in the council of the City of Swan. My comments are also not about all councillors. There are some absolutely brilliant councillors on the City of Swan. There are some genuinely community-minded, well-motivated people and they do not necessarily share my political views at all. I have worked well with people who have run for the Liberal Party and have sat on council.

The key point being I am really pleased to work with people on council who are genuinely motivated to deliver for their communities. People who cannot leave their politics at the front door, as I said, either for personal vendetta or petty partisan politics are not able to get on and deliver for their community. Frankly, they will get no truck with me and they should not get any truck with the people of Swan Hills. I would encourage people to think very carefully in October 2023 about which councillors and which people lurking in the outer realms of council, perhaps with relevance deprivation syndrome —

Mr D.A. Templeman: Tell us what you really think!

Ms J.J. SHAW: I will say what I think because this is important stuff, minister! This affects delivered outcomes for my people. I work hard for my people. I have lived in my seat for 16 years and I care about outcomes. While any of these councils cannot get their act together, it affects all of us. There are seriously dysfunctional behaviours. They are harmful and they need to be addressed so I want to speak to them. Firstly, new public registers will come in under this legislation. The bill will provide for a new requirement for local governments to disclose key information on public online registers, which the Minister for Local Government trialled when he was the Mayor of Vincent. The sorts of things on these registers will be leases of local government property, the awarding of grants, high-value goods and services contracts, disclosures of interests related to items considered at council meetings, and cash-in-lieu contributions to the local government for things like car parking and public open space. Ratepayers will be given a very clear line of sight into how local governments are allocating resources and finances. They will have a very clear line of sight for all sorts of conflicts of interests. There are open questions in the City of Swan.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

HOUSING SOLUTIONS

Motion

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

That the house implores the McGowan Labor government to take a statewide, holistic look at the housing crisis and consider innovative solutions to prevent the housing crisis from worsening.

As we know, there is a housing crisis. There is a shortage of regional accommodation, builders, workers' accommodation in regional areas and skilled labour. That shortage of skilled labour is being accentuated, as we know, because of this government's changes to the immigration arrangements for skilled migrants in 2017, which has led to a backlog of housing workers required right across the state. From the Kimberley to the Pilbara and down as far as the great southern, the goldfields and Esperance, and all points in between, there is pressure on housing stock and shortages of accommodation. Opportunities for economic growth are going begging because of a lack of houses, workers' accommodation and workers generally. Our state is growing, but the housing situation is a slow-moving train wreck, with a government that refuses to acknowledge that there is a problem and thinks that if it makes an announcement, the problem goes away. This government's own decision-making in the past to slash the number of social houses, the availability of skilled labour and the migration of skilled labour into the state has led to this shortage of both houses to house that labour and labour to build the houses. It is a wicked problem that this government has helped contribute to.

I turn to rental housing stock at the moment. I read a report from the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia about rental housing stock. The CEO of REIWA, Cath Hart, was talking about the situation in Perth. In this report from 1 March 2023, Ms Hart says —

“Perth's vacancy rate is currently at 0.7 per cent, during a balanced market it usually sat between 2.5 and 3.5 per cent,” ...

This means that there is very, very little housing available. We hear stories of people who are unable to find accommodation. When the shadow cabinet took a trip to the northern growth corridor last week, some councillors and businesspeople told me stories of people living in cars in various car parks throughout their own city. They are people who previously had accommodation and have work and families. There are families living in cars and just moving from one car park to the other so that they do not attract the authorities' undue attention. This situation is striking right across the metropolitan area and the regions. In the report Ms Hart goes on to say —

... according to rental bonds data, in the past two years nearly 19,000 rental properties have been removed from the rental pool ...

I suppose that is because people are coming back to the state and taking occupation of their own houses. These people might have had a house they had let when they were temporarily out of the state. There also could be people simply taking advantage of capital growth and moving a house into the market. As we know, houses do not sit very long in the market. Despite interest rate rises, houses in Perth are still selling quite strongly. Ms Hart goes on say —

“Delays in the building industry have also played a role as many tenants who took advantage of COVID building incentives are still waiting for their home to be completed and need to retain their rental accommodation ...

As I say, people cannot build houses because they cannot get the labour and they cannot get the labour because they do not have the houses to put the labourers in. In the meantime, there are all these houses sitting half built in Perth. I am told it goes in a cycle. There is a big demand for concrete slabs, so there is a shortage of grando workers to put down the concrete slab. Then there is the experience of putting the bricks together. In Perth, most of the houses are double brick with what is called a stick roof, so a bespoke roof is made on those bricks. There is a shortage of bricklayers. The price to lay a brick went to \$3.50 a brick, which is well over the long-term price for bricklayers. A lot of the brickwork has now been done, so the emphasis is on getting the roofs on houses, and there is an extreme shortage of roof carpenters. I am told that some of the brickies are now not so heavily employed. I will get to that at the end of this sad story about the unbalanced market we are in at the moment. The price for roof carpentry has moved from \$20 per square metre about two to three years ago to \$60, so it has tripled. The cost of labour and the cost of getting the roof on has tripled, not to mention that there has been a shortage of timber and virtually every component of houses as we have moved through this cycle. A lot of housing stock is sitting half completed, a lot of people are sitting in rental accommodation waiting for their house to be completed and there is an inability to bring in labour.

In the past when we have had a situation like this, there has been an inflow of labour from the eastern states into Western Australia because, typically, we seem to run at a bit of a countercycle to some of the eastern states. At times when they have had downturns, we have been in a bit of a boom over here, so it has been possible to attract staff to Western Australia. For the reasons I have outlined, that being the fact that there is nowhere for labourers to stay and also because of the strong building demand in the eastern states, there is not the impetus to bring them in. We cannot seem to attract them. This is just unfolding slowly; as I say, it is a train wreck unfolding in front of our eyes, with a government that does not seem to understand that this situation needs to be addressed.

REIWA also points out that there is a need for about 18 000 to 20 000 houses to be brought on to the market to compensate for those that have been lost to the rental market because, as I have said, of people taking up opportunities here and the need to keep up with population growth, which we hope will continue in the future. The government's response has been abysmal in the sense that we have seen no real action to attract labour, to find accommodation and to put a cure on the situation. In some ways, the government caused some of this because of the overstimulation of the market at a particular time. That led to a very large number of building starts under the stimulus. As I will point out later in the final part of my speech, we now have very few housing approvals. It is a strange situation; we have all these half-built houses, but there are very few in the pipeline after them. We will not see a quick solution to any of our problems in providing housing.

This is not just happening in Perth; as I said, it is right across Western Australia. The country rental situation is also dire. In the past, I have highlighted an experience in my own electorate of people having to leave their communities because they cannot get a house to live in. They go somewhere else. They will end up in a larger community or they will go and live with a family or somewhere else where they can find some shelter. It will probably be in Perth or somewhere else, but not in the small community that needs their skill, whether they be the local mechanic, the local hairdresser or even the local chemist, who I am aware left town in one of the cases. These situations are manifesting across Western Australia. The Real Estate Institute of Western Australia is a great source of information on these matters because, of course, that is the agency that helps to rent out the houses and it seems to have a good idea of what is going on around the state. Its report in the *Farm Weekly* on 24 January outlines some of the situations that are occurring in many regional centres. The report indicates that very limited stocks are available in places such as Broome, Albany, Bunbury, Busselton, Esperance, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie. At a time when we are finding it hard to get people to invest in and build and put on the market long-term rentals, the government is reviewing the Residential Tenancies Act 1987. That concerns people who potentially are thinking about investing in rental accommodation because there is uncertainty about what the legal position will be between the landlord and tenant in the future. Comments have been made by members of the government that people should be able to have pets without the approval of their landlord and should be able to make modifications to the house. Those types of things are very worrying to people who are thinking about whether to make an investment in a property or just put their money into the share market or superannuation or some other vehicle. They are real concerns for people. Those types of considerations that the government is reportedly going through are very worrying to people who are potentially putting their life savings on the line in building or buying a rental property and then putting that out to the market with the uncertainty of what this government is going to change with the legal situation in this state.

Nothing has changed since that report came out in January highlighting some of the shortages. A refresh of the *Farm Weekly* in March outlines the same types of problems with the figure that between 18 000 and 20 000 rental houses will be needed as demand continues to exceed supply and regional areas are feeling the pressure the most, with a handful of rentals listed on most markets. Persistent inflation and wages struggling to catch up are causing a problem for affordability and for families looking to rent in those markets. We know, too, that many houses are in another market altogether, the Airbnb market. I was in the south a couple of weeks ago in the member for Bunbury's electorate at a regional development conference and I spoke to many mayors and local governments in the area who said that there are houses available, but because of the need to cater for holiday-makers, many of those houses are not there for the people who need them. There is an allocation problem as well. That sort of problem

will not be improved if the government threatens to bring in tenancy changes that will worry the owners of the properties even more. It will drive them into platforms such as Airbnb rather than putting their house on the market for long-term rental. That is a real issue going forward.

In the state at the moment there is tremendous opportunity in all sorts of industries in many regions because of the state's position as a supplier of critical minerals. At Eneabba, in my electorate, Iluka Resources is building a \$1 billion refinery—the only one of its type in Australia, where rare earths will be processed and it will add value to the product. It will kick off a new range of industry in that area. But again, there is no housing, so what to do? It must be workers' camps. A town such as Eneabba, which has relied on the mining and mineral sands industries since inception in the 1970s, risks not having the ability to grow from that \$1 billion investment and the hundreds of jobs it will create because no land to speak of is available in the town. Land supply is another issue that needs to be taken seriously by this government. In every town we visit, we hear stories that DevelopmentWA is either inactive or it drip feeds the blocks onto the market in a way that maximises the price, but it is not enabling the state to capture the opportunities that exist in various areas of the state, from some of the new ministries and new opportunities that should be driving growth for those regions, simply because there are no houses—whether it be in Port Hedland, where there is a real need for serious investment, or a change in the way of doing business for DevelopmentWA to ensure the market demand is met. We know that there is a voluntary buyback in the Port Hedland west end improvement scheme. That is having a limited effect. I understand that it has attracted about only a 50 per cent take-up.

One of the reasons is: where will the people go? They can stay there in a long-term rental, but if they have to stay there, they are not thinking there is a need to sell. People do not sell unless they want to leave, basically. That town is unable to grow its permanent population because there is not the availability of land, but that is only one town. Dalwallinu in my electorate is not exactly what people would think of as a growth community; except that it is, because it services the mining industry. It is the last jumping-off point of the wheatbelt before moving into the mining provinces. Because of that, many industries are located there that service the mining industry. There is everything from plastic tank manufacturers to exhaust manufacturers for large earthmoving equipment and concreters et cetera. That town has never been able to get the land supply it needs to either grow its industry properly or provide accommodation for the local workforce, despite having tried for a long time to have it supported by government. We face a time when we have these opportunities, but we will not be able to capitalise on those opportunities if there is not accommodation available for people who want to move into the area.

I saw a media release today announcing that the government will invest \$80 million in the headworks fund to boost infill and regional land supply. That is \$80 million across the entire state. Seriously? Is \$80 million the best the government could do to invest in what is a crisis situation? I was in the member for North West Central's electorate the other day and we were looking at the situation in Kalbarri, where this government had promised workers' accommodation. That \$80 million is actually only \$40 million for regional WA and \$40 million for the metropolitan area. A lot of that \$40 million allocation would be sucked up into that development and also in Exmouth where I understand the regional headworks are extremely prohibitive and are holding up the development of much-needed workers' accommodation. It is \$80 million across the whole state to address a crisis. The government is sitting on billions and billions of dollars—I think it is \$11 billion to \$13 billion in combined surpluses in the past couple of years—and \$80 million is the best it can do.

I have had the Premier as Treasurer pouring scorn on the opposition because it put forward a \$1 billion headworks fund, but that is the sort of investment needed to unlock opportunities for Western Australia. The opposition proposed a fund of \$1 billion. Mind you, that fund is over 10 years, so it would not be \$1 billion into the market today; we do not want to cause the type of splurges seen since this government overstimulated the market. We want a steady growth. Nonetheless, we have to understand that we need to unlock opportunities in various communities across the state. Allocating \$100 million across the state for regional communities to grow is not a huge investment. That would be \$1 billion over 10 years to cure one of the most wicked problems in Western Australia at the moment—the cost and lack of supply of housing. If we step back from that, it is actually stopping us from growing. It is stopping us from unlocking approaching opportunities for many communities around our state.

Kalbarri, one of those town affected by cyclone Seroja, is in the North West Central electorate; it used to be in my electorate until a few weeks before the cyclone, and I still have a great deal of connection with Kalbarri. I recently visited with the member for North West Central and was shocked to see how many empty blocks are still there. I saw the house of a man whom I had spoken to before; I know he has spoken to members of government, but he is still living under a tarp, and that situation has not been resolved. I understand that throughout midwest areas affected by cyclone Seroja, probably half the people who lost their houses still have no house two years on. That situation has not been adequately addressed. The state and federal governments combined have put up over \$100 million in investment under the cyclone Seroja recovery arrangements, but we know from questions asked in the other place that very little of that money has actually got onto the ground. There will be further activity on this from the opposition over the next weeks as we head towards the two-year anniversary of cyclone Seroja. The opposition seeks an understanding of how poorly this government has handled the response and how little it has cared about making sure that people affected by Seroja are in a recovery situation.

Apart from Kalbarri, one town badly affected was Mingenew, one of those communities in the north of my electorate in which we have seen a hollowing out of the community since the cyclone hit. Many of these towns have had population decline as people have been unable to re-establish their lives in the communities. This is despite the fact that some time ago Mingenew offered blocks of land for sale for \$1. In fact, nine blocks were put on the market in 2020 with prices ranging from as little as \$1 with a condition that development would begin within two years. It looks as though those blocks will have to be handed back. I am looking at a report from the *Midwest Times* from earlier this week that contains the words of shire president Gary Cosgrove; it reads —

... TC Seroja and COVID had played a part in delays, he said the lack of tradespeople willing to come to regional areas had been the biggest stumbling block for the would-be new home-builders in Mingenew, pointing to State Government building grants as the cause of the disruptions.

The article goes on to say —

People rushed to take advantage of the twin benefits—leaving the low-interest marketplace at risk of overheating and, Mr Cosgrove says, having the unintended consequence of leaving the regions high and dry.

As a result of some of that overstimulation in certain markets —

Ms M.J. Davies: Unintended but foreseeable.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Unintended but foreseeable—that is a very good way of putting it. It certainly should have been foreseen. It has been very difficult in the midwest in particular to get those communities back on their feet because of the shortage of, and competition for, labour and a lack of coordination to achieve an outcome by providing accommodation and avenues for builders to go there. At the time of the cyclone, I was contacted by a number of builders who said that they wanted to prioritise going to the midwest; they asked how they should go about it. All I could do was point them towards the state and local governments—mainly, to the state government—and say that they have to deal with them to integrate, get established, get their people housed, get works off the ground and help. I doubt, in the end, that too many of them could help because I do not think that there was any real level of coordination to make that occur. We saw an opportunity in which builders wanted to come and help, but due to circumstances and a lack of interest, those builders went and did other things. Also, I have got to say that there was a pretty poor performance by a number of insurance companies that did not come to the party in a timely manner either. It is still a challenging situation in the midwest because of a range of factors, and it needs the attention of government.

As I said, the member for North West Central and I were at the site of the much-vaunted Kalbarri worker accommodation. It was announced that the land was being released on 7 March 2022, over a year ago now, and registrations of interest were being taken for this wonderful block of suitable land, but the land appears to be a bit of a drainage hole that needs a fair bit of remediation work, which will soak up a fair bit of the \$40 million allocated over the entire state. These pipes run in from the road, the caravan park and all around it and come into a thing that I would characterise as a sump, which would be a bit problematic if worker accommodation is to be established on that site. Whoever was clever enough to pick that site perhaps should have walked the site instead of looking at a map and making a judgement that it was appropriate. Nonetheless, it is the only site that has been selected.

On 16 August, an announcement was made that modular housing provider Petra Westkey Modular Housing was named the preferred proponent. It was said that the Perth-based company had been selected and would help support local businesses by providing worker accommodation. I understand that the government said at the time that it would “enter contract negotiations with the proponent”. These were comments attributed to the Minister for Lands, who is sitting here now, so maybe he can give us an update on the situation in Kalbarri when he gets up, no doubt, to attack everything the opposition has said. I am sure the member for North West Central and her constituents would like to know what is being done to assist that community to get back on its feet two years after the cyclone devastated it and much of the midwest communities in its trail. We know that a contract negotiation was underway. Perhaps the minister can update us about whether that contract has been finalised, whether there is a design and whether there is a start date. When will site works commence? When will the worker accommodation be delivered or is he just hoping that time will tick along, people will forget and just move on, and it will fall off the radar? We know that that can happen to projects that sit around for a long time before they are addressed. I will be looking forward to the minister giving us an understanding of that situation.

I will speak more generally around the midwest. I spoke before about the opportunities and also the problems that exist in that area. One of the towns that has experienced real pressure and real problems in providing accommodation for its workers is Dongara. Dongara sits at the epicentre, if you like, of a vast amount of new projects in the Perth basin. Huge gas fields have been discovered and are being developed, so there is a construction boom at the moment, as members could imagine. That is obviously not the basis for long-term population growth, but it will create decades of work for local people in that community. However, there is no long-term rental housing in the town. Where will those workers be housed? Unless someone does something to encourage development in Dongara, it will not be in Dongara. It will not be in the local communities in that area, like it should be. Yet again, it will result in a fly-in

fly-out situation, as we have seen develop in many parts of state. That would be a tragedy for a town that has had an affinity with and a history in natural gas going back to the 1970s. It was the very first real supply of reticulated natural gas in Western Australia. The Parmelia gas pipeline was put in place and dedicated to providing gas to the metropolitan area. For 50-odd years Dongara has been a source of gas for the south and it will continue to be a source of gas for the south, but some of the mining projects that are trying to find alternatives to diesel and other dirty fuels will also be making use of that gas supply. The local communities will not be able to grow and make the most of that opportunity if there is not a concerted effort to make land available and encourage investment in those areas. That is why the earlier point I made about the Nationals WA and Liberal Party's policy on headworks is so important. We need to allow those communities to have the chance to grow and to make use of those opportunities, not stifle their opportunities, as we have seen happen so often in the past. This is happening not just with the development of gas plants. There is also talk of things like urea being produced out near Three Springs. That has an important knock-on effect with agriculture because the carbon footprint of that urea will be magnitudes less than the carbon footprint of the urea imported from places like China and Russia. In the future, that will become increasingly important in agriculture as farmers come to understand how their carbon cycle works and how they can help decarbonise our industries going forward.

There are some tremendous opportunities in the midwest around not just Geraldton and Oakajee—Oakajee is also in my electorate just to the north of Geraldton. There is an opportunity there for significant growth in hydrogen but we have seen very little attempt by this government to energise that. It seems to have bypassed that opportunity countless times and it is still prevaricating around the commencement of the road works needed there. It is not helpful at all beyond platitudes, nice statements and having little conferences et cetera. Very little is actually happening to get that project off the ground. Again, we need to make sure that when that happens, land is available in Geraldton and the surrounding areas and hopefully private developers will be assisted to help deliver on the future for that area.

I turn my attention now to another major regional centre that is experiencing growth and opportunities. We know that lithium and other essential minerals are being found in the goldfields and that developments are taking place to ensure another major arm to the mining province out there can move from gold and nickel and into a range of other things including lithium and, down the track—getting back to that interplay with agriculture—potash. This government has had a woeful track record in encouraging the potash industry in Western Australia. It refuses to listen to the needs of that industry. As a result, those projects that could take place are not growing and moving on.

I am looking here at a very good little snapshot of the situation in Kalgoorlie–Boulder titled *Kalgoorlie–Boulder land & housing position paper* published in December 2022 by the Kalgoorlie–Boulder Chamber of Commerce and Industry. These are the people who are living the dream in Kalgoorlie, battling with the skill shortages and the unavailability of land. The executive summary in its first sentence reads —

Kalgoorlie–Boulder is experiencing a severe land and housing shortage which is having tangible, negative impacts on businesses, residents and the broader liveability of this regional centre ...

An estimated \$3.7 billion of major projects are underway or in advanced planning in Kalgoorlie–Boulder and a further \$2.7 billion across the Goldfields ...

The degree to which the region and Western Australia can take advantage of this investment and economic opportunity is however constrained by a severe land and housing shortage in Kalgoorlie–Boulder. The residential market is currently characterised by:

- **Extremely low rental availability ...**
- **Low land availability**, with new serviced land limited to an estimated 60 lots over the next 12–24 months;
- **Constrained long term land supply ...**
- **Limited infill development ...**

All those things in Kalgoorlie–Boulder are leading to a lack of opportunity to take up all the economic growth that is on offer at the moment in the goldfields. The paper further states —

The lack of housing availability is contributing to a range of economic and social challenges, such as:

- Business viability ...
- Population retention ...
- Visitor attraction ...
- Social issues, with community and government service needs increasing to unsustainable levels

A survey was done on the members of that organisation with the vast majority, well over 60 per cent, reporting that the accommodation shortage is affecting their workforce. Only a very minor number said that there has been no effect at all. They were asked, “Has your business experienced resignations or rejections of employment offers as

a result of the lack of accommodation options?” Again, the majority replied yes. We are seeing tangible effects felt by business in regional areas, and I am sure in metropolitan areas as well. I know that there are plenty of businesses in Perth that struggle to find labour. But in regional areas like Kalgoorlie, it is a long drive to another major centre where a person might find accommodation. If a person living in Perth cannot find work in or near the suburb in which they live, they can hop on the train or drive to another suburb and find something. That opportunity does not exist in many regional areas, except through the FIFO way that does not actually lead to community development.

This situation is similar in many other towns. As I said, I attended a regional development conference in Bunbury at which the Minister for Regional Development spoke. It was highlighted to me that there are vacancy shortages in the Bunbury area. Cath Hart said that a vacancy rate of 2.5 or 3.5 per cent is a pretty balanced state in which to be, but in the Greater Bunbury area the vacancy rate is 0.4 per cent! In Bunbury, just as in Kalgoorlie, there is a shortage of rental accommodation. Albany has had an 800 per cent increase in what is known as internal migration. People are moving to Albany from the metropolitan area, basically. That in itself means that there will be pressures on the housing stock in that town as well going forward.

We need to take advantage of this unique time when we are seeing people leave the Perth area. In the Nationals and on this side, we always look at trying to develop regional areas. At the moment, we have an opportunity with this internal migration. People are leaving Perth and heading off to communities in country areas. I note that one of the areas most affected is Exmouth, member for North West Central. That is one of the areas with the highest rates. In my electorate, Chittering and Toodyay are other areas that have picked up a lot of that migration moving forward. It is a great pity to me that the midwest communities I spoke of earlier have not been able to benefit in the same way. As we know, there has been a lack of effort to address the situation that affects them at the moment.

We know that there are construction issues in the metropolitan area and difficulty in actually finishing off some of the housing projects. The fact is that we have not been able to attract the same level of interstate workers as we normally would expect to at such a time of busy construction work and that has led to a shortage of skilled labour and workers. One of the concerns coming from that is that with the big rush to build houses, some of the building standards might have fallen away a bit. We know that Western Australia is a state that does not have mandatory building inspections. There is no mandated compliance. The Minister for Commerce, through the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety, is responsible for that. We feel that needs to be examined to make sure that the housing being provided during this time of pressure is actually of a good standard.

From my own point of view, I had an experience going back to about 2014. I was working with a constituent of mine who had a house built in Lower Chittering, just outside Perth, by a builder who did not do a very good job at all. In fact, he did a very shoddy job of building the house. The bank that was financing the house paid without making sure that there was an inspection or having any idea that the house was being built properly. That house cost just under half a million dollars to build. After it had been completed, it was found that it would take another half a million dollars to actually fix it. This person then thought, “Oh well, we have home indemnity insurance. We will go to that, and that will cover it.” However, at that stage, home indemnity insurance went to a value of only \$100 000, with less than \$5 000 excess. An individual would get policy cover from QBE Insurance that would say a house was worth \$490 000, so that individual might think that policy would cover them for \$490 000, but it would not; it would cover them for only \$100 000. That constituent’s case was brought to this Parliament a number of times and to the attention of the former Minister for Commerce—the Deputy Premier at one stage—and the then Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Commerce, the member for Wanneroo. Largely as a result of that, we saw the government at least double the value of home indemnity insurance to \$200 000. That was a good step that resulted from that constituent in Lower Chittering having a manifestly inadequate insurance payout for the situation they found themselves in. They are not a builder. They did not know that the house was not fit until after they had moved in and it started to fall apart almost immediately.

There was another constituent of mine, whose situation I have raised in this place before. I am not going to use their name because I think they have moved on in life. They were building a house in the Shire of Gingin, about 80 kilometres north of Perth. At the time, the builder was running short of cash and hit them up for a very large progress payment. They paid far more than they should have done at that stage. Their bank advanced the money. The builder then went broke and, of course, all materials onsite were retrieved by the supplier. They were left with a house that was not even bricked up; it was only half bricked. Their family of four was living in a tin shed in Gingin in 40-degree heat in summer. Again, all they could get was \$100 000, which clearly was not enough. That was another situation in which regulation failed people who needed some protection when things went wrong.

I am just about to run out of time, so I will finish off. I go back to the start of the discussion about the big boom in construction that followed the twin stimuli of the federal and state first home owner grants. That led to housing starting to skyrocket. Off the top of my head, there were about 20 000 building starts, which was a significant increase on what would normally be the case. There was an article titled “Perth housing crisis: Approvals hit 40-year low as families battle to get roof overhead”. What we are seeing in Western Australia is that approvals are coming forward at this time of stress in the housing system, but once we get past that and the current backlog has been cleared, there is not going to be much housing constructed. There will be a 40-year low in housing construction approvals. That is a terrible cycle that we seem to have entered into. We will have too many houses being built for our industry

to cope with and then we will have too few houses being built to house the people who will be coming here. That is actually pretty worrying for the government. It is a prediction that the government should take note of. If housing approvals hit a 40-year low at a time when the population is increasing and there is already rental stress, the government should be alarmed. It should act to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place. I finish off not by condemning the government, but by imploring the government to act to rectify this situation and provide some continued development of housing stock in Western Australia.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party) [4.48 pm]: I rise to support the motion —

That the house implores the McGowan Labor government to take a statewide, holistic look at the housing crisis and consider innovative solutions to prevent the housing crisis from worsening.

As the Leader of the Opposition stated, we certainly have a crisis right across the state when it comes to housing. It is impacting a range of different sectors. Today, we heard about the implications for the international education sector. The most important implications are for the people who are struggling to find a place to live. When we have new building approvals at near record low levels, severe skilled labour shortages, a critical housing shortage, rising costs, rising interest rates and the state's biggest home builder announcing that it will not write new contracts, it points to a crisis.

It is interesting that new building approvals, as the Leader of the Opposition stated, were at about 40-year lows; they were at a level similar to what they were when the Premier announced a stimulus in 2020 and raised some very real concerns about the state of the building sector. The government's spin on this is extraordinary, because we now hear from the Premier that it is a sign of a strong economy. We argue that it is also a sign of a Premier who is becoming increasingly out of touch with the challenges that Western Australians are facing on the ground. Housing is a key example of the government failing to respond to and address the key hardships that Western Australians are facing. The clear response from the Premier to date is that it is a sign of a booming economy. Again, it falls well short of understanding the challenges that Western Australians face. We are seeing a lot of people out there who are homeless and bunking in with relatives or living in their cars. We recently met with a mother and her baby in Wanneroo who were living in her car under very challenging circumstances. These are not unique stories to any member in this place and I certainly do not doubt that every electorate office is being challenged by these very real concerns.

The constraint on the sector has the potential to impact affordability and availability of housing in Western Australia for decades to come. It is obviously critical for all Western Australians. Some new census data out today showed more than 2 300 people in Western Australia in August 2021 were sleeping in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out—otherwise known as sleeping rough. For a state as prosperous as WA, it is appalling that we have seen such an increase since 2016. The cohort of people who are sleeping rough has increased by about 114 per cent. This is in significant contrast to the wealth that our Premier boasts about, with the fact over the last couple of years the state has enjoyed an \$11 billion surplus. Apparently the surplus is the envy of other states, but we also have the unenviable title of being the rough sleeper capital of the country, with the highest number of rough sleepers here in Western Australia. Over 1 800 social housing homes are effectively vacant, boarded up and in need of maintenance. We have less social housing stock than we did in 2017. Our figures indicate we have 300 fewer stock. Some updated figures reported in *The West Australian* today indicate it may be 600 fewer stock. While we are here, the minister boasts of 1 000 new homes in this Parliament, but it does not take into account the 1 300 that were sold off when this government first came to office.

On the ground, the Perth rental vacancy rate has dropped to 0.7 per cent and median weekly rent has increased by \$100 a week to \$550. The social housing waitlist has about 34 000 people, with 9 000 on the priority list desperately seeking homes. The Reserve Bank of Australia's 10 straight interest rate hikes are certainly hurting and we understand that the cost of living is a significant issue. Over the last year, Western Australians have sat anxiously waiting every month to hear what the RBA's decision will be and how much more they will need to pay to stay in their home. Only recently, the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia released its annual affordability report, which shows how much interest rate rises are starting to bite in Western Australia. The report shows that families now require more than one-third of their income to make loan repayments, and, sadly, more shock is about to come for those who will come off fixed-term loans later this year.

The cost of living is a very significant issue. It is front of mind for the opposition and that is why we recommended that this government invest \$300 million to support the not-for-profit sector for the challenges that are expressed right across the board. Housing availability and affordability is a driver of the pain that many Western Australians are feeling in their hip pockets. The cost of bills, food, fuel and mortgages continue to rise, but we hear from the government only platitudes and empty promises. Perth renters are specifically suffering. The REIWA data reveals that median rent on Perth houses is now 30 per cent higher than it was two years ago, and median apartment rent is 25 per cent higher. With vacancy rates at 0.5 per cent in Perth and rents staying high, struggling renters are experiencing just another horrid year in this key area under the cost of living. As a result, Perth is now the third most expensive capital city in Australia to rent, behind Sydney and Brisbane. House rents in Perth have risen sharply for the fifth successive quarter with the strongest quarterly growth in two years. Domain's rental report from March 2023 shows that the average weekly rental for a house in Perth rose by 4.8 per cent to \$535 and 12.3 per cent year on

year, which is the second-highest increase in the nation's capitals. This marks the longest stretch of continual housing rental growth recorded in Perth. We know rental conditions appear to be more competitive for houses, with quarterly growth for houses more than double the pace of units. This reflects the underlying demographic trends with housing preferences and availability of rental supply between property types.

Average rent at record highs and vacancies at all-time lows is seeing Western Australians now more urgently seeking social housing. As I said, there are 34 000 people on the social housing waitlist and 9 000 on the priority list. These figures are very alarming. They are further proof that more Western Australians are doing it tough, and plunging for the first time into housing stress and poverty. We in the Liberal and National Parties are very concerned about not only the level of homelessness and the figure of over 3 200 people sleeping rough, but also the new and expanded cohort of working poor. This government has failed to boost housing stock for our most vulnerable. Instead we have actually gone backwards. The latest figures indicate that there are now at least 300 fewer social housing homes. *The West Australian* reports about 600 fewer, but according to our latest figures, there were about 1 857 vacant social housing properties in January. These properties are sitting vacant because the government is incapable of addressing the maintenance backlog or beginning new projects.

An example is the dilapidated social housing units in North Beach. We asked questions about that last week. An announcement was made for a tender to demolish those 30 units. Although there is a tenant in one of them, we understand that settlement happened last year. It is quite clear that much more needs to be done to urgently ensure that the government's social housing stock is best utilised. These units went out for comment in August 2018, so to see so little progress five years later is really damning of a government that has lost its way. The Minister for Housing claims that the site works are expected to be completed in mid to late 2023, yet that is what was said about the Common Ground project in East Perth. That project was meant to be completed in mid-2023, but we have now learnt that it could take another two years.

Considering that there are more than 33 000 people on the social housing waitlist, including those who are considered to be a priority, the government cannot afford to continue to drag its feet on this issue. We cannot afford further delays to projects like Common Ground and the North Beach housing units. There are reports of working families living in their cars because it is virtually impossible to find affordable rental properties. Meanwhile, the Premier thinks that the housing crisis is a sign of a strong economy. That is an absolute insult to families and individuals who have been on the social housing waitlist for years, waiting to put a roof over their head. The government has had six years to develop and deliver a plan for social housing, but instead it has been left scrambling to build new dwellings and repair old ones in an inflated market.

The issue of housing affordability is obviously a significant one and, arguably, is an economic failure on the part of the government—but not according to the Premier, who believes it is a sign of strength and robustness in the state's economy and has called it a success. Talk about being out of touch! We have seen about 100 building companies collapse over the last 12 months. Tell that to their staff, who are faced with no work and cost-of-living pressures. Tell that to the Western Australian families who are paying both rent and a mortgage on an unfinished home. They are being pushed to the brink of financial ruin. I do not think these people would agree with the Premier.

I have met with many building industry stakeholders, including the Housing Industry Association, the Master Builders Association and some of the smaller builders, and the message is clear: this issue is not going away anytime soon. The congestion of work will take longer than expected to get through, which means that people who are waiting for their dream home to be built have no clarity on when they will actually get their keys. I have also heard that the government plays favourites with whom it takes advice from.

We welcome the government's announcement of a joint working committee to look at industry reform; however, this committee was convened to look only at government building contracts and non-residential contracts. That is not nearly the scope that the building sector sorely needs. Smaller players in the sector are not being represented, and they do not feel that they are being heard. There are real concerns across the industry that the government is not listening to smaller builders, contractors, consumers and allied industries and trades, who feel that they need to be heard. That is why the opposition called on the government to convene an emergency summit of all stakeholders in the WA building sector in a bid to chart a way through the unprecedented challenges it is facing.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms L. METTAM: This would get everyone around the table and give a voice to those who feel that they have not been heard. I remind the government that desperate Western Australians are waiting years for their homes to be built and that urgent action is needed to tackle this issue.

Another issue I would like to address, which I am sure my colleagues will also address, was raised by the member for Cottesloe earlier today during question time—mandatory inspections. Western Australia remains the only state in the nation that does not require mandatory inspections. That has created an environment that encourages cowboys in the building sector. I make it clear that I am referring to only a certain few in the sector, but I have heard plenty of anecdotal evidence from Western Australians about the issues they have encountered when building their homes. In 2017, all governments around the country agreed to better regulate the Australian building and construction

sector. However, Western Australia is the only jurisdiction that has not introduced a mandatory inspection policy. I ask the government: What has happened with this? Where is the government at? It has not yet been implemented and the opposition is very concerned, as are many consumers in the sector. We are also concerned about the current shortage of skilled workers, which could expose customers even further. It is the opposition's view that any changes to provide better outcomes for consumers could only be a good thing.

An issue that many regional members will know only too well is the number of Airbnb and short-stay holiday listings in regional areas. This is of concern in some metro areas also, but the number of Airbnb and short-stay accommodation listings in the regions is an issue. Although I certainly respect home owners' ability to utilise and benefit from platforms such as Airbnb—particularly our coastal towns and tourist hotspot regions—it has created a challenge for Western Australians who wish to move to these locations for work. Across the state, Airbnb listings outnumber vacant rentals by more than 40 to one. In a swag of regional WA towns, fewer than a dozen houses are available for long-term tenants.

My electorate of Vasse is certainly not immune to that. In August last year, *The West Australian* reported that there were 1 295 combined Airbnb listings within the City of Busselton, which includes Dunsborough. In comparison, only 31 properties were listed online for rent in these towns. It is a challenging issue. Holiday-makers have nearly 700 Airbnbs to choose from in the Shire of Augusta–Margaret River but there are just five properties available for rent in Margaret River and surrounds. The same situation is replicated across WA. Denmark has 185 Airbnbs and three rentals. Albany has 300 Airbnbs compared with 22 rentals. Broome has 161 Airbnbs and 13 rentals. Short-stay holiday homes also currently far outnumber rentals in many Perth councils. I recognise that the government's draft short-term rental accommodation reform policy has been out for consultation. I look forward to its findings and the subsequent government response to what I understand is certainly a very challenging issue.

I will leave my comments there. Quite clearly, there are a range of challenges right across the housing sector. There was news out today about Western Australia being the rough sleeping capital of the country. At a time when we are enjoying significant economic prosperity thanks to the iron ore sector, it points to a significant disconnect between the windfalls that this government has received and what it is actually doing on the ground.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.11 pm]: I also rise to make a short contribution to the motion. I want to point out some concerning issues in the world of housing and support the motion —

That the house implores the McGowan Labor government to take a statewide, holistic look at the housing crisis and consider innovative solutions to prevent the housing crisis from worsening.

On the front page of today's *The West Australian* is a picture of three international students who are paying \$1 000 a week between the three of them for a two-bedroom apartment. They also had to throw in \$17 000 up-front for some sort of bond deposit. That was quite concerning. I will stray on to international education. That story does not send a good message to future students. It does not send a good message to students from around the world who come to Perth. This is a great place; we have four great universities, but students will have nowhere to live. I asked a question about this situation of the Minister for International Education last year. WA has now dropped to being the lowest participation state, with 5.8 per cent of the international education market. Part of that is due to the efforts of the McGowan government when it pulled the rug out in February last year. Now we have this scenario with a lack of accommodation and housing. It is all coming together. It is not a good look for our state or for our international education economy. I find it quite upsetting in a lot of ways.

The member for Vasse asked a question of the Premier today. He was gloating back in 2017 when he reduced the skilled migration list, saying, "Look at me. Look at this. Isn't it great? We won't need to have any overseas workers. We won't have anyone taking away our jobs. I'm going to reduce that list." Sure enough, it again resulted in long-term damage to our economy. When the Premier was asked that question today, he said, "We were trying to repair things that occurred under your government." He made all the excuses under the sun. He will not take any responsibility for his actions. When I was sitting where the member for Nedlands is now, I listened to him proudly talk about how he had reduced the skilled migration list and that it would be great for WA. Sure enough, it had the opposite effect. That was a disappointing aspect. From my perspective, the government needs to learn from these lessons, and, hopefully, from people like the housing minister.

I have already spoken about maintenance and other issues and I will talk about them again today. These lessons are not being learnt. We have people out in the Department of Communities and housing. We have empty houses out there but the government is not swinging into action to address the situation. Now we have real problems, especially in the regional areas, and also with social housing.

I want to refer to an article that appeared in the *Farm Weekly* of 16 March relating to some regional areas. It was referred to by the Leader of the Opposition and mentions Cath Hart. It includes some really interesting statistics, reading —

Perth's vacancy rate is currently 0.7 per cent, far away from where it was between 2.5–3.5pc.

...

The number of available properties under \$400 fell to 17.6pc, the lowest level since 2018.

That is \$400 rent. As the article pointed out, regional areas are really feeling the pressure. It states —

“At local, State and Federal levels of government, we need policy settings that encourage rather than discourage people from investing in rental properties,” ...

Some of these stats are quite disturbing. In Albany —

The number of active rental listings stayed the same for the month of December 2022, and January 2023 at 17 properties ...

In Broome, the number of active rental listings stayed at 38 properties listed in the area. Broome has record rental prices of \$850 a week. In Bunbury, the number of active rental listings increased between December and January, up to 56 listings now. The median rental price is \$475. Busselton saw a massive increase in the number of listings, from seven to 10 in January, with the rental price peaking at \$600. Esperance, in my electorate, has barely any properties at all. Four properties were available. I understand there are now none. The median rental price is \$325 a week. Geraldton has hit a low of only 11 properties on the market, with a median rental of \$350 a week. That article outlines the regional situation and gives a good summary of where we are right around the state.

Flowing on from that, another article stated —

“The government is currently undertaking a review of the Residential Tenancies Act 1987 ...” the spokesperson said.

“The review is addressing a broad range of issues impacting tenants and landlords throughout the tenancy cycle.

“The consultation phase for the review has been completed and a decision from government on which elements of the reforms to proceed with will be made soon.”

I say to the minister that I am very interested in this because landlords, people who own properties and so forth have some real concern about the arrangements that will be put in place as part of this tenancy reform. Quite frankly, I can see a lot of people pulling their properties off the market if this reform goes ahead. I am curious about what will happen if and when the government decides to bring on these reforms. I know a lot of people who are quite frightened by the scenario of tenants’ rights overriding those of the landholder. They will be able to do whatever they like—bring in pets and make arrangements to adjust whatever they like inside the property with some sort of free-for-all for tenants. That will just reduce the housing stock again. I am sure those sitting around the cabinet table will be saying, “We’ve got the left wing of our party that is looking to make these arrangements to make life great for tenants, forgetting about the landlords and the owners”, but the other side saying, “Let’s hold five for a minute because we’re already in strife as far as the housing market is concerned, and this is only going to make it worse.” I will be curious to see whether there are any comments from the minister on that. I can imagine that the only solution will be holding fire for the moment because I suspect there is some grief to be had.

I quickly want to move on to my electorate because it has some really promising signs of regional growth, and I am quite concerned that we will not be able to capitalise on them because we do not have the housing. As we know, my concerns about Government Regional Officers’ Housing are always there. There is a scenario with nurses, police and teachers. Several weeks ago in Narrogin one of my constituents told me there was some real concern about the standard of the nurses’ quarters at some of the hospitals in the electorate of Roe. I have also heard this from another person who came to a wheatbelt town in the electorate of the member for Central Wheatbelt. They said they would stay in those conditions for a week but it would be the last time they would be there. That was in Northam. In various towns around my electorate and that of the member for Central Wheatbelt conditions are just not good enough. We might be able to attract someone for a week, they say they will put up with the conditions for a week, but they will not come back. That is another thing that really worries me. The Department of Health needs to look at improving the state of nurses’ quarters—this scenario of someone being put into a single motel room with very little security. It is not acceptable in this day and age.

According to last year’s budget papers, \$5 million was set aside for a critical staff accommodation upgrade program to address the most urgent staff accommodation refurbishment and replacement priorities to support the medical and nursing workforce required in regional and rural areas. I note that there is no funding in the forward estimates. When a health worker signs up for a position and housing and security are the basic requirements for their tenure, that is why they will stay. But apparently there is no room for that in the forward estimates. That is what I am worried about. Where will the future security come from?

As I said, in my electorate there are a couple of good regional growth opportunities. I look forward to hosting the Minister for Education; Citizenship and Multicultural Interests in Katanning on Saturday at the Harmony Festival. I am sure he will hear some stories about promising things going on there, such as the likes of Ausgold, which has been exploring for several years now. It will have an estimated team of 80-odd mining, maintenance and supervision personnel if things come to fruition, but, once again, housing opportunities are very limited. This is an exciting project. It is obviously not a government issue, but all the houses have been soaked up and there is no spare capacity for the company to purchase any housing. We will have to look at whether it builds housing or goes to another town and how that will work. It is an exciting regional development opportunity.

Another one is the Future Energy Australia, which is Carnarvon Energy and Future Impact Group, biodiesel plant in Narrogin. It has purchased a 65-hectare site and is looking at a biorefinery business that will convert sustainably sourced woody biomass such as construction waste, ecological thinnings and plant-based agricultural waste into renewable diesel. Once again, though, the catch is where the employees will live. Enel Green Power, another large company, is also undertaking a major project in my electorate, with a predicted number of 120 personnel required to install a wind farm project. Stage 2 will be developed by Western Power and that will face the same challenges.

They are some of the issues that our companies are facing when they come to regional towns. I am sure that the minister saw the front page of *The West Australian* featuring my local town of Katanning, where a person could buy a \$120 000 house and rent it for \$500 a week, so a yield of nearly 20 per cent. That is one of the best investments around at the moment. That shows there are no rentals in the town whatsoever. It is quite disturbing when the likes of Katanning, Esperance and Narrogin all have fewer than 10 houses available for rent. WAMMCO International runs the large abattoir in my town that employs 300-odd people. It rents over 50 local houses and units. It has bought the local motel to provide housing for its employees. Perhaps the government could look at incentives for big businesses to build accommodation for workers and down the track these could be potentially converted to other options. I ask the minister and the department to think outside the square.

As I have said many a time to the minister, I am sure that the minister's department tells him it is doing a great job with maintenance and that all houses are taken up. I can assure him that there are quite a lot of houses sitting empty around the place waiting for a tap or something else to be fixed. A classic example is in Newdegate. I am talking about the middle of last year. A family departed from a residence and left their rubbish all over the place, including the yard. I got a phone call from a local resident who lives next door. He said he knew a family with three or four kids who were keen to come into the town. They wanted their kids to go to the local school. Given that the previous family had gone, he asked whether there was any way the residence could be cleaned up so that this new family could come in. I rang that person this morning because I knew we would debate this motion today. Here we are eight or nine months later, the residence is still vacant and rubbish is lying around everywhere. I rang the housing person from the Department of Communities several months ago and they said the matter was being looked into, but the house is still empty.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This is an example of why people in regional areas get upset. Why can we not deal with these issues and get these houses back on the job, in the market and there for social housing for vulnerable members of the community? Why can those people with three or four kids who could go to the local school in that town not move into that house? Why can it not be cleaned up? I just cannot understand it. As I have said, I have spoken to the department. I brought the matter to its attention. I found my way through myriad phone numbers, being transferred, people hanging up or telling me the problem did not belong to their department and that another department in another town looked after it. I spent about three-quarters of an hour on the phone to finally get to the bottom of things, and here we are several months later and still nothing has happened with that house in Newdegate.

Mr J.N. Carey: Why didn't you come to my office like every other member, including the Leader of the Liberal Party? My office is well known for being accessible and for assisting any member of the opposition.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I tell the minister what, I will be more than happy to do that. I thought I would give them time to do their job. Once again, I rang up this morning about what was going on, but now I will go to the minister.

Mr J.N. Carey: Give me the street address and the time frames you have called and how long it has been vacant.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Absolutely; I will be more than happy to do that. I appreciate that offer. These are the issues.

In closing, I will talk about our shires. They do a good job. As I said this morning in debate on the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023, shires seem to get roped into a lot of activities that are not their core business. A volunteer group in the Tambellup shire cropping program is contributing more than \$160 000 to a local product supported by their local shire to expand the caravan park and build accommodation for workers. I applaud that community for taking that issue into its own hands. I know the minister has worked with the Nyabing shire, and we have had a positive outcome there. I remember the minister announcing last year that project with the Nyabing shire. Once again, is it the responsibility of those shires to have to come forth with these housing solutions? From my perspective, it is not. The minister needs to focus on some of these elements. As far as I am concerned, the government has a \$13 billion surplus from the past three years. It had a surplus of \$6 billion last year and we still have housing issues out there left, right and centre. As the member for Vasse pointed out, we have a real homelessness issue. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, there are any number of issues in relation to the likes of cyclone Seroja. The member for North West Central raised the growth issues in places such as Exmouth. The state has myriad issues and the scenario of needing to house people. I raised international education earlier. The article on the front page of *The West Australian* today does not exactly bode well for our ability to attract more international students because they are going to ask, "Where can I live?" Three students had to pay \$1 000 for a two-bedroom apartment. From my perspective, this government needs to think clearly about its \$6 billion surplus from last year, and about how it can make it easier for the people of Western Australia. It is not good enough. We need to do better.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe) [5.32 pm]: I rise to support this excellent motion put forward by the opposition. We had rhetorical questions in this place earlier today: “What’s your side done? What’s your side doing?” The ridiculous proposition that we would be releasing all of our policies now, two years out from an election, is clearly farcical. The Labor Party did not do it and we will not be doing it either. We will be doing that in an organised and staged manner as we go to the election.

What I want to talk about is what our government did —

Dr A.D. Buti: Like your energy policy at the last election.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Oh, for God’s sake.

Dr A.D. Buti: That was really well done, wasn’t it?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Do you know what? You are a minister of the Crown. You do not need to parrot on with interjections now.

I want to talk about the record of the previous government that came to office in 2008. This is what it achieved in a similar time to the period members opposite have been in government. Where they have abject failure, we had nothing but a record of outstanding achievement under the Liberal–National coalition government. I will start with the affordable housing strategy—these are numbers the government can only dream of. The strategy met the target of 20 000 homes by June 2015, five years ahead of schedule. Because it was so successful, there was a revised target of 30 000 affordable homes coming up to 2020. In fact, by June 2016, 24 000 affordable housing opportunities had been created. Here is something the Minister for Housing can only dream about. There were 5 200 new social houses to help the most vulnerable people in our community—5 200. The minister has not managed yet to even replace the residences the government sold at the start of its term. There were 670 homes for Aboriginal people in remote communities and over 3 000 homes completed under the national rental affordability scheme, giving low-income people the ability to access affordable rental accommodation in Perth. There were 14 300 Keystart loans for low and moderate-income households, including more than 2 200 shared equity loans.

We created a web portal for advice on affordable housing so that people had a one-stop shop to go to. We continued the Government Regional Officers’ Housing scheme. That scheme was the key and we continued to develop that and increase the stock for GROH. We provided a minimum of 500 new affordable homes by establishing the housing stock redevelopment strategy. That was delivered by 30 June 2016.

Land development activity is something this government could learn about. In 2016–17, the Housing Authority, through its land development activities, intended to produce 1 900 housing lots, including 1 452 lots developed with joint venture partners. The transitional housing program provided public housing for tenants who were actively employed or in training to develop their skills and networks they needed to transition into affordable homes. The government just ignores the regions. It talks about them, but it ignores them. Work in the East Kimberley commenced in Kununurra in September 2012. Forty houses were built in Kununurra and 15 in Halls Creek with the support of royalties for regions. It is an important fund and under our government that was spent on developing communities, not on usual recurrent government subsidies.

Here is something the government can really only dream about. What a disgraceful deterioration under this Labor government. As at the December 2015 reporting period, there was a 99 per cent school attendance rate in Kununurra and a 97 per cent school attendance rate in Halls Creek. Minister for Education, look at those numbers and look at what they are now. We know that was the situation in Halls Creek, because of the information provided by the now parked former truancy officer in the town, someone who has been put on gardening leave because he had the temerity to tell the shire the truth about the low attendance rates at that school. What an absolute disgrace.

Dr A.D. Buti: You know you are wrong.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I do not know. I know exactly what has happened.

Dr A.D. Buti: No, you don’t.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Well, minister, you will have your chance to get up and speak, because he has been punished.

Dr A.D. Buti: Don’t mislead Parliament. He has got a lot of support and he can go back to work tomorrow.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is he in his job or is he on gardening leave?

Dr A.D. Buti: You know nothing. He has been offered to go back to work. You have no idea.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is he working as a truancy officer? Yes or no?

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: What a joke! What a disgrace! The party that talks about whistleblowers does nothing but punish them.

Dr A.D. Buti: You are a wally. You’ve always been a wally and you remain one.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk): Order!

Dr D.J. HONEY: Madam Acting Speaker —

The ACTING SPEAKER: I was trying to call you to order as well, member.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I know. I stopped; he did not.

The ACTING SPEAKER: All right, let us go on. I gather you are not inviting anymore interjections. Is that what that means?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much, Madam Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER: All right; let us proceed.

Dr D.J. HONEY: What an absolute disgrace. This government is the supposed champion of whistleblowing, but not when it is against it.

The Liberal–National government established short-stay centres to provide Indigenous people visiting regional centres with accommodation. The Derby facility began operating in October 2014, the Broome facility was in the design phase and the Aboriginal short-stay facility had already been operating in Kalgoorlie since 2012. We also passed important legislation in the Land Acquisition Legislation Amendment (Compensation) Bill 2014. This side of politics has a proud record. As I said, the government’s paltry performance in this area is in stark contrast to the achievements of the previous Liberal–National government.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, just to assist Hansard, that was paltry, not poultry; is that right?

Dr D.J. HONEY: That is correct. I said paltry, but anyway. Thank you very much, Madam Acting Speaker, I am always grateful for your clarification and assistance.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Excellent.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Unfortunately, the member for Central Wheatbelt cannot be in here today, but she asked me to remind members of the poor achievements of this government. We created the first worker accommodation village in Karratha. Again, this was something this government could have learnt about and done in those regional centres where regional workers cannot get accommodation. The lack of accommodation in regional areas is the single greatest handbrake on regional economies from Esperance to Kununurra in the state of Western Australia. It is the single greatest thing holding back development in those communities, and I suspect it is the single greatest handbrake on development in metropolitan Perth. The Minister for Police is boasting about bringing 950 police or more over from the United Kingdom, desperately trying to stem the haemorrhage of police leaving the workforce because of cultural issues. Where are they going to stay? We hear about other workers coming to this state. Where are they going to stay? It is a complete failure of this government. We did something about it because we especially cared about broader regional development, not just development in metropolitan Perth. As I said, we delivered Government Regional Officers’ Housing.

In question time today, we got asked, “What did you do?” Under the previous Liberal–National government, it was almost exclusively during that period that the state’s population increased by around 500 000 people. The population of Tasmania came here during those two terms of government. All those people had houses. All those kids had schools to go to. All of them had a fully trained teacher in their classroom at the start of the school year. All of the gas and sewerage services et cetera were supplied to those schools. Unlike this government putting partly trained teachers in classrooms, these teachers were fully trained. During the term of that government, every single classroom had a teacher at the start of the school year because that government cared about education in the state. That population came to this state and that is what the government of the time provided for. But this government’s appalling performance is all too stark. We had the regional cities or SuperTowns policy. The National Party had a policy that supported the services of Young House in Albany and services in other regional centres. Those were the achievements of the Liberal–National government. This government has set us up to fail in the area of housing.

The previous speaker talked about changes to the skilled migration program. To purely satisfy union demands, this Labor government cut the number of categories for regional migration from, I think, 178 to 18 and it took metropolitan Perth out of the regional sponsored migration scheme. What did that do? We warned of this at the time. It did two things. The first was that it took away jobs for students and others who wanted to come into the state—those people who drive growth in the economy. It took away their jobs and it took away key skilled workers. Before I was elected, when I was nominated as a candidate, a senior manager in the building industry said to me, “David, for goodness sake, see what you can do to get this government to reverse its decision because this is going to destroy construction in the state of Western Australia.” That is what this government has contributed towards. We then went into the COVID period and this government again placed severe restrictions on skilled migrants coming into the state, in particular, and ridiculously, doctors and nurses. It reversed that decision at some stage, but imagine that! It is incomprehensible. This government’s millionaire mates can travel from one end of the world to the other with impunity, but the skilled labour that we needed in this state for critical matters was stopped from coming into the state. At the time, other people and I said that if this government did this, we would pay an economic consequence once the COVID pandemic started to subside. I said it in this place and outside this place.

Several members interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Go and look at *Hansard*.

Dr A.D. Buti: It's like he's the Messiah!

Dr D.J. HONEY: A person does not have to be the Messiah to work this one out, minister, because it was an obvious consequence of the government's poorly thought out policies that led to this problem. Do not try to pretend that there are other issues such as COVID or a lack of materials. The simple fact is that this government sold public housing and did not replace it in a timely fashion. It also fundamentally deprived the state of the workforce it needed to build houses. That has been a significant contributor to the crisis we have at the moment.

The Premier made some comments on pump priming; that is the reality. Whenever a government provides excessive amounts of money for people to come into the market, an enormous number of people come in, many of whom should not. Many young people thought interest rates were going to stay at four or five per cent. We know that the long-term average since Federation is 7.5 per cent, and there are at least a couple of people in this room, including me, who paid 17 per cent not so long ago. Those people have been enticed into the market. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, this led to an enormous bow wave that is causing chaos in the industry. We now have the ridiculous situation in which some trades have hardly enough work because there are no new starts, and others are absolutely overwhelmed because we have not seen an evening out of that. The government was directly responsible for that. We also have the government actively competing against the private sector for construction labour. This is a political issue. This is where a mature, responsible government comes to the fore. Once the government announces a project such as the railway line to Armadale with all level crossings and so on, no opposition will oppose that. The political reality is that once a project is announced, if it is opposed by the opposition, the opposition becomes a pariah. The reality is that if this government had provided proper smoothing and prioritising for those projects—it talked about smoothing and delaying other projects before it announced that new project—it would not be competing with the private sector for labour. A number of people in the construction sector have told me that because the Metronet projects are under such pressure from government, they are actively poaching their workers from the housing construction sector. Many of the workers from both those areas are the same workers. They do not have to be especially highly skilled in a particular area; they just have to be competent workers. This government's program is causing a shortage of workers in the private sector. Is there a political wedge? Can the opposition say, "You shouldn't be doing X, Y and Z"? No it cannot, but the fact is that a responsible government would have levelled and smoothed at the outset before it made the announcements and commitments that would then suck labour away from building houses. People are sleeping in cars tonight because this government is competing with the private sector for labour. That is the truth. Those are the choices that responsible government has to make.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Dr D.J. HONEY: This government has not made responsible choices. It is a ridiculous situation that we still have the same amount of public housing that we had when this government came into office six years ago. We are not talking about one, two or three years in; we are talking about six years in. We have a 500-bed quarantine facility out at Bullsbrook that the government was keen on at the start. I understand that it is completely unutilised. Surely ministers can have a mature conversation with the federal government about the proper use of that to help ease the housing crisis and the fact that people are sleeping in their cars.

I will give an example of something that we sensibly did in the Pilbara when we were in government. Land prices were skyrocketing and house prices were escalating, making housing unaffordable. What did we do as a government that was criticised by the opposition at the time? We released land to take the heat out of that market and keep housing affordable for people in the Pilbara. Has this government done that? Does this government have any meaningful program to release housing and so on?

Unfortunately, there is too much material to cover in the time that I have left because I want to leave a few minutes at least for the member for North West Central to make a contribution on this motion. In relation to accommodation, the Onslow worker camp is projected to go ahead for Mineral Resources. An article in *The West Australian* refers to luxury FIFO resorts being built to attract more female workers. The "attract more female workers" was unnecessary; it should read "more workers" because both men and women like quality accommodation. One resort at Onslow will have 750 rooms, with 500 allocated to the larger Ken's Bore resort and 250 for the Onslow resort. This is high-quality accommodation with a swimming pool and the like. According to the article, construction on the two projects has commenced and they will largely be completed by the end of the year. The private sector has come in to create valuable and useful housing to help with workers' accommodation shortages. I know that the Minister for Housing is a caring and passionate person and that he cares about this issue, but the simple reality is that if the private sector, in the same constrained market with the same problem of access to workers—in fact, even more so in the north west of the state—and the same constraint on access to materials, can deliver a large number of houses in that area, why can this government not do the same? There is the more general issue of housing—I think the area of rental accommodation has been covered—but the fact is that the private sector appears to be able to achieve a rapid increase in the number of quality houses for people, particularly at the affordable end, but this government is failing to do that.

I will leave my contribution there. This government has comprehensively failed in this area. Its record of achievement is a poor shadow of what was achieved by the former Liberal–National government.

MS M. BEARD (North West Central) [5.51 pm]: In the short time that I have, I want to make some observations about the regional accommodation issues in the north, particularly in relation to tourism. Just to go back, one of these issues is mirroring what happened in 2008. We often have a two-speed economy in the north. We have mining and exploration and oil and gas and, on the flip side, we have the coffee makers, the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker. There is a difference in people's ability to pay rent in those situations; for some, it is not possible. They do not earn the same wages and salaries and some people cannot house themselves unless they bunk in, if they can find accommodation, in overcrowded housing.

When I was in Exmouth on the campaign trail in June or July last year, I walked the streets and I would say that every third or fourth house had one or two tents or a caravan out the front. It was overcrowded. When I walked into one house, I said to the lady, "You've got a tent under your pergola." She said, "Yes, that's my son's home for now. He is a FIFO to Paraburdoo. He's had to give up his rental because they are renting it out to Airbnb." He was temporarily living in a tent that was anchored to the pavement of her porch until something came along. He did not have anywhere to live. This is not an isolated situation.

In 2008, the same thing happened during the construction phase in the Pilbara. Rents were pushed up; indeed, those who owned homes were asking for extraordinarily high rent. Again, it was a two-speed economy, which is what is happening now. Back then, people were bunking in caravans in caravan parks. The situation gutted the ability of butchers, baristas and businesses, which keep communities functioning and alive, to operate. The Liberal–National government opened up new land in an attempt to normalise the market, which, I believe, it achieved. It created the first workers' accommodation village and offered subsidised rents to support small businesses. I understand that this model is being replicated across the state. In addition, there was the delivery of Government Regional Officers' Housing accommodation and housing for not-for-profit community organisations. Work was definitely done under the former Liberal–National government.

At the moment, there are blocks of land in Kalbarri and Exmouth on which nothing has progressed. The issue is that the cost of building is very high. It will be a long bow to draw to think that a proponent who can afford to build will come along and charge what casual workers and backpackers will be able and willing to pay. It seems that there is a stalemate at the moment, particularly because some of the blocks need significant headworks. If members look at the blocks of land in Exmouth or Kalbarri, they will see that they need a lot of work before it would be possible to start construction. Increasing costs will prohibit some of those significant headworks from happening without government assistance. I know that an announcement was made today, but from what I understand, having spoken to people on the ground, the headworks are way over and above that.

Another issue in the regions is Airbnb. Although it is a good thing because it creates more beds, it has squeezed out other people. Families in my electorate have rung my office and said, "We're going to have to leave. We've been in the town for nine years and our kids are at the school." They are members of the clubs and they hold volunteer positions in the town, but their leases have not been renewed because the houses are being flicked to the Airbnb environment, which is also creating pressure for the small businesses that are trying to service the customers they get from those Airbnbs. We have something to consider in that space. Airbnbs have taken a chunk of houses out of regional markets in particular.

Small towns have a low base rate, so their ability to develop housing estates and provide new housing is limited. There is a large visitation rate but a low number of ratepayers. I understand that smaller councils have a limited ability to get involved in property development without significant help.

Another thing that has been brought to my attention is the building grant that was issued. A constituent in Exmouth built a modular home. He was told there would be a two and a half year wait for the build. He went ahead and did the build on the assumption that he would get the \$20 000 grant. There was an announcement that the grant would be extended until 24 June—I could be wrong with the month. He needed to have his slab laid by 31 December but because of the issue with tradespeople, he told the cement supplier, "Don't stress too much; it's Christmas. According to the grant, if I get it done in January, I should be fine." It was done 13 days after and he is now not eligible for the grant. It seems that owner–builders are not eligible for the grant extension. The food for thought is that if there is a way to encourage people to become owner–builders, it would be really useful because these modular homes are quite satisfactory. He is extremely happy with his home, which he is now living in. He has a business in town and in another part of the region as well. As an owner–builder, many people have approached him about becoming owner–builders. Something that we need to explore in the regions is getting some of these people into these spaces.

The knock-on effect this is having in the regions is not new to people. Population retention in the regions has been severely impacted. With a lack of housing, we see the population shrinking and with that goes the number of students at schools and the number of people available for football teams. I went to a carnival on the weekend. One of the clubs was struggling to form a team that could front up on the day. That will become more and more prevalent as we move forward. It is a chicken-and-egg challenge in this space. We cannot attract workers because there is nowhere for them to live. People are living in cars, vans and people's backyards.

One thing that I would really like to see is people encouraged to do owner–builder builds. We need to look at other ways outside what we have done in the past to try to get accommodation into these towns. These towns, especially up and down the coral coast, will not grow if they do not have anywhere for workers to live. We really need to find ways to make that happen. Kalbarri is still suffering after cyclone Seroja. The backpackers are slowly wandering back in, but they are coming in only to find out they do not have anywhere to live other than a car, if they have managed to buy a car, which is not ideal either.

We need to consider how this will impact upon the long-term reputation of tourism. We are marketing the regions and the state outside WA, which is fabulous because we need to attract people through Perth and to the regional areas. However, if visitors are not having a good experience and things stay closed or operate at 50 per cent or 60 per cent because businesses cannot house workers who are now trying to stream back in, we need to look at that. It is also affecting the ag people. Traditionally, workers will come into Perth and study and work in other businesses. In the north they will work in the ag industry during the day, and work in other industries at night. They work together, so both these industries are struggling.

In summary, there is a massive void in the towns. The sustainability of a lot of these businesses is starting to be impacted, as is the mental health of a lot of people. We have a problem whereby wages now do not meet what it costs people to pay for rents, so we need to help people with subsidised rents. As I said, Kalbarri and Exmouth are two examples. The model that was rolled out in Karratha, which was a subsidised rental arrangement, is what they need at the moment to make sure that they can spearhead what will happen with the growth and development in tourism.

The Kimberley is also an issue and I understand that, but we really need to work on the corridors where people have had no accommodation. We need to try to help people and we need to potentially look at the Airbnbs and see whether there is some kind of way that we can come to a compromise to reduce the number of Airbnbs in the market or to put parameters around it so they are on a level playing field with the commercial side of housing going through planning and being licensed to operate. I think that would make a difference. The small towns with the really low numbers and the need to boost their populations will help this, because there are houses that were being lived in. Another thing is social housing; a lot of houses across my electorate are in serious need of repair and have been sitting empty for what seems to be some time. If there is a way to open that up and expedite some of those remediation works, that will make a huge difference to what is happening on the ground in a lot of those towns, particularly further inland.

I ask the government to consider closely some of those suggestions. We need to find a way before it becomes gridlocked and there is nowhere for people to go at all. It is getting worse and we need to do something about it.

MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Housing) [6.03 pm]: Obviously, as the Minister for Housing, I will provide the government's response to this debate. I will work through all the things that the government is doing, but I will also respectfully correct the record. Simply some false statements were made in the house and I will work through correcting those for the public record.

I have said multiple times that it is disappointing to see the Leader of the Opposition claim that the state government is not cognisant of the housing pressures or the pressures that faced in the rental market. We know it, and I think I have said that multiple times in the chamber. We know it because COVID has created an extraordinary set of circumstances. Prior to COVID was a very different time. In fact, the rental market was great for tenants. Landlords were complaining of negative equity. Then once COVID hit, there were very dire projections about the state of the economy, the housing market and the jobs market. We know that those dire predictions were wrong and instead, because of our COVID management, we have overseen extraordinary economic growth in Western Australia.

We looked at and implemented a range of measures, and I will touch on the Building Bonus grant in a second, but we have found ourselves in extraordinary circumstances as a result of COVID and a number of different factors have come into play. This has been acknowledged by experts and the housing sector, and it is a range of different issues. It is everything from the sustained lockdowns in China and how that affected supply, to the war in Ukraine, which has created disruptions in supply chains. The international border closure, to which everybody agreed at the time, has obviously created significant issues with trying to get skilled labour back to Australia and Western Australia. Of course, we saw the influx of people returning to Western Australia. It is pleasing to note that the Leader of the Opposition acknowledged this in his commentary. He said people returned home, and, as a result, that put pressure on the rental market. As we know, the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed there was a net interstate migration increase of 11 423 between 2020 and 2021. In the final months of 2021, more than 13 000 people moved west, which was WA's largest ever quarterly interstate migration inflow. At the same time, we saw net decreases in New South Wales and Victoria. People left Victoria and New South Wales and we faced extraordinary growth. People were coming to Western Australia and our booming economy. It is a great place to live and a state that has a reputation because of our COVID management, so people choose to live here. We face that incredible pressure. More people still continue to come to Western Australia.

We made the decision to do the Building Bonus grants and at the time, as I have said, there were quite significant fears about the state of the economy and particularly how COVID would —

[Interruption.]

Mr J.N. CAREY: Thank you for that YouTube clip. Thank you to the Minister for Police. I put that on the record.

Mr W.J. Johnston: Are you the only person who has not seen the YouTube clip?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Yes, clearly. I do not know what the YouTube clip is about, but he had to run out. I want to read these quotes. This article is from Sunday, 7 June 2020. The Urban Development Institute of Australia said —

... the government had acted “decisively and precisely”.

“They have demonstrated a detailed understanding of the mechanics of the market, and the grave situation the housing construction industry was facing in the coming months without government support.”

...

Master Builders Association of WA ... said the government’s package would make a big difference.

“This is an absolute game-changer for the building and construction industry in Western Australia,” ...

“We think that this new announcement’s going to really turbo-charge the residential housing industry, so it’s great news for the industry but also great news for consumers.”

John Gelavis from the Master Builders Association is quoted as saying —

... without government assistance, the outlook for the sector was dire.

He is also quoted as saying —

“This stimulus has come just at the right time.”

These are quotes at the time from key, respected housing industry leaders, who pleaded for and welcomed our housing building bonus grant. I respectfully say that the Leader of the Liberal Party is now attempting to rewrite her own calls at the time. In May 2020, the now Leader of the Liberal Party said that Western Australia was facing a significant jobs crisis and that the McGowan government should do all it could to invest in the WA construction industry and local jobs. She also talked about infrastructure spending and in June 2020 said that infrastructure spending was an obvious and necessary stimulus area, that WA had record unemployment and that what we needed was local jobs, right now.

Now we see the Leader of the Liberal Party ignoring the comments she made at that time and ignoring her calls for the government to create support for the construction sector. She has turned around and said that that support is superheating the construction industry. I think that is a clear demonstration that the opposition just flip-flops around when it is convenient to do so.

We understand that home builders are facing challenges, so we have undertaken a range of measures. It has already been mentioned, but we doubled the cap on individual payouts through the home indemnity insurance scheme. We have smoothed the pipeline of government projects to free up skilled labour, noting that we are then constantly criticised by the opposition for those deliberate decisions. We have invested in a range of measures to attract skilled workers to WA and we introduced security of payment laws to protect subcontractors. On top of that, we introduced a \$30 million financial relief scheme to assist contractors with the rising cost of state government projects. That was particularly targeted at Department of Communities’ projects, which fall under my portfolio. I am advised by the Department of Finance that, as at 28 February, 121 claims were being assessed and 109 had been approved. Those financial relief payments, totalling \$5.4 million, have been approved. The government introduced a building bonus grant that responded to the needs of industry at the time, and we noted the calls from the opposition. We know that we now face a heated construction market because of all the factors I have described. We have also brought in a range of other measures to assist the growing pains of that heated construction market, particularly in respect of cost escalations.

The opposition also focused on training. This government has undertaken an extraordinary number of measures in training. That contrasts sharply with the more than 500 per cent increase in TAFE fees between 2013 and 2017 under the previous Liberal–National government. It is fair to say that we saw the trashing of the TAFE sector. There were skyrocketing fees, funding cuts and plummeting enrolments. History shows that; it is a fact. We brought in a range of measures to boost the numbers of apprentices and of TAFE enrolments to skill Western Australians. We slashed fees by up to 72 per cent for 210 courses. That included 17 construction-related apprenticeships and traineeships and 13 pre-apprenticeships. That is an extraordinary incentive for people to get into those industries.

We have also supported a range of programs to encourage employers to take on more apprentices and trainees, such as the jobs and skills WA employer incentive program; wage subsidy programs to boost apprentice and trainee numbers in construction; and an adult apprentice employer incentive program, providing support for businesses that take on a mature age apprentices. We also get ongoing support from the Construction Training Fund, which provides grants to building and construction employers who employ apprentices and trainees. There is also the recently completed apprenticeships and traineeships re-engagement incentive program, which again is about providing financial assistance to businesses to re-engage apprentices or trainees who may have fallen out of the sector as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are also making a massive reinvestment in the TAFE scheme and the TAFE capital works program.

That is a substantial amount of investment in our TAFE system. There have also been other, smaller initiatives. One came out this week from the Skills Summit. We held the Skills Summit and every cabinet minister was there around the table at all the regional Skills Summits. We said, “Right, these are all the changes. We’re slashing fees. We’re doing all these programs, but we still want to listen to the sector about what else we can do.” It was identified that the lack of drivers’ licences for apprentices in the building and construction industry was creating a hurdle, so what did we do? We created a \$1.26 million program called the Construction Training Fund’s driver’s licence training support program. I do not know who makes up these names, but thank you! I have all this saliva now pouring out of my mouth, so sorry about that! That was identified as a key barrier, so we brought in that new program to offer standard driver training and key safety training relating to construction contexts, including towing trailers, securing loads, and driving in sand and off-road environments. There is also life skills and vehicle maintenance training. This initiative will help around 120 eligible students and will give young workers the ability to enter jobs in the construction market.

That initiative complements the other program I was talking about, the \$10 million driving access and equity program, which is about assisting disadvantaged drivers in regional and remote areas to get their driver’s licence. We created a specific program for construction and building, and then we tackled the broader barriers and roadblocks for people getting a driver’s licence. There is also the Job Ready program in infrastructure and bricklaying—short, sharp training to get people into the construction workforce. The initiatives just go on and on. Of course, the Minister for Police also recently went to the UK to launch a big recruitment program to get people to come to Western Australia, given our economy and the lifestyle we offer. That is significant. I have gone through the conditions, training and our key works and measures to really boost skilled labour and programs targeted at construction.

We also recently announced significant planning reforms. We know that we need more infill and higher density; that is a critical part of the equation. People do not realise this but the advice we get is that 60 per cent of apartments that are approved are not built. That is because cost escalations are prohibiting development. What is also prohibiting development is approvals. The length of time it takes to get projects approved is creating a major hurdle. We know that a contributing factor to cost escalations is the time required for approval through the planning process.

I recently went to the housing summit in Kalgoorlie. The Leader of the Nationals WA mentioned Kalgoorlie. I attended a housing workshop in Kalgoorlie with about 30 to 40 stakeholders around the table, and one of the strongest themes coming out of that was the disappointment felt by stakeholders that the local government had not approved worker accommodation and housing. Members may remember that the opposition tried to get me on this. It asked a question and selectively quoted the *Business News* about the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia. They failed to say at that time that the Kalgoorlie–Boulder Chamber of Commerce and Industry had been highly critical about a number of decisions made by the council. Even the Mayor of the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder acknowledged at that housing workshop that local government decisions, council decisions, had not facilitated that necessary housing.

We are bringing in planning reform because we know that we need infill and density, particularly in the city, transport corridors and Metronet sites, and we need to facilitate that better.

I note the comments by the Property Council of Australia. The WA division of the Property Council said —

... a decisive series of evidence-led reforms that set the national benchmark for housing productivity.

...

Premier McGowan has raised the bar, let’s see if other state government leaders can match him.

They are pretty incredible statements. I am sorry that I am reading from my phone. The last statement, from the CEO of the Property Council of Australia, was —

... noted the housing strategy put in place by the WA Government to address supply shortages over the coming decade was a positive step and would place the State ahead of other major capitals such as Sydney and Melbourne which are failing at zoning and planning levels for new builds.

We have to remember that this is the Property Council of Australia praising a Labor government and saying —

Mr W.J. Johnston: Well done, socialists.

Mr J.N. CAREY: They are. Sandra Brewer is a well-known socialist!

The CEO of the Property Council said that we would place the state ahead of other major capitals. I was not quoting from a Labor group; I was actually referring to the Property Council and the changes that we are making in planning to address housing supply issues.

I also want to deal with social housing. First, I want to address the comments made by the member for Cottesloe relating to the previous state government’s achievements. The funny thing that the opposition always miss—I respectfully say this—is the fact that there is one difference between what we had in our first four years and Colin Barnett’s government. It had the Kevin Rudd stimulus. It was a \$6.6 billion package to create housing.

I will read members a quote from Joe Spagnolo. He wrote a column on 15 May 2000. He said —

The Rudd Government had ridden to the Liberal–National Government’s aid with heaps of cash for schools, health facilities and public housing.

Dr A.D. Buti: There you go, member for Cottesloe.

Dr D.J. Honey: They’re your mates. I thought you got all the money you wanted from them, you were telling me.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I say to the member for Cottesloe that it is well recognised that the former Liberal–National government left the housing space. I will give members a small example. The federal housing minister did not contact me once, from memory. There was no ministerial council meeting. I have a good working relationship with all the ministers around the table, whether they are Liberal or Labor. Everyone says there is a renewed sense of drive from this new federal government with its \$10 billion housing fund. The previous Liberal government walked away from remote housing. It said, “We are no longer doing this. See you later. We’re walking out the door. Arriver-darchy, goodbye, it’s not our responsibility.” That is the problem.

Dr A.D. Buti: Arrivederci.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I just said that wrong, thank you. It was not as bad as the member for Cottesloe’s “chi-chuana”, so he did not have a go at me, although I did say, “Remember that time.” That is just as bad. I take the hits as well. Did I tell him we both made *The Project*?

Mr W.J. Johnston: You probably just made *The Project* again.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Well, there we go. I was trying to read the lips of the Minister for Education and mispronounced it.

The point I am making is that the federal government left the space for remote communities. As a state, we have now stepped into that role. That puts that on the record about the big cash that flowed through to state governments across the nation from the Kevin Rudd era as part of the stimulus package to boost housing across Australia. We are accelerating social housing delivery. These things are true. It is a \$2.4 billion program. It is the biggest injection in social housing in the state’s history—\$875 million. In the toughest housing market ever in this state’s history, from July 2021 or since the beginning of this program, we have delivered about 1 100 homes, with almost 1 000 under contract or construction. In the last month alone, just under 100 were delivered. We have also provided grants to the community housing sector, with \$78 million in grants given to deliver 320 homes. We have introduced many reforms in social housing. We have created new panels to do the pre-approval up front so we can get housing contracted faster. We created a statewide modular panel. We have created small and medium business panels so we can streamline procurement. Eighty businesses have got onto that panel. Our modular program will see 200 homes delivered, with over 90 already under contract or construction. Through a timber frame program, we are seeing homes being delivered under six months. I talked today about the spot purchasing program and the numbers that we have delivered.

We also have renewal projects in place. In effect, those renewal projects are the challenge that we face in the social housing system. When we came to government, we inherited a significant ageing stock. There are about 35 000 public houses in the system. We made some very tough decisions in our first term, remembering the context at the time was that it was a renter’s market. We decided to close down social housing sites like Brownlie Towers. When we make a decision like that, it is a big decision. I did not hear from anyone, any party, even the opposition, saying that was the wrong decision. It was the right decision and it was recognised as the right decision at the time.

Whenever we do these renewal programs, which are strongly supported by communities, whether it is in Bunbury, where we are spending \$5 million; in Geraldton, where we are spending \$9 million; in Albany, where we are spending \$4 million; or in other renewal programs like Beaconsfield, difficult decisions are made. Part of that renewal program is trying to deconcentrate some of that social housing and improve the overall amenity. These are all strongly supported in the community.

I know that the opposition has tried to make hay about North Beach, which is interesting. I understand that the opposition was trying to go to the media to flog a story, but that, for some reason, it was unsuccessful. Let us be very clear that sometimes these renewal projects are extremely difficult because there are long-term tenants and that is their home. Imagine if the government just swept in and kicked someone out. It does not work like that. We work with them on looking for other solutions and other tenancies. We also have private landlords and private owners at some of those sites. That is exactly what has happened in North Beach. I find it ironic that the previous Liberal government tried and failed to do exactly what we have achieved. It started purchasing private property and got to a point in 2013 when it threw up its hands and said, “We can’t do it.” That is a fact. The former government started purchasing homes in North Beach from private owners and got to a certain point and then said it was too hard. We have not done that. We have successfully negotiated with the final private owner and the last tenant is moving out this month. We will take that site out to the market to get a good mix of affordable and social housing, which will address the previous antisocial behavioural issues and boost social housing.

There has been some commentary about Government Regional Officers’ Housing. Again, I want to put on the record that we are spending around \$200 million on GROH. We always have done and always will do a capital works

program and a leasing program. There are a range of different ways, even via local governments, to secure housing. We heard the opposition crowing about GROH. The member for Central Wheatbelt has done that. The GROH program, under the previous Liberal–National government, clocked up a \$180 million debt and, as a result, that cabinet authorised a sales program to try to drive down the debt. I have already been on the record as saying that the greatest loss of GROH properties sold off in any one financial year was under the Liberal–National government.

Opposition members say to me that they are the champions of the wheatbelt, yet the facts do not lie. The greatest selling off of GROH properties in the wheatbelt actually occurred under the Liberal–National government when the member for Central Wheatbelt sat around the table. That is a fact; it is not made up. Another part of all the changes we have brought in is a range of changes to Keystart and the tax side. Keystart is a great program that started under Labor that has enabled more than 118 000 Western Australians to achieve their dream of home ownership. In 2020–21, 3 977 new loans were approved by Keystart. That is the highest level since 2009–10. We have made some changes. We have increased the income eligibility limits to \$105 000 for singles and \$155 000 for couples. We have lifted the property cap to \$560 000. That is in recognition that there has been an increase in the median price of households. We introduced a new pilot program called Urban Connect, which is about creating a tailored product for infill. We also incentivised—I have talked about the need for infill and density—a new off-the-plan rebate for purchasing off the plan, with 100 per cent rebate for homes under \$500 000 and then tapering off to 50 per cent for apartments over \$600 000. All of that has been about reforms to incentivise. Of course, we are also bringing in a 50 per cent land tax concession for build to rent so that we can grow the build-to-rent sector. I have just gone through changes in Keystart and changes in tax, which are about boosting the overall housing supply.

I also want to talk about evictions, because that received media coverage last week. I have to say that the media coverage obviously focused, as it does, on the negative, but there is actually a good story to tell, and it contrasts deeply with the former Liberal–National government. I made it clear that I want to drive down evictions. We want to support people in social housing. I make no apologies for that. We are investing significant amounts in the Thrive program to provide tenancy support. The stats show that our work and our focus is assisting to drive down evictions. In particular, bailiff evictions of households with children, have been driven down significantly. I want to put this on the record because I think it is really important. The bailiff evictions for tenancies with children has decreased by 94.7 per cent since the start of the McGowan government. I want to be clear that in 2016–17, the number of bailiff evictions under the previous government was 171. So far, to date, it is nine. That shows us very clearly that there has been a significant change about how we have tried to keep people in households. There is a very clear and stark difference between our government and the previous government. Members might remember Troy Buswell and the sort of language that was coming out at that time. It was almost a sense of pride that that government was trying to drive people out through evictions. I am deeply proud that our government has been making a concerted effort. I note that Betsy Buchanan, who is a homeless advocate and, I would say, sometimes a critic of our government, appeared before the homelessness inquiry last week. One thing that I know—I am paraphrasing; I am not quoting her—is she said that we are not seeing the mass evictions under my ministry that we saw under the previous government. Under the previous government—I want to be very clear—Troy Buswell championed that, and Betsy Buchanan talked about the mass-evictions approach at the inquiry. We are a compassionate government and a kind government. We want to support people in social housing and keep them, whenever we can, in those tenancies.

I also want to talk about vacancies very quickly because we heard from the leader of the Liberals that 1 800 homes have been boarded up. The claim that 1 800 homes have been boarded up is false. Although at any one time there are vacancies in the system, the idea that every home is boarded up, thrown away and is unusable, is just nonsense, because at any one time in our social housing system, there is a churn rate. There are always vacant houses. That is normal. A percentage of those homes are actually in the process of being re-tenanted. That is not acknowledged by the opposition at all. In fact, we saw on the record last year that Hon Steve Martin claimed that the number of vacancies doubled. That was false. He got his figures wrong. I note that he never apologised for that. He said they doubled. That was just completely wrong and he never corrected the record. The reality is that because of the churn rate there are always vacancies. It is also because that is the reality of the social housing system. The opposition makes it sound like a person can take a bit of spakfilla and paint, do the job in a day and then roll out and say, “Congratulations. Here’s a house.” Can we get real just for a moment? We have to invest significantly in refurbishing stock to make it ready for the next tenants. Sometimes it is a really tough decision on whether to invest \$250 000 to keep a house in the system, which may only lengthen the life of a property for a certain time, or to unfortunately demolish it and build a home. The opposition did not acknowledge that at all. Apparently, it is just a tap that needs fixing. This is the reality of managing a social housing system with 35 000 stock—at any one time, it will have vacancies. We are spending incredible amounts on refurbishments. We are working hard to bring housing back into the system, but the reality is we face a tight construction market and, at any one time, there is a churn rate. Again, it was never acknowledged by the opposition.

I will talk about land because land was also raised. Land has been totally ignored by the opposition. In fact, I was perplexed by the Leader of the National Party and the member for Cottesloe when they said that the state government had made no investment in land release. It is well documented in this chamber that we created the \$166 million Regional Land Booster program. It has already seen almost 550 lots of residential housing released to the market

across 75 regional towns. Of these, 74 lots were in Karratha, 55 were in Broome and 46 were in Kalgoorlie. The Regional Land Booster program is a subsidy recognising the costs around getting regional land up. On top of that, we have allocated additional money to release lots. We gave \$19.1 million to DevelopmentWA to release an additional 35 residential lots in Kalgoorlie and 62 lots in Karratha. None of that was mentioned. There was silence. It was as though the government had done nothing or is not investing in land release.

On top of that, we are actively looking at how we can provide crown land housing. As the minister, I supported a transfer of 15.6 hectares of crown land in Kalgoorlie–Boulder for a major expansion of seniors' accommodation. We are also working with other local governments to assist them to look at how we can unlock crown land. In terms of crown land, this government has also been looking at lazy land. We have created the Housing Diversity Pipeline program. I have talked about it so many times, but again there was no mention of it by the opposition. That program identifies lazy land that we can take to the market—community housing providers, developers and so forth—and ask: “What can you do for us? We want one in five social housing. If you can do affordable, what can you do for us? Will we give you a ground lease, will we discount land or do you need a funding injection from our social housing fund?” That is a significant program in which we are now working through proposals. That is a demonstration of our very strong approach to identifying lazy land in both metropolitan and regional communities so that we can boost future housing supply.

We also announced an infrastructure fund. This is a new fund on top of the Regional Land Booster program to provide support for headworks for both regional worker accommodation and for encouraging infill, particularly around housing diversity sites and also Metronet stations. The response that I have had from local governments has been incredibly warm and receiving. In Kalgoorlie, there was a lot of interest. The local government was going to work with stakeholders following that workshop to look at opportunities and how they can help pump out land.

I have just gone through a vast raft of reforms that we are implementing to boost housing supply in Western Australia—the social housing program, tax reform, Keystart reform, land reform, infrastructure and headworks reform and planning reform. This is the substantial amount of work. On top of that, because the Liberal–National federal government left the space, we are also boosting housing, water and infrastructure to remote communities by creating a \$350 million remote communities fund. That is about ensuring that we improve the lives of people living in remote communities—no acknowledgement; no credit. This fund is a direct result of the previous federal Liberal–National government that walked away from this space.

I will also touch upon homelessness. We are making huge investments in homelessness with \$225 million in funding this year. We are funding more than 130 organisations and we are also driving a significant reform program. We have boosted homelessness outreach in the city to seven days a week with two teams in the morning and afternoon. We have creating rough sleeping groups in Perth that have also occurred in Bunbury, Mandurah, Rockingham and Geraldton. They are about better coordination to ensure proper referrals. We have created the 100 social homes program, which will provide housing for rough sleepers to jump off the street directly into housing, supported by a community housing provider. We created Boorloo Bidee Mia, the first culturally appropriate accommodation to particularly assist Aboriginal people who are rough sleepers. It has been an outstanding success in tackling a very difficult issue. I have announced the purchase of the Murray Street lodge, adding to the 143 per cent increase in transitional beds that was in data today. On all those measures, I note the comments made by David Pearson of the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness on the data released today. He said —

“It is worth noting that the Governments leadership on efforts to end rough sleeping are showing signs of progress, because since this census data was collected 19 months ago, the by-name list data is showing reductions since then, as reflect on the **WAAEH data dashboard**.

That is, the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness data dashboard. There is a recognition that the reforms we are undertaking are beginning to have an impact. I note that the opposition has no policy on this. In fact, when I announced these homelessness decisions, its members attacked them. I want to be very clear that Hon Steve Martin attacked my measure for purchasing Murray Street lodge, which is transitional accommodation. We know that at the next election, these opposition members will not be committing to transitional accommodation because they do not support it. That is the logic. They attack it now and say it is no good, so I assume that they will not be making any commitments to homelessness transitional accommodation.

Mr W.J. Johnston: Do you know how many policies they have on their website?

Mr J.N. CAREY: No.

Mr W.J. Johnston: None. Zero.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Okay. The irony is that Hon Steve Martin says things, but he does not actually add to the debate. I know that there was a very embarrassing interview for him. I understood he was very embarrassed by it because he was put on the spot on ABC radio, I think it was by Nadia Mitsopoulos who actually asked him, “Could you clarify what is your policy?” He said, “I think there should be maintenance.” One would think that after six years in opposition, Hon Steve Martin would have shaped a policy. If the opposition wants to help shape and contribute to the solutions, it should come up with a specific policy. Rather, it has attacked our 100 social homes program and

our transitional housing program and it ruthlessly attacked Boorloo Bidee Mia, and that is on the record. I will be interested to learn what its solutions are during the next state election. If they include anything that the government is already doing, I will remind Hon Steve Martin that, two years ago, he was trashing it. I think the opposition will find itself in a very difficult position in trashing a range of measures now and perhaps copying the state government's initiatives in two years.

I will deal with Common Ground. We know about the embarrassing release—again, I feel sorry for Hon Steve Martin—that Common Ground had been ditched, which was false. We have been very clear that we face a heated construction market, but we want this project; we are committed to this project. Of course, in the meantime I created the 100 homes program for rough sleepers, which, again, the opposition never acknowledged—it attacked it—as an interim measure. We are working with proponents; it will proceed. We are working through that process.

It is very clear that we are making significant investment in the social housing and homelessness space. I particularly want to refer to helping to prevent Aboriginal people from rough sleeping. We are also creating the country connect service, which is about trying to break the cycle of rough sleeping when someone comes down for healthcare services and becomes stuck in a cycle of rough sleeping. We are creating that country connect service. We are also creating new Aboriginal short-stay accommodation, including in Perth, so that we can again help break that cycle.

Mr W.J. Johnston: A great location.

Mr J.N. CAREY: It is a great location in Cannington. What is really pleasing is that that will also try to help break the cycle of homelessness because we are providing that supportive accommodation.

In rounding up—I will leave the member for Cockburn five minutes for his contribution—I want to say this: the opposition simply omits all the reforms that the government is doing in housing, housing supply, land supply and homelessness, and it is clearly deliberate. Substantial investment is happening right now. We have accelerated the delivery of social housing and we have added 1 100 new homes to the system; these are facts. We know that the market is heated and that there are significant challenges in the housing and rental markets, but we are aggressively pursuing a range of reforms to boost the housing supply in Western Australia.

MR D.A.E. SCAIFE (Cockburn) [6.52 pm]: I obviously rise to speak against the motion. It is quite clear from the contribution that the Minister for Housing just made that he is across his brief and is working furiously in lockstep with the government to deliver more housing options and greater housing supply in Western Australia. I was a bit surprised when I read the motion because it refers to taking a statewide, holistic look at the housing crisis and considering innovative solutions to prevent the housing crisis from worsening. I thought to myself, “That word “innovative” rings a bell. Where have I heard that sort of messaging before?” I realised that if the opposition wants an answer to this question, it does not need private members’ business; it just needs to do a *Hansard* search. I did a *Hansard* search on the number of times that the minister has already talked about innovative housing solutions in this chamber in this term of Parliament and I found at least five examples. I refer to a response to a Dorothy Dixier from the member for Bicton in which the Minister for Housing said —

Therefore, I was very pleased this morning to announce a package of \$24.2 million so that we can leverage the best we can and, in particular, in alignment with the 10-year homelessness strategy, focus on rough sleepers.

He continues —

This is innovation.

There is then another Dorothy Dixier from the member for Mount Lawley to the Minister for Housing. The Minister for Housing said —

The latest initiative, which has received some media attention, is Boorloo Bidee Mia, which is unique, innovative and new.

There is then another Dorothy Dixier from the member for Belmont to the Minister for Homelessness, and he talked again about Boorloo Bidee Mia —

I am very pleased to report that it is at near capacity, with 64 of the 66 rooms now filled with people who were rough sleeping who have been referred there. It is part of a bigger picture and bigger investment.

Then he says that is an example of a special and innovative service. There is then a brief ministerial statement to the house from the Minister for Housing on 12 May 2022 in which he refers to the housing diversity pipeline and says —

The focus of the pipeline is to drive investment in more social and affordable housing in transport corridors and infill sites, such as Metronet ...

He earlier said —

Through the pipeline, we are bringing lazy government land to market and seeking innovative housing ideas such as ground leasing and build-to-rent schemes ...

It goes on. There is another couple of examples as well. I have to say to the opposition: when in private members' business its motion reflects the government's own messaging back at it, it is in trouble. If its best material is to pick up the word "innovative", which is a word that did not need to be in the motion, and talk about innovative solutions, when the Minister for Housing —

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE: I have only five minutes left and I am not taking interjections from the Leader of the Opposition. The fact is that he appropriates the work of the government. He is so lazy that he appropriates the work of the government for the purposes of private members' business. It is completely outrageous! You know what? Let us talk about what the alternative is.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE: If I have already got under the Leader of the Opposition's skin now, it is only going to get worse.

The Minister for Housing today pointed out to the Leader of the Liberal Party that her party does not have any policies. The Minister for Mines and Petroleum is right; if we go to the Liberal Party website, we see that there are no policies. Do not worry; I went to its website a year ago and I printed off the policy from the last election because I wanted to see what it was and I have kept this hidden in my drawer in my office to roll it out on an occasion like this. This is the Liberal Party's policy for housing at the last election. If we take out the giant photo of former leader Zak Kirkup, it is barely even a page. This is for something the Liberal Party says is a crisis and that the government is not addressing. This is all the Liberal Party took to the last election when it was seeking to form government. Forgive me, it was not seeking to form government at the last election; it acknowledged it was going to lose and it gave up, famously. Its proposal was a page—not even back and front. It adds up to just one page. It is a policy-free zone.

The Leader of the Opposition does not need to worry; I have one for him because I found the Nationals WA's housing policy from the last election. I did this a while back as well. It is half a page. The policy that was on the Nationals' website in the lead-up to the last election is just a bunch of platitudes about an affordable housing initiative—no numbers, no funding, no commitments, nothing about how the National Party will achieve any sort of targets. It does not need to say that because there are no targets in it anyway. If it does not set targets, it does not have to explain how it is going to achieve them.

It is all well and good for members opposite to pipe up and have their say. They have had their say. We have had to sit through their bleating for the last couple of hours. The fact is that neither the Nationals WA nor the Liberal Party do the hard work. They have not done the hard work. The proof is there. I am not making these up. These are literally the policies from their websites. This is all they have had to say. So far in private members' business the opposition has appropriated the language of the government when it is celebrating the many innovative solutions that it is bringing to housing in Western Australia and it has failed to talk about any innovative solution that it is proposing. I was expecting, listening to the debate today, that there would be some proposals. This lofty motion about addressing the housing crisis has been moved in private members' business.

Dr A.D. Buti: Very optimistic!

Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE: I admit that I am still idealistic early in my first term, Minister for Education. I just assumed that the Leader of the Opposition would have something to say. He does not have anything to say, he has not had anything to say for the last six years, and it is clear that he will not have anything to say for the next two years, either, but the people of Western Australia will be the judges of that at the next election.

The other thing I will say is if members opposite are so concerned about housing in Western Australia, maybe they should talk to their federal colleagues about why they are opposing the federal Labor government's \$10 billion housing package. I have here an article from *The Sydney Morning Herald* from just a month ago, 14 February, which shows that the coalition was warning against the plan. It was opposing the plan. In fact, it was not just opposing it; it was on the same side as the Greens in this case.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

ROAD TRAFFIC (VEHICLES) AMENDMENT (OFFENSIVE ADVERTISING) BILL 2022

Returned

Bill returned from the Council without amendment.

House adjourned at 7.00 pm
