

LOCAL GOVERNMENT — GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Motion

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Barnett Liberal–National government for its illogical and erratic management of the local government portfolio.

We are in very, very interesting times politically in Western Australia. There is no more apparent area of dysfunction, decline and, sadly, uncertainty in Western Australia than the local government sector. I am not going to lay the blame for that with the former Minister for Local Government, the member for Darling Range, because I think it is true that when the former minister took over the local government portfolio, he did so with all good intentions. It is also very true that the former Minister for Local Government was well liked. The comments we heard all the time from people were that Tony was a nice bloke trying hard who certainly made himself available to local governments across the state with regard to his portfolio. But it became very apparent, particularly when the failed local government reform process in the metropolitan area councils was underway, that he was being white-anted consistently by the Premier of the state. I do not expect the former minister to confirm this, but he basically did so in his resignation speech last Saturday. I think he basically confirmed that when he said on Saturday that he had lost faith in the Premier’s leadership. In a statement to the media he said he was hoping that the leadership issue would come to a head, because unless change was made, a third term victory at the March election was very unlikely. Further, he said the following —

“I have taken this step reluctantly and with a heavy heart, but have done so because I no longer have confidence in the direction and leadership being offered by the Premier and hence cannot say he had my full support.

When asked whether he had been undermined by the Premier over the local government reform he said the following —

“I came in at the pointy end, I got the proverbial s ... sandwich.

That was a common thing. I know that the former minister highlighted that he believed he had been dealt a very stale and stinky sandwich indeed in the reform process. He, of course, promptly resigned. In that statement I think we very clearly see a minister who felt generally let down by his leader.

Let us go to some of the history of the last four years or so of the local government portfolio under the stewardship of the former Minister for Local Government and, of course, under the puppet hands of the Premier. I say “puppet hands” because quite frankly one of the things that many local governments—councillors, leaders, staff—said privately to me was that they liked the Minister for Local Government, but they knew who was pulling the strings. They said that the person pulling the strings in that portfolio was not the Minister for Local Government, but the Premier. That was made very evident when some two or more years ago the Premier and the local government minister called the metropolitan council leaders to the first meeting at which they announced the process that would, in their view, reform local government in the metropolitan area. From memory, that was at Cockburn. Of course, the Premier led that meeting, but it was not really a meeting; it was more an informing of local governments about what was going to happen, and it was to be the Premier’s way or the highway. That was the message genuinely delivered to the sector in the metropolitan area from that point on. Then there was a very interesting process in which the government continued to claim that it was not undertaking forced amalgamation, yet every single action following confirmed that it was in fact a forced amalgamation process—a confirmed approach by this government and this Premier to foist that on local government in the metropolitan area. The plan later was to attack councils in regional Western Australia and to push through what the government claimed would be a reform. Then all hell broke loose in the government sector and it splintered in a whole range of ways. Some councils joined together to set up fighting funds and community action groups, or they supported community action groups in their councils, and others moved to getting legal advice and mounting legal challenges. All these things were the swirling nature of the sector’s reaction to the government’s plan to force amalgamations. Some days before the March election of 2013, the former Minister for Local Government, before knew he was going to be minister, made the infamous comments about amalgamations at the Armadale business meeting. He was horribly embarrassed because he was forced by the Premier, even back then before he became minister some weeks later, to retract the comments he made at that famous business meeting in Armadale. He then set on a road of saying something and the Premier, depending on his mood, his nature and his thought bubble for the day, slapping him down. Indeed, as the minister said in his comments in the media, he would sometimes wait to hear what the Premier’s latest policy position was on local radio.

In question time this week we have pursued the Premier about his relationships with the former Minister for Transport and the former Minister for Local Government and about why both of them saw fit to resign from the

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Mr David Templeman; Mr Albert Jacob; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Tony Simpson

cabinet and their portfolios last weekend. We want to know why there has been a chaotic lack of communication between those ministers and the Premier and why the Premier has treated those senior ministers in the Liberal–National government so appallingly. The scene was set in 2013 when we saw the botched attempted rollout of local government reform in the metropolitan area. It was a total basket case attempt at local government reform. The minister would tell some local governments some things in private meetings and reassure them about processes and outcomes and then he would go outside those meeting to find that the Premier had said something on the radio that morning directly, or semi-directly, counter to what the minister had already told those people. As we came to some key votes required as part of the Dadour amendments of the Local Government Act, there were ongoing issues. Communities who strongly believed in their local government identities waged very strong public campaigns to engage community concern and action which resulted in a strong “no” vote for council amalgamations. From that time, the whole thing collapsed in a foul stinking heap.

The Minister for Local Government had been given not only the proverbial sandwich; he had been delivered a tray of them. In fact, the Premier added more filling into the sandwiches on that tray. He would get his spatula, scoop out more filling and whack it on those sandwiches, and say, “There you go, Tony. Have a bite of that, son.” Quite honestly, no-one can blame the former Minister for Local Government for deciding, “I’ve had a gutful of this. I have had more of these sandwiches than Imelda Marcos has shoes, and I have had enough of it. The Premier has dished up trays of these sandwiches and I have had my fill, and I am out of here.” Why would we blame him?

There is more intrigue to this story. Earlier this year, after the great flop in local government reform in the metropolitan area, he served up the great distraction of the City of Perth Bill, which the opposition supported and made sure went through this place. That bill highlighted, and we agreed with it, a concentration, if you like, of logical boundaries that would outline the City of Perth’s identity. We supported that bill. We understood the importance of having the iconic sandstone University of Western Australia within the total boundary of the City of Perth. We understood the need to have the key hospital included as well. We understood that part of the natural boundaries of the City of Perth should include Kings Park. We argued in the second reading stage and in the consideration in detail stage that we needed to protect the integrity of Kings Park and that we would make sure that we would never allow Kings Park to be threatened by any development or undue influence by being included in the City of Perth. We also said, “Get your hands off Victoria Park! Keep your dirty fingers, your stenchy sandwich-making fingers off the Town of Victoria Park and off Burswood peninsula. Wash your hands!” We were not going to be tricked into having some clause that would allow a future government to slide in later, which is the behaviour of this Premier, a land grab on the peninsula. The opposition said that if the minister wanted the opposition to support that bill, he would have to make sure that he accepted the opposition’s amendment that sought to ensure that any future government seeking to expand or alter the City of Perth boundary would have to do that through an act of Parliament or an amendment to the bill. They would have to come back to this place for debate and ultimate decision. They were the opposition’s terms.

The bill went through. However, after the whole gestation of the City of Perth Bill, a Corruption and Crime Commission report came out in mid-October 2015 that universally acknowledged that the highest office, the office of Lord Mayor, had been compromised on transparency, gift registers and declarations. That CCC report was damning. The opposition asked what was going to happen with the CCC report. The minister fluffed about and said that the government was going to get the Department of Local Government and Communities to look at the CCC’s report to see whether there had been any breaches. Indeed, there had been significant findings against the Lord Mayor on gift declarations or the lack thereof. The minister said that he would make sure that the Department of Local Government and Communities came up with a recommendation report. We waited. Through Christmas 2015 into the new year, we waited. We waited for the report from the Department of Local Government and Communities. All that time, the very reputation of the City of Perth was in question. That has been the very point I have tried to make in questions in this place and in the media. We had a bill in this Parliament that was all about enhancing the status of the City of Perth to ensure that the City of Perth was recognised for its unique and key focus and status, but we had a problem. The Lord Mayor’s reputation was under a cloud and there was the CCC report and a report commissioned by the minister and the Department of Local Government and Communities.

We were kept waiting. We got to February. I asked questions and there were reports in the media in February asking when we were going to get an outcome. The longer it went on, the more sullied the office of the Lord Mayor and its reputation was. The reputation of the City of Perth itself was sullied. Would we not think that this would be the priority of the minister of the day and the Premier? It needed to be off the table; it needed to be resolved.

It is not good for the City of Perth and it is not good for the high office of the Lord Mayor of Perth for this to be unresolved. In February, the Premier, himself, made a number of comments about wanting to see this resolved quickly. Fast forward to 21 September—today. Has it been resolved? No. We are nearing one year since the

original Corruption and Crime Commission report brought down a series of findings on the Lord Mayor's serious breaches regarding gift declarations et cetera. My question in this house on Wednesday last week specifically asked the minister why he had not at least gone to the State Administrative Tribunal, because after the Department of Local Government had released its report, which confirmed a range of serious breaches, it then said it had to go to SAT. My point last week to the minister was, "Minister, you can't keep saying 'my hands are tied'." The damage has already been done to the City of Perth. The councillors are fighting. A few months ago we saw the debacle when a non-binding motion was moved against the Deputy Lord Mayor and carried. That motion was having a go at him because he had been reported in the media as saying that he thought the Lord Mayor needed to reconsider her position. Why? Perth is a small place. People were asking: when will this be resolved; when will we get a resolution to this? They are proper and genuine questions to be asked. The former minister sat on his hands and did nothing. I wonder why. We now know, of course, there are some political links here, which I think need to be exposed. We might get to them shortly during this debate. At this point, on 21 September, we have no resolution. We do not know where SAT is at with it. I think it is a fair question by the minister of the day to say to SAT, that this has gone on too long, and ask, "Where is it at; when will there be a time line for resolution?" There is no guarantee that this will be resolved before Christmas or before the next election. If it is not resolved within the next two months, we will not have a chance to interrogate this in the Parliament. The premier local government in Western Australia, the council that governs our capital city, is under a major cloud and this minister and this government have done nothing about it.

Last week I asked the Minister for Local Government —

I refer to the Corruption and Crime Commission's report ...

- (1) Has the minister requested from the State Administrative Tribunal when a final resolution to this saga is likely; and, if not, why not?

What proved to be almost one of his last answers in this place as a minister, was not a very good answer, I might say—not a great way to go out. He replied —

I thank the member for the question. The member is correct. In about October last year, the Corruption and Crime Commission handed down a report to me as the Minister for Local Government with the words that I could take it through the Local Government Act. Since that time the director general of the Department of Local Government and Communities has instructed the State Solicitor's Office to take care of this case, so at the moment it is in the hands of the State Administrative Tribunal.

That was since October last year. Where is the urgency? There ain't none—"I can't do nothing; I can't do it." We know why: the guy who sits over there, the Premier, is a great puppeteer. He don't pull no strings! Tony's arm don't move until the Premier pulls it!

Mr M. McGowan: Geppetto.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Geppetto! He don't move!

I understand now exactly why the former Minister for Local Government got so frustrated. He got a tray full of the proverbial sandwiches. He could not hand them around to anyone in cabinet; no-one would go near him—"We don't want any of that sort of stuff; get away from us." When things start smelling, everyone rushes away. Have members ever noticed in question time how all the heads are down? The member for Maylands has a special term for that, but I cannot mention it because it is unparliamentary. Their eyes are all down. Brbrbrbr! When someone is asked a question, they line up and say, "Thank gosh it's not me." This is where we have got to.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Doesn't that come under the Attorney General? Surely he could do something. What has he done in this state?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The Premier said in February this year that this has to be resolved; we have to get this out of the way. That was February and it is now September.

I feel sorry for the member for Darling Range because this is not his fault. This issue was given to him and in his frustration last week, he highlighted just what happened to him. Let us go through —

Mr R.F. Johnson: He's part of my friendship group.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes. I think this highlights —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This is about me, not you. Look at me; look at me!

Several members interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I was being superseded.

This is an example of a game. This issue has dragged on; by that time it was nearly eight months since the process had begun. On 14 June this year in a question on notice to the then Minister for Local Government, I referred to the department of local government's investigation—it was then out of the CCC and with the Department of Local Government and Communities—into the Lord Mayor's travel and expenses, announced on 12 October. The big twelfth is coming up; it is a few weeks away. I asked in a question on notice when the department of local government's investigation was finalised. The answer was 5 May 2016. I also asked when the minister got a copy of the report. The answer was 6 May. I asked: what date did the department send the Lord Mayor, Lisa Scaffidi, a copy of the report?

Natural justice means that, of course, the minister has to make sure the person under investigation gets a copy—absolutely; there is no question about that. The answer was that the draft report was out on 24 March and the final report was out on 10 May. Then I asked —

Given the Premier was calling in March 2016 —

He called for it in March as well. It continues —

for the Report to be released publically and couldn't understand what was taking so long, why is it taking so long to release the Report;

The minister answered —

There are a number of processes that need to be undertaken when conducting an investigation. Accordingly, the Department's officers must ensure that the investigation is completed in such a manner ...

Then he tabled the report on 10 May and it was released publicly. That was the 10 May report. The Department of Local Government and Communities did its investigation as per the breaches reported in the CCC report and the Department of Local Government and Communities undertook its process. That was 10 May. Where are we now? It is 21 September. It was a fair question to ask last Wednesday, as I did: why had the minister not at least sought confirmation about when we will see this resolved? He was not able to answer that question effectively.

The reason we have moved this motion is simple. It is not to attack the member for Darling Range.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I thought, normally, the minister would be in the house when a motion was moved. Where is the Acting Minister for Local Government?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We do not know who that is.

Mr R.F. Johnson: We do; it's the Premier.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, but he will not come in here. At least the member for Darling Range has the courage to be here. I applaud him for that. Good on you.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I think that demonstrates the calibre in which we hold the former minister. We do not want to eat the member's sandwiches from the tray, but we have affection, some might say.

Mr A.J. Simpson: I will be responding.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: He will be responding. That is good.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I hope so. It depends whether he is the lead speaker.

In the dying days of this Parliament, and I suspect, possibly the dying days of this government, we have a major issue that has hung over the status of the City of Perth and, indeed, the office of the Lord Mayor of Perth that remains unresolved. If this government thinks that that has not damaged the council's reputation, then I think it is in fairyland. A number of questions need to be asked. For example, the Lord Mayor was once very, very media savvy and very, very keen to be in the media, but members would agree that in the last year her appearances have been very limited.

Mr R.F. Johnson: On the social pages.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Even those have been very limited. I can understand that, because I think the Lord Mayor would be appalled at how long this process has taken. She would not be happy about it, and I do not blame her. This government has let down the City of Perth and the local government sector.

I want to finish with some comments about this government's haphazard, erratic and illogical management of the local government portfolio. The point is the language used by the Premier about local government. Loosely, on at least one occasion, when issues about crime and corruption have been highlighted, the Premier has said off the cuff that most corruption appears in local government. That comment was very offensive to the sector. I think the former minister knows that because I think many members of the sector highlighted that to him. Good people who work in the local government sector were absolutely offended when the Premier of the day in his blasé scattergun manner labelled all local governments corrupt with that comment. That is basically what he said. He said that most crime and corruption inquiries are about local government because that is where we find corruption.

Mr J.M. Francis interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is what he said, mate. They were angry about that. That comment sullied the reputation of literally thousands of very good people who work in local government—elected members and, indeed, staff. One fellow came to me at, I think it was, the Local Government Managers Australia conference last year and said that he was absolutely offended, because the Premier's comments had continued this government's demoralisation of the local government sector. Over the last eight years, particularly over the last four to six years, the Premier has eroded any trust that the local government sector had with the state government. I think the reputation or the relationship has reached its lowest ebb ever. Little wonder the local government sector reacts when the Premier attacks it over financial stewardship.

Mr R.F. Johnson: That's the pot calling the kettle black.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, that is what he did. He said that the sector cannot manage its budgets. Wow! They cannot manage their budgets. What about that! Forty billion dollars or \$4 billion—who cannot manage their budget? The Premier! He cannot manage his budget, but he goes off lecturing everybody else that they cannot manage theirs. The guy has not got a forked tongue; he has got a four-pronged tongue. We know that whenever the minister, as is his nature, tried to settle the sector down and told them that they could talk this through and work this out, he was undermined and had the carpet ripped out from under him by the Premier. It was usually on local radio or in local or state media. Little wonder the former minister said, "I've had a gutful of this. You can have your sandwich—take it." That is what he did.

There has been not just an illogical approach to the local government sector, but a deliberate act by this Premier, in particular, to denigrate and treat with disdain a sector that is very important to the communities that it represents throughout the state. That is why we have moved this motion, and, more importantly, why we need to put on the public record that there has been appalling stewardship of this portfolio. This former minister was unable to have control of his department's destiny or the sector's destiny, because his hands were not tied—as he said to me in an answer to a question I asked last week—but were actually lassoed and were moved whenever the Premier decided to move. That is sad. The end result is that a good man had to take drastic action and resign. This motion should be supported for those reasons.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Member for Ocean Reef.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Are you the acting minister?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Are you the lead speaker?

MR A.P. JACOB (Ocean Reef — Minister for Environment) [4.37 pm]: Yes, I am the lead speaker on this motion.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Can you confirm that you're the acting minister?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I can confirm that I am the lead speaker on the motion before us.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Who is the acting minister?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I can confirm that I am the lead speaker on the motion before us.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members for Girrawheen, Warnbro, Midland and Albany! I am happy to stand here; it is your time. Members, the minister has the floor and he has indicated that he is the lead speaker.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro!

Mr A.P. JACOB: Thank you, very much, again. It was particularly interesting listening to the lead speaker for the opposition because I do not think that he really addressed the motion terribly much. His speech seemed to be a lot less about the motion and far more about the Lord Mayor and the City of Perth and various other interpersonal issues. As I said in my comments in this place yesterday on a virtually identical matter of public interest motion, when any portfolio under this government is married up, our track record stands. Our track record will stand the test of time. I can tell the member for Albany that our track record in local government absolutely leaves Labor's track record for dead. I was in local government when the Labor Party was in government. I was a local government councillor for the final three years—the dying days—of the Carpenter government, and I remember what that was like. I think the sector still has not forgotten —

Ms L.L. Baker interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! I get that you are upset with the minister, but Hansard is trying to take down the debate. How about having some regard for the employees in this house.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. We know that we have members opposite when they start trying to change the subject.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Are you finished, members?

Ms L.L. Baker interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Maylands, I am going to call you. Member for Maylands, you are called. Member for Albany, you do it again and you will get called.

Mr A.P. JACOB: There is no accounting for some tastes, Madam Acting Speaker.

As I said, the Liberal–National government made a number of changes and reforms to local government. I start my comments by talking about the environment portfolio, because a lot of portfolios interact with local government. In the local government portfolio, this government's actions and policy on legislative change and investment have improved accountability for ratepayers and increased transparency of the operations of councils and better supported local government through grant schemes and also governance and training. As I said, improvements to legislation will absolutely stand the test of time. I can remember a number of debates in the council chamber from early 2006 until early September 2008, but once this government was elected the achievements it made under both local government ministers will absolutely stand the test of time.

I move to my own portfolio. The Department of Environment Regulation, in particular, works very closely with the local government sector.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Again, I do not get what it is with opposition members continually trying to change the subject. This is the opposition's motion. Members opposite have accused the government of falling short in its management of local government. I am seeking to constrain my comments on local government to the motion, unlike the opposition's lead speaker, but opposition members keep trying to change the subject. I will start again. The Department of Environment Regulation, in particular, has programs underway right now to directly support local government efforts to tackle illegal dumping, particularly outer metropolitan councils such as the City of Wanneroo in the electorate of the member for Wanneroo, and the City of Swan in the electorate of the member for Swan Hills. Indeed, it is a particular problem for most members who represent outer metropolitan electorates.

Ms M.M. Quirk: This is about local government.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Member for Girrawheen, illegal dumping is a significant issue in those areas. It is principally a responsibility of local government, as the land manager in those areas. The Department of Environment Regulation has this year established a seven-person dedicated illegal dumping task force, because the government knows that although the number of illegally dumped items is tracking down, the volume of bulk litter is tracking up. That is clearly a problem area with litter. Local governments, as the first responders, have been struggling to deal with some of the illegal dumping challenges in their areas. That is not a new problem; it has been around for many years. The department looked at innovative ways to work with local governments. The illegal dumping task force is one way. We will be using covert surveillance cameras to help local governments catch these individuals and also to make available prosecution pathways under the Environmental Protection Act, which has serious and significant penalties attached to illegal dumping. We have had fantastic results with that program, such as the very well-publicised example of an individual who had illegally dumped a load. Our inspectors went out and looked at what had been dumped and found a receipt from McDonalds for a Big Mac, member for South Perth. They went to the McDonalds in question and asked if they could have a copy of the

CCTV footage from its drive-through. That footage showed the individual going through the drive-through with the exact trailer load of material that had been illegally dumped in the bush, and we successfully prosecuted him. When we put in investment and resources we get results.

Ms L.L. Baker: Will you take an interjection, minister?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will, in a second, when I finish my story. That is a really good example of the government partnering with local government and delivering outcomes. I was at the Western Australian Local Government Convention a few short weeks ago and one of the few questions I received from the councils there was whether they could roll out that program in the regional areas. That was because they liked the program so much. The government will look at doing that. We also have a program of working with local government to assist in monitoring industrial premises along the Swan and Canning Rivers. Again, in dealing with legacy landfill sites and light industry that may be regulated under local government, there can be a crossover between local government and state government. We are always keen to explore further any opportunity to work with local government.

My Department of Parks and Wildlife also has a very strong relationship with local government in regional areas, but not exclusively regional areas. Since coming into government, the Liberal–National government has supported local governments in sharing responsibility for the Swan and Canning Rivers, with around \$16 million for 192 river restoration and foreshore projects. That \$16 million has unlocked in excess of \$30 million worth of funding. I do not have the exact figure in front of me, but from memory it is a greater multiplier and the figure is probably more like \$32 million. An iconic project is the South Perth foreshore in the electorate of the member for South Perth. That is a really good example of where the state government, in this instance through the Department of Parks and Wildlife, partnered with the City of South Perth to fix up the area around the Mends Street jetty. The Department of Parks and Wildlife worked with the City of South Perth in a partnership that was matched in kind to deliver that fantastic foreshore area. That was an election commitment of the Liberal Party. It is an example of the government working well with local government. This is a very important project that local government has been calling for for a long time. I announced with the Premier that this government would introduce a container deposit program.

Mr W.J. Johnston: Which you voted against.

Mr A.P. JACOB: The member for Cannington can bleat on as much as he wants; his lot never did it.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr A.P. JACOB: The irony is, member for Cannington, that that silly little bill, that silly little stunt that you pulled to pull the bill up —

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Cannington!

Mr R.F. Johnson: It has nothing to do with the motion.

Mr A.P. JACOB: It has everything to do with the motion, member for Hillarys, because this motion is about the government's management and relationship with local government. Local government has been calling for many years to bring in a container deposit scheme. It is an example, member for Hillarys and member for Cannington, of how the government works with local government.

Several members interjected.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I do not care how loud members opposite yell in opposition, these are things they never did in government. What members opposite are yelling about now is irrelevant. That silly little private member's bill offends section 90 of the Constitution and would fall over in the High Court if it was challenged. That is why the government does not support silly little bills like that; it does proper governance and not little stunts. When we were in opposition, we had our heads down quietly working through things.

Mr W.J. Johnston: When is your bill coming in?

Mr A.P. JACOB: If the member for Cannington cannot even bother to do the research and read my public statements, it sure as heck is not worth responding to his puerile interjections.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Cannington!

Mr A.P. JACOB: Do your research, member for Cannington. Do not make silly off-the-cuff interjections. That has been answered ad nauseam.

Mr W.J. Johnston: It's not off-the-cuff and you're an idiot!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Cannington, it is not necessary to throw that sort of insult across the chamber. You have made your interjection. The minister has the floor.

Mr A.P. JACOB: No withdrawal, which speaks to the character of the member for Cannington, which I think is well understood.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I did not ask for it.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I know, but if he had a shred of decency —

The ACTING SPEAKER: I am in the Chair. Thank you, minister! You have the floor—continue.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I know, Madam Acting Speaker, but I think I have the right to respond to that puerile interjection. They are typical grubby tactics from the member for Cannington, because that is all he has. We get a silly little interjection because he has not even bothered to read my public comments and media statements on the issue. Then, when I call him out on it, he calls me a name and does not have the dignity or the integrity to withdraw. We all know he does not have the integrity to get up and withdraw.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Does the member have to be told to do it?

Point of Order

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: No-one asked me to withdraw anything. There was no point of order from any member on the other side. Nobody asked me to withdraw anything, so I do not know what it is. The member on his feet is now addressing me and not the motion. He is clearly out of order because he cannot discuss me when he is debating the motion. If one of the members on the other side had taken objection to anything that I said and suggested that anything I said was unparliamentary or inadequate, they would have taken a point of order. That did not happen. Under the standing orders, they have to take a point of order at the time that I make a remark and not some other time. None of them tried to do that. I ask you to require the minister to comply with the standing orders and address the motion and not me.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Member for Joondalup, when there is a point of order, you are to be silent. Minister, you have the floor.

Debate Resumed

Mr A.P. JACOB: As I said, I was simply responding to the puerile interjection from the member for Cannington. I would rather it stand on the record as yet another reminder of his character and conduct in this house. It is a pity he does not have the integrity to stand up and withdraw of his own accord. I am not planning to ask him to do it, but it underlines how he operates.

Point of Order

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: This debate is going nowhere because the minister is not complying with the standing orders. The standing orders require the minister to address the motion and he is not doing that. If there is a point of order about my behaviour, I am happy to respond, but there has never been one.

Mr J. Norberger interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Member for Joondalup, I call you.

Thank you, member for Cannington. That is why I wanted you to sit down. Would you like to continue with a point of order or have you made your point?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Apparently, the minister took offence at something I said. Not a single member from his side of Parliament —

Mr J. Norberger interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: There was not a single point of order in respect of anything I raised in my interjection. Apparently, not a single member of the government took objection to any of my interjections. Instead of dealing with the matter before the chamber, the minister continues to talk about me, which is clearly a breach of the standing orders. I would ask you, Acting Speaker, to require the minister to comply with the standing orders and direct his remarks to the motion in front of him, not to any other extraneous matter.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Joondalup, do you have a point of order?

Mr J. Norberger: No.

Debate Resumed

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, you have the floor.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Thank you, Acting Speaker. To mix my metaphors, people in glasshouses should not have such glass jaws.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, just come back to the debate.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I am desperately trying to.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, come back to the debate.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Certainly, and then I will move into the local government portfolio in particular. I know my good colleague the member for Darling Range wants a chance to address it as well. As I said in my opening comments, since 2008 this Liberal–National government’s management of and relationship with local government is far, far stronger than the record of members opposite. I will run through some of our list of achievements. It is exhaustive—in fact it is almost exhausting when one starts reading it and realises how much this government has done with the local government sector. That also shows why we maintain a far stronger relationship with the local government sector than members opposite were enjoying in 2008. I can remember it well; was it after five or six ministers?

Mr P.T. Miles: Six.

Mr A.P. JACOB: There were six ministers on a rotation system; it was very generous. There was no reform and very little achievement. One of our most recent achievements is to increase the independent oversight of local government through the appointment of the Auditor General as the auditor for local governments.

Mrs G.J. Godfrey: Well done, minister.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Well done, indeed. It is a grand achievement of this government. Also, we have introduced performance audits that examine the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of programs and organisations, including compliance with legislative provisions and internal policies. This Liberal–National government has increased the transparency of rate setting in local government. The Liberal–National government has commenced dialogue with the sector to consider standardising the publication of rates and expenditure information, rate controls, tools for the community to assess value for money, and publishing local government financial information—not rate capping, which is the member for Cannington’s policy and one reason I suspect the member still struggles in his relationship with local government. The Labor Party’s policy at the last state election was to enforce rate capping on local governments, not recognising myriad complexities and challenges that sit over local governments.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Acting Speaker, I will ask for some protection because this interjecting is puerile.

The ACTING SPEAKER: You have the floor, minister.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Thank you very much.

We have increased the transparency of rate setting—not the top-heavy, head-down rate cap that was the policy of members opposite.

Picking up on comments from members opposite, this government created a City of Perth Act, recognising Perth as the capital of Western Australia and recognising the special significance of the role and responsibilities of the City of Perth. This government envisions Perth as a thriving centre of business. The Premier is correct—Perth is the focal point for Western Australians. It is our capital city. We need to maintain its reputation as a thriving, innovative and vibrant destination, and a sustainable and vibrant global city. Not only have we achieved it through the local government portfolio with the standalone City of Perth Act, we have also backed it up with investments. We have backed it up with Elizabeth Quay, Perth City Link —

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for West Swan, you are on three calls. You have asked the question; there is no answer. Let it go. The minister has the floor.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I cannot even hear her. If she wishes to interject, she would probably have to say it a little louder. Maybe I am a little —

Ms R. Saffioti: Do you avoid the rain? Don’t worry about it; keep going.

The ACTING SPEAKER: The minister has the floor. Continue.

Ms R. Saffioti: Keep the automated answers; it is great!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Keep going, minister.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Again, cute, little picky responses and then the second the Acting Speaker calls them out on them, we get the debacle like we just had. It is worth pointing out that I am really happy I have that member —

Mr W.J. Johnston: Point of order!

Mr A.P. JACOB: Look at it!

Point of Order

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: There has not been a single point of order about anything I have said, yet the Minister for Environment continues to return to a breaching of the standing orders. He is required by the standing orders to address his remarks to the motion. The motion states —

That this house condemns the Barnett Liberal–National government for its illogical and erratic management of the local government portfolio.

I suggest the Acting Speaker request the minister kindly to address his remarks to the matter before the house.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Nobody is talking about, or to, the member for Cannington, so I am not sure exactly what his point of order is. The minister is talking about the topic at hand. He is not making any reference to the member for Cannington. I am sure his ego will not be hurt by that.

Mr W.J. Johnston: I never said he did!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Really! Minister, you have the floor. Let us address the motion before us.

Debate Resumed

Mr A.P. JACOB: Another key initiative of this government is that it has now made changes to the Local Government Act to enable two or more local governments to form a subsidiary body. This will enable them to perform a service or to carry out an activity jointly, much like we see currently with regional councils. Those changes to the Local Government Act provide a flexible mechanism for local governments to collaborate on activities such as the management of information technology and, very importantly, on regional tourism. It is great to see more and more collaboration in that space, and also through service delivery to remote Aboriginal communities.

This government introduced the MyCouncil website in April 2016. The Liberal–National government launched that website to provide a snapshot of every local government in Western Australia, allowing the public for the very first time to make comparisons between local governments. Western Australian ratepayers are now able to scrutinise their council's financial health and/or performance. We are providing unprecedented access to local government data directly to ratepayers, enabling them to compare, making sure we hold them accountable—not in a prohibitive manner but in a way that encourages them to be more efficient and to work towards efficiencies.

Better training for councillors was a key initiative of this government through the former Minister for Local Government. We have provided a \$1.52 million training program to enable Western Australian–elected members in country local governments to build their skills and to improve their governance and decision-making capacity. That is such an important area, particularly in regional communities that have smaller populations within their local governments, but they form a key part of those communities. The capacity to improve governance and decision-making on council leads to far better decision-making processes. Key modules include meeting procedures and debating, land use planning, strategy, and managing risk for those local governments.

Another two programs were launched in July 2016—the youth development program and the community development fund—through the country local government fund. The youth development program, launched in July 2016, provides scholarships of up to \$10 000 each. They are on offer to country local government employees under the age of 30 to participate in job-relevant training or study. Scholarships of up to \$10 000 are for employees under the age of 30 in regional areas. Even more importantly, the Liberal–National government is supporting job creation in regions through local government, thanks to funding of up to \$20 000, to support 20 regional local governments to create traineeship-based employment for young people up to 24 years of age. That youth development program alone is a total investment of \$1.2 million directly into regional Western Australia, upskilling young people and creating job opportunities in those communities. The community development program, which was launched in July 2016, provides for country local governments to apply for grants of up to \$20 000 to undertake programs involving best practice in community development, and also working in partnership with the not-for-profit sector and the community. Scholarships of up to \$10 000 are also available for staff and elected members to participate in nationally recognised programs of training or study in community development. The total investment there is \$1.42 million.

In another very important reform that has been sought for a long time—in fact, there are two, but I will start on this one—in November 2015 this government brought in mandatory microchipping for all dogs. These new laws increase penalties for all offences, impose stricter control over dangerous dogs and give local governments greater ability to deal with barking dogs.

Several members interjected.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Again, I am getting silly interjections. If members opposite spend some time in their local communities talking to their constituents, they will find that that is one of the biggest issues. If they spend some time in their electorate offices, they will find that that is a big issue. It matters a lot in the local community. I know that the member for Maylands knows that. Barking dogs in the local community and control of dangerous dogs are very important issues in Western Australia. It does not behove members opposite to make those silly interjections on that one.

The other reform is something that was also aspired to for many years. I go back to my time as a Joondalup city councillor, when the council went down the path of creating its own local government cat law. I think it ended up with the member for Wanneroo, when he was on the Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation. My memory is that I did not support that cat law when I was on council. I was very supportive of a cat law, but I took the view that it should be done at a state level. No other government had been prepared to step up and bring in cat legislation, but this government took it on. I think Western Australia is still the only state in Australia that has a Cat Act, mandatory sterilisation for cats and mandatory microchipping. It is a remarkable achievement, considering that Western Australia is by far the biggest state, with one-third of the continent. I was always very supportive of this. I moved motions at the Joondalup city council calling on the then state government to step in. Those calls fell on deaf ears, but fortunately this government, when the member for Bunbury was Minister for Local Government, put the cat legislation through.

Last year I was at the first Australian threatened species summit in Melbourne. Every jurisdiction around the country was represented, along with all the key non-government organisations. One of the key questions—almost the key theme of that conference—was how to tackle feral cats. I could proudly stand up and say that Western Australia was leading the way on tackling feral cats. On the one hand, we have our Eradecat program, run through the Department of Parks and Wildlife under the Western Shield program, using 1080 baits, now newly licensed, to specifically target cats. I should say that I have just put out an Eradecat media release, because we are just starting our baiting program again. That is only one part of the equation, because we are also dealing with the supply base. We were not quite the only jurisdiction with a cat law. I think one of the smaller states managed to require one little island off its coast to impose mandatory microchipping and sterilisation, but we did it for the entire state. That was this government. Again, when we start going through the list, it is almost exhausting listing how much reform we have achieved in local government.

Ms A.R. Mitchell: I wonder whether the minister would like to look at my cat.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Thank you, Minister for Mental Health. Mine has not visited me for the last two or three days. As the member knows, I have a joint custody arrangement with my neighbours.

This government provided funding for companion animal shelters to encourage responsible pet ownership and to assist shelters that rescue and care for abandoned and neglected animals. That funding has resulted in 10 363 cats and 12 184 dogs being rehoused or rescued. I am sure the member for Maylands would applaud that decision of this government.

While I am on the topic of cats and dogs, I refer to another reform that came through this government. I remember bringing a grievance to this place in the last term of Parliament as a local member. The Burns Beach Cafe is located on the Burns Beach dual-use path on the foreshore. Everybody tends to walk past with their dogs, because it is probably the most beautiful walk in the electorate, so the cafe thought it would start to offer a dog menu. It put out dog bowls and encouraged patrons to sit in the alfresco area and enjoy a cappuccino or a meal while their best friends could also enjoy a meal. I thought that was a brilliant idea, but the local government, due to the existing Australia and New Zealand Food Standards Code, had to require the cafe to stop doing it. This is another example of where work as a government and a local member can make a difference. I came into this place and made a grievance to the then Minister for Health. The minister and the government saw that it was a bit of red tape that needed to be removed. The former Minister for Health, the member for Dawesville, championed that change. Now, if a cafe wants to include dogs amongst its patrons, it is free to do so. It is fantastic to see it happening. That cafe in my electorate is more popular than ever. It is well known as a bit of a doggy destination. It has even worked out its licensing around the dogs, and serves a special dog beer, maybe for later in the evening when the walkers are on their way back. I do not actually think it is an alcoholic beer, but it was a bit of a branding exercise. Again, I thought it was very clever.

Moving back to some other reforms, this government has improved strategic planning and asset management in local government by introducing an integrated planning and reporting framework. Since its introduction in 2010, local governments are better able to plan for the needs of their communities, and ensure that they can maintain current assets and judge their capacity to provide further services. This government has also acted in many

instances, such as the one that I have just outlined with the Burns Beach Cafe's dog menu, to reduce unnecessary regulation and red tape.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Maybe the list is a bit too long. I cannot help that; I am trying to get through them as quickly as I can. We have carried out a remarkable amount of reform and achievement in the local government portfolio.

Several members interjected.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I can understand that a government achieving and delivering outcomes must really go against the grain for members opposite, because they love to make their little symbolic gestures and bold statements while sitting on that side, but this is what achievement looks like. So what if we have the odd challenge along the way? There are always challenges; there is always difficulty. The cheapest skill in the world is that of simply sitting and pointing out the challenges. We have had our challenges, and we will have more challenges as long as we are in government.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mr A.P. JACOB: That is a stupid interjection again. Our examples of removing red tape and taking a creative approach to removing the regulatory burden make a big difference in the local community.

Another example is simplifying the local government compliance audit return process. The size of the returns in local government has decreased by about 20 per cent through the removal of questions on areas of compliance that are already audited by the Department of Local Government and Communities or external auditors. This is one of the more significant reforms for local government. It was called for throughout the entire period of the previous Labor government, but it never acted on it. It never took it seriously.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I may well have been; I will have to go back. I might have been even back then. That gives members an idea of how long Labor members sat on their hands and did not do all that much. That is why there is such a long list of achievements by our side.

This government improved the standard, performance and calibre of local governments and their elected members by allowing the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal to set the level of fees and allowances paid to elected members and CEOs. It was a significant reform, which the member for Darling Range is to be absolutely commended for. It was a reform that local government had been calling for probably since I was in high school, because there were a lot of years when that lot was in government and not a lot seemed to happen. Through that reform, we can regulate the types of ventures in which local governments can invest. We have also enabled the minister, as a check and balance, to suspend a council for up to six months and/or require members of a council to undertake remedial action when a council has become dysfunctional.

One more reform was to have online reporting of gifts and travel contributions. Again, it was a small reform in the scheme of things but it has made a big difference to local government and underlines this government's approach to, and its relationship with, local government. This reform ensures that councillors and senior staff disclose gifts and travel contributions within 10 days and that that information is easily accessible on the council's website rather than simply within the annual return. It was to help with public confidence in local government decision-making, further increasing the transparency and accountability of local governments. We believe in local government. We support local government. We know that from time to time we will have disagreements with local government, but we know it is an important sector and an important tier of government. It is doing an important job and, whenever possible, we work with it to deliver outcomes for the community. That was an exhaustive list. They were some of the headlines of what has been achieved under this government.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington) [5.12 pm]: We know that the Liberal Party has given up on a topic when it allows the Minister for Environment to be the lead speaker. We know that it has given up on an issue when he gets up to speak. When the Minister for Environment is the lead speaker on a topic, we know that the Liberal Party has run up the white flag and that there is not going to be content to the debate. All he is capable of doing is reading out a list of activities that he is forcing local government to —

Point of Order

Mr J. NORBERGER: Madam Deputy Speaker, before you had the opportunity to take the chair, the member for Cannington had multiple points of order and was quite distraught that the minister was addressing even portions of his speech towards him, yet the moment the member gets to his feet —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! What is your point of order?

Mr J. NORBERGER: My point of order is that this is hypocrisy from the member.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order. Resume your seat.

Debate Resumed

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: As I was saying in support of the motion that this house condemns the Barnett Liberal–National government for its illogical and erratic management of the local government portfolio, the Liberal Party is running up the white flag. It got the Minister for Environment not to discuss the management of local government in Western Australia, which is the purpose of the motion, but to read out a list from the Premier’s office. He has been told that extra burdens had been placed on local government. Take the cat law as an example. That law was introduced by the member for Bunbury, and I worked with him on that bill and, to his credit, we made 17 amendments to the bill, many of which came directly from my pen, as the former minister can attest. Let me ask the Minister for Environment this: how many cats are registered in Perth? The minister is running out of the chamber, because he knows that hardly any cats are registered. Are 6 000 cats registered in Perth? The minister runs out of the chamber. The Liberal Party ran up the white flag when it put up the Minister for Environment and now the minister runs up the white flag. That is the way it works with this government.

I went to the Premier’s website to have a look —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! Member for Joondalup!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I wanted to know who is responsible for the chaos in local government, so I went to the Premier’s website. I wondered whether I could find on the Premier’s website who is the Minister for Local Government. Just before I spoke, I downloaded from the Premier’s website the Western Australian government ministry, which has Hon Tony Simpson, MLA, as Minister for Local Government. I thought he had resigned. Then I went to the list of ministers on the Premier’s website and what did I find? I found that Tony Simpson, MLA, is Minister for Local Government. That is what is on the website. On the Premier’s website—www.premier.wa.gov.au/Ministers/Tony-Simpson/Pages/Biography.aspx—there is Hon Tony Simpson’s curriculum vitae. During question time today, we could not get the Premier to tell us who is the acting minister, but apparently the Premier reckons it is still the member for Darling Range. No wonder there is chaos at the centre of this government. It runs up the white flag. It does not debate the issues. It does not give a damn about the management of local government, which is what the motion is about. Instead, it gives the Minister for Environment a list of things to read out, because the minister cannot carry an argument. All the Minister for Environment can do is read out a list; that is all he is capable of doing. He can vote against container deposit legislation and he can read out a list. What an achievement! No wonder the Liberal Party runs up the white flag on local government. It does not have a Minister for Local Government, unless it is the member for Darling Range, as the Premier says.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Carine, I call you. Member for Bateman!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: What is the achievement? I want to read the last line of Hon Tony Simpson’s CV on the Premier’s website. It states —

His major project to introduce local government reforms and make councils in metropolitan Perth larger, stronger and more financially sustainable, is on track, with new local governments due to start on July 1, 2015.

That is what the Premier’s website states is the Liberal Party’s great achievement. The Minister for Environment can read out a list, but he cannot discuss the topic. We know that the one thing that cannot happen if the Minister for Environment is thrown into a debate is for him to argue anything. He cannot defend the government’s failures. He is good at reading a list; I give him that. But do not ask the minister to come up with an idea and contribute a thought, because that is not what he gets paid for. He gets paid to read a list into *Hansard*. I think he should be proud that he has reached that capacity—he can read out a list in Parliament!

An article on the Government News website states —

Western Australian Premier Colin Barnett appears to be retreating from Perth council mergers saying he is surrendering because it’s all got too hard.

The original proposal was to reduce Perth’s 30 councils to 16 but a recent ‘no’ vote by residents in six council areas, which were to be merged into three, has blown a hole in the scheme.

...

Mr Barnett told 720 ABC Perth this week: “yep, I’ve failed. So I’ve put up the white flag.”

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 21 September 2016]

p6484b-6504a

Mr David Templeman; Mr Albert Jacob; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Tony Simpson

And today the Liberal Party put up the white flag when it asked the Minister for Environment to read out a list. What a contribution! That is all he was able to do. It continues —

“We gave it, and I gave it, my best shot. I failed, I concede that ...

What date was that? That was 11 February 2015, yet on the Premier’s website today under the CV of Hon Tony Simpson, MLA, it states that the amalgamation is on track, with new local governments due to start on 1 July 2015. What a farce! Why does the government not talk about the actual management of the local government sector? How is it that after all this time it can still do nothing about the proved conduct of the Lord Mayor? It is an embarrassment to Western Australia. I have heard the Premier say on multiple occasions in this chamber how important the City of Perth is and how it is the gateway for our state as it is the international entry for people and it is what we hold up to the community outside this state. He said the Lord Mayor has a special role that is beyond those of other officeholders in local government. But what do we have? We have a Lord Mayor of the City of Perth who cannot be seen in public because she is too embarrassed about the findings against her. What does the government of Western Australia—the Liberal Party—do about this travesty? Nothing. It gets the Minister for Environment to read out a list about cats. There is a crisis in the reputation of the City of Perth, which the Premier says is so crucial to the state, and the member for Mandurah highlighted that in his contribution, and what was the response from the government? Did it address a single thing raised by the member for Mandurah? No; the government got the Minister for Environment to read out a list. This is a tired Liberal–National government that has run out of ideas. It has the most unpopular Premier in the state’s history. Fifteen members of the Liberal caucus do not want him there. They would prefer to vote for an empty chair than the current Premier. In fact, a majority in this chamber do not want the member for Cottesloe to be the Premier, and that is why the government put up the Minister for Environment. Instead of dealing with the issues facing local governments, all the government got the minister to do was read out a list. Is that not an achievement? I am proud that the minister is capable of reading out a list. Sometimes I am not sure whether he is, but apparently today he could achieve that. I am sure the minister feels very proud because he read out a list.

I want to make another point. What did the member for Darling Range say in the media over the weekend? I will read what he was quoted as saying in an article that appeared in PerthNow. He said the following —

“I would listen to talkback radio to hear what the Premier had said about my portfolio in the case of local government. And then I’d have to try to find a way to adjust, and work off that.

The former minister went on —

“From the perspective of the local government sector as a whole, if someone’s done something wrong, there needs to be consequences,” Mr Simpson said.

“I just wish we could deal with it sooner. But it’s out of my hands once it’s in the prosecution process.

What do we see here? The motion today is about the government’s management of local government. What did the minister say? He said we are right. That is exactly what the former minister, the member for Darling Range, said. When the government is given 60 minutes to rebut that case, the case not just of the Labor Party but of the resigned Liberal Party minister, what does it do? It reads out a list about cat laws and dogs—cats and dogs is the government’s response. There is a finding of fact that there was serious misconduct by the most important person in local government in Western Australia and the minister talks about cats and dogs. For crying out loud. No wonder there is silence, no wonder there is so much embarrassment, no wonder the white flag goes up and no wonder the minister obviously has important parliamentary duties elsewhere in the building, because he is not here to defend that. There was no defence. The member for Mandurah clearly laid out the problems. Multiple millions of dollars were wasted in the department and in local government on that failed, stupid, badly thought through, illogical forced amalgamation process that was a clear breach of promise by the Premier. Let us remember what happened: the member for Darling Range went to his local community in the election campaign, when he was not yet the Minister for Local Government, and said that the Liberal Party would have forced local government amalgamations. The Premier made him go back out and say that he was wrong and there would not be forced to local government amalgamations, and then he was made minister and asked to introduce forced government amalgamations. How did he know about it? He heard it on the radio. It was not discussed and talked about in cabinet or at some other meeting. He heard the Premier on talkback radio making announcements and he had to go out to try to clean up the mess. There was not one word from the Minister for Environment. As I say, I am not surprised there was not a single word from the Minister for Environment. I note that there is not a single member of the government in the chamber. There are no ministers present. There is not a single minister here to respond to anything that has been raised.

Mr P. Papalia: There is the one still on the website.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Yes, there is one who the Premier says is the minister, but there is actually no minister in the chamber. That is the level of respect for the appalling management of local government that has happened. There are no ministers brave enough to talk about it.

Mr R.F. Johnson: There is supposed to be a minister in the chamber.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Of course; everybody knows that it is the job of the Leader of the House to make sure there is a minister here, but he is not here. There are no ministers in the chamber. There is not a single member of the government, and that is a disgrace. The government raised the white flag. As the Premier said, he failed. He raised the white flag on forced council amalgamations back in February 2015. The government raised the white flag because all it could find was the vacuous Minister for Environment to read out a list, and now there is not a single minister ready to defend the government's behaviour. It is ridiculous. I look forward to the Minister for Small Business participating in the debate. Of all ministers on that side of the chamber, the one we worry about least is him, because he has never got a thought out of his mind accurately. We used to like the Minister for Transport, but it is the Minister for Small Business that we like the most. I loved it when he criticised us about Metro Area Express. He criticised us for wanting to bulldoze houses on Fitzgerald Street, which was required for the MAX plan, but he criticised us for the plan. I always loved that one. Anyway, we will look forward to hearing his defence for the chaos here. Why did the government spend millions of dollars of ratepayers' money on forced amalgamations and then walk away from the process when the government was told all the way through not to do it—not to follow that path. Why, after all this time, is there still not a resolution to the problems in what the Premier says is the pre-eminent local government authority in Western Australia—that is, the City of Perth. Why do we not have any action from this government? The government is happy to have the minister read out a list, not of achievements but of bits and pieces about cats and dogs, but it is not prepared to address a simple issue—that is, why is there erratic and illogical management of the local government portfolio? I love the ministers when they change a law that they themselves introduced. The reason the minister had to put the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal back in charge of the salaries of chief executives of local governments is that the Liberal Party removed it. The Liberal Party removed the SAT from managing local governments. The Labor Party said it was a mistake, but that is what the Liberal Party did. Now the Liberal Party has reversed that. We are the only state in Australia that has non-compulsory voting and multi-member constituencies with first-past-the-post voting. Then government wonders why there are factions in councils. The government designs a system that delivers factions and then wonders why there are factions in councils. The management of local government by the Liberal Party over decades has been a shambles. The changes by the Court government in the 1990s were terrible. We tried to change them when we were in government and guess what, Minister for Environment? The Liberal Party voted against it. The Liberal Party ran a campaign against us. Let us remember that the Labor Party has never controlled the upper house of this Parliament—not once.

Mr A.P. Jacob: Didn't you vote against the biodiversity bill?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: No.

Mr P.T. Miles: Yes, you did.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: When?

Mr A.P. Jacob: Last week.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Where was I last week?

Mr A.P. Jacob interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I am sorry, what is the minister saying? Sorry, I was in Sydney last week; I do not know what the minister is talking about.

Mr A.P. Jacob: You voted before on it in this house on the third reading.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Sorry, I do not know what the minister is going on about.

Mr A.P. Jacob: Yes, you did.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The minister voted against container deposit legislation, if he wants to be like that. Not that we could under the debate we are having now, but if at some time the minister wants to move a motion, I will explain to him why I would have supported the Liberal Party's position on that bill, but that is not what we are discussing today. Today we are talking about the illogical and erratic management of the local government portfolio. That was something the minister had 60 minutes to discuss, but chose not to. He could have dealt with the question of why the government got local governments to spend millions of dollars on council amalgamation. I always like this. I go and speak to local governments in my region. I have two—the council of Canning and the council of Gosnells. I have a very good relationship with both the elected and professional officials of both

councils, and they complain about the decisions the government has made. They complain that this government constantly passes laws that makes their workload go up, but allows the member for Riverton to complain about increased council costs. This government puts up their charges and then complains in the media about councils increasing rates.

The minister raised the question of rate capping. The Liberal Party in New South Wales does rate capping for local governments. The Liberal Party in Victoria introduced rate capping for local governments. What a damned socialist agenda is there when the Liberal Party does that! I do not understand why the government would oppose the idea of having local governments justify increasing the rates. What an outrage that would be! Residents would be able to hold their local governments to account on the question of rate increases. It is one thing to have a website; it is another thing to have a process to make sure that there is value for money. Let us not forget, the only reason there is a local government website so residents can make comparisons across councils and there is some transparency in local government is because of the report that I co-authored with the member for Belmont. That was the response to the inquiry by the Public Accounts Committee of which the member for Belmont and I were part. When the minister went off on his urgent parliamentary business, he forgot to say that it was not the government's idea to do this. It was our idea; it came from the Public Accounts Committee made up from the bipartisan part of this Parliament.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: After seven years of this government, I have read 120 audit reports and the management letters for the audit reports. I think I am probably the only person in Western Australia to have actually read 120 audit reports.

Several members interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Oh—the member for Belmont as well to give her a credit.

Ms R. Saffioti: You need to get out more.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I do.

Mr F.A. Alban: You need a life, member!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: By doing that, member, I exposed something that nobody knew—namely, that the Department of Local Government and Communities under the leadership of the Liberal Party had known that there was a range of local governments in Western Australia that were in breach of the Local Government Act, and it had done nothing about it. So when the Minister for Environment read out his list, and on his list were the website and accountability mechanisms, he forgot that they were a direct response to the chaos and dysfunction at the heart of the Department of Local Government and Communities that was exposed by the Public Accounts Committee. Having covered this up for seven long years of Liberal government, the government claims credit. It is no wonder that the minister could only read out his list because he did not even know what they meant. He did not even know that it was not the Liberal Party's plan; it was a response to the Public Accounts Committee.

I remind people that in 2006 when the Public Accounts Committee produced the original recommendation for the Auditor General to do the auditing, the Liberal Party ran around with the Western Australian Local Government Association opposing the recommendation. The member for Victoria Park and the member for Butler were on the committee that made the recommendations. WALGA ran around opposing that. It did not happen under the Labor government because the Liberal Party opposed it. Members opposite now want to claim credit for it because it was written on the minister's list. He did not know what anything meant; he just read the list out. He was very good at reading out the list—I accept that—but the problem was that he did not understand anything he was reading out. It reminds me of so many other debates. I remember a debate a couple of years ago about renewable energy in which the member for Joondalup was reading out a list and did not even realise it had nothing to do with the topic that was being discussed.

Mr P. Papalia: It was the wrong list.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It was the wrong list.

Mr R.F. Johnson: He would have been given it by the Peta Credlin individual.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I do not care who gave it to him; it was just the wrong list. Today we have a list, not of questions about the illogical and erratic management of the local government portfolio, but of extra obligations placed upon local government. They might be very good obligations. I am very proud of my personal involvement, along with the member for Warnbro, in the passage of the Cat Bill 2011.

Mr P. Papalia: We wrote it!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It came out of a committee—not a parliamentary committee, but a committee of the government led by the member for Jandakot, who is a dog owner, who does not have anything to do with cats. Everyone who owned cats and read the original draft said, “You’ve got to be joking!” The bill the Liberal Party introduced to Parliament would have allowed the killing of pet cats without any notification to the owners. That is exactly what the bill allowed. We had to get in there and fix it. It is a credit to the member for Bunbury that he was clever enough to work across the aisle, as they say, to get a good outcome. Sadly, he is one of those ex-ministers. It was years ago.

Mr P. Papalia: It was a huge debate.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It was a huge debate.

Mr M. McGowan: The cat killing.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It was a provision of the legislation.

All I am saying is that we knew the government had run out of arguments and had no puff, because they put the Minister for Environment up. We would have looked forward to the Minister for Local Government to have been involved in the debate as the lead speaker, but we cannot find the Minister for Local Government. Apparently, according to the Premier, it is still the member for Darling Range, but I do not think the member for Darling Range thinks he is the minister. I saw a brief ministerial statement from the Premier saying that the member for Darling Range had resigned to the Governor. That would seem to mean that he is no longer the minister. Even though the Premier says he is the minister, I am confident he is not. Another side of the illogical and erratic management of the local government portfolio can be seen just by looking at the Premier’s website.

MR A.J. SIMPSON (Darling Range) [5.36 pm]: I appreciate the opportunity to a place on the record what the government has achieved in local government, especially in my former role as minister. The important thing to acknowledge here this afternoon—the Minister for Environment did read out a huge amount of things we have achieved in this term of government—is that we have done a lot of work around trying to get accountability and transparency around local government. One of the key drivers behind this has been a number of committee reports trying to work out how we can get our ratepayers far more involved and understanding. Launched back in April, the MyCouncil webpage goes a really long way to making ratepayers far more informed, but, more importantly, able to compare neighbouring councils with their own. Ratepayers can ask questions of their local council about where their money is being spent. They can see quite clearly where they are.

The Minister for Environment touched upon a couple of factors around what we are doing to try to build the capacity of local government. A raft of things are happening, including traineeships and scholarships, which is a fantastic outcome. They came out of a report that identified the ageing workforce in local government and the need to stimulate younger people to get involved in local government to keep that workforce at a great level. About a month ago, I tabled in this house the Local Government Amendment (Auditing) Bill 2016 that should be the next step we take to achieve more transparency in how local government is reported. The member for Cannington touched upon this; it is to do with the auditor reports. This recommendation from a committee report, but also from a Corruption and Crime Commission report, was to bring the Auditor General in. There will be another level applied. The Auditor General takes over the audits of local governments. The Auditor General audited 200 government agencies in Western Australia to make sure that their books are being checked off.

An interesting point that the member for Mandurah touched on about the gift register was brought up during debate on the City of Perth Bill 2015. This has been rather interesting. Looking at the Local Government Act, it can be seen quite clearly that a gift over \$300 cannot be received. If I am correct, from Monday there should have been a committee meeting discussing how we can look at the regulations around gifts. I think an important part is to make sure that a mayor or president can fulfil their role without impinging on the Local Government Act rules on gifts and how they declare them. Through the City of Perth Bill, we put through that amendment to make sure that gifts and travel allowances went online to bring more transparency. Should the state Parliament possibly do the same? Just today, I remembered to do my annual return, which is probably a little bit out of date. Maybe we should be looking to do a similar sort of thing around gifts and travel and come into the twenty-first century. That is one of the key issues in the Local Government Act 1995, which has been enacted for 21 years. Parts of the act refer to a document being available on demand between the hours of 9.00 am and 5.00 pm from Monday to Friday. I think it is saying that it should be online and available to the whole world. That is something we should look at doing.

One of the key issues the member for Mandurah raised was the Lord Mayor of Perth. This is very interesting. I do not deny that the issue has taken a while, but the process has been followed according to the act. As I said in reply to the question last week, the Corruption and Crime Commission has handed down a report. The CCC took nine months to tell me that the Local Government Act had been breached and gifts had not been declared. It is interesting that the CCC could say to me that the Department of Local Government and I could charge the Lord Mayor under the

Local Government Act and then send us on our way. The other thing it did not tell us was, “By the way, you can’t use any of our evidence; you have to get your own.” We therefore have to go through the whole thing again to come up with a resolution. Yes, it does take another, say, 18 months and finally after reading more of the Local Government Act, the minister does not take the Lord Mayor to any type of court process—the director general does. Rightly so, I think it is important that the minister do not have any input into that process because to do so could be seen to be, as is thrown at me all the time, political. It is, rightly, out of the minister’s hands.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes; I will get to that in a minute.

The director general of Local Government can direct the State Solicitor to prosecute that case. Obviously, if members look on the net, they will find there was a meeting between the two parties a while back for some mediation to agree on some facts. That is coming along. I point out that although I was the Minister for Local Government responsible for that process, the actual questions should be fired through to the two people in that discussion—one being the Lord Mayor, and the other being the State Administrative Tribunal. The two at the table are the Department of Local Government and the State Solicitor.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The minister can only ever do what he does in each weekly catch-up with the director general. It is progressing quite nicely. I am still waiting for bits and pieces to come to hand. There is no way the minister could step into that process. The minister can only work as fast as the system allows for the two people to come together.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Does the whole debacle with the City of Perth have anything to do with your ultimate resignation as minister?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Nothing at all. That is a side issue and has nothing to do with the Lord Mayor at all.

However, it has highlighted the rules around gifts and stirred up a very large hornet’s nest around gifts and travel. Hopefully, the working group met last Monday to try to resolve that issue. It is very important we get to the bottom of it.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Do you concede it has damaged the status of the sector?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes; any case that ends up in court in front of a judge is not a good outcome for local government. I am as keen as I was when I was the minister to try to resolve that as quickly as possible. That it is out of our hands and in the other people’s hands is frustrating and we can only stand outside looking in and ask: how is it going; are we any closer? It is very frustrating trying to get to the bottom of it. As the former minister, I am concerned about what it is doing to the sector as a whole. It is not a good look.

Some other areas are starting to come to light that are a real concern for me and the sector. The CCC investigation into regional wheatbelt councils, I imagine, is coming to a close. The transcripts of the CCC’s hearings show quite clearly where it is going. The new minister will have to table a report in the house. Like a lot of things, its recommendations will be pushed back onto local government. It will be hard for regional councils because I think it will point towards the need for councillors to know the rules and responsibilities, especially concerning money, bills and so forth. There will be a bit of push-back on that. The sector will have to work on how to ensure they can be truly accountable and transparent to communities with the bucket of ratepayers’ fees and charges. There certainly needs to be transparency around it.

The Minister for Environment touched on a couple of matters. The integrated planning and reporting framework is a fantastic program. It recommends local governments sit down and look at how all their assets are tracking and how they will replace them. That will take councillors’ eyes off the budget-by-budget process to see where money is being put away. Local government websites will show that local governments are holding quite an amount of money in reserve funds. That money is there for a reason—to replace assets as they deteriorate. It will avoid waiting till assets have completely worn out and the need to ask the state government for money to replace assets that are 20 or 40 years old because there was no opportunity to put money aside. It is good to see financial reserves building up. I acknowledge the Western Australian Local Government Association’s Know Your Council site. It has certainly encouraged a lot of ratepayers to ask a lot more questions. This year’s rate increases were reasonably low in metropolitan and regional Western Australia compared with rates charged for years gone by. I have to say the only reason they have gone up quite a bit is because they have been trying to catch up with asset management to make sure reserve funds are put aside to replace assets. It is important to do that.

There are a couple of good points. I do not know whether the minister touched on the Better Practice Review, program, which is fantastic and something I wish we could legislate for. It is about local governments implementing best practice for how they deal with their procedures and policies. As ratepayers seek access to

something, better practices can be put in place so they can deliver services. Councils must meet certain criteria to be awarded best practice. It is very important to see that local governments are trying to be far more transparent.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! There are too many conversations in the house. Thank you.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Probably one of the last issues the member for Mandurah referred to was the regional subsidiary legislation, which will allow two or more local governments to form a company as such. That can involve any aspect from delivering payroll services to child care and rubbish disposal. The reason behind this is that in the metropolitan area there are five regional councils. They are called regional councils because they are made up of five or six local government areas. The interesting part is they have to form a completely new local government and that means their reporting mechanisms are the same, so their reporting process is quite heavily weighed down. The regional subsidiary group will allow them to operate simply. The minister will sign off on a charter giving them approval to develop an agreement, and that will be very good. Resources will be shared. Charters can have end and start dates, checked off by the minister. Charters cannot borrow money; each local government has to borrow money if it wants to go into an agreement. Each local council will vote on it so that no-one gets into trouble. It is fantastic legislation that will go a long way towards helping to build local government capacity. On a recent road trip through the wheatbelt, I came across a local government that was sharing a CEO; that was good to see.

The main area I have been trying to work on since I became the minister was the local government reform agenda. I used the term “proverbial sandwich” on Saturday, but it certainly felt like that. When we dig deeper into the reform process, we do not have to go back further than 2007 to what is referred to as the SSS report—“Systemic Sustainability Study” done by WALGA, which identified a number of really interesting things. It contained a fair bit about rates but, more importantly, it discussed how we can best resource local governments to have a better business base to deliver services. It also acknowledges that of 138 local governments, 80 were unsustainable if the financial assistance grant is taken away. Each year, the federal government hands out just over \$270 million to the WA Local Government Grants Commission, which distributes that money to local governments. If that grant is taken away, it will not be sustainable. The sector acknowledges that there are problems. The grants are provided to help with infrastructure, not run the business, but as time has gone by they have become more reliant on them. A lot of councils would be feeling pain because the federal government has frozen those financial assistance grants, so they are not being increased, and councils have been seeking to increase their income through their rates to keep up with expenditure. Interestingly, the reform process tried to build sustainable local governments.

Mr D.A. Templeman: What would you have done differently?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Recently, my councils and the Auditor General have done the transparency stuff, but I think we needed to build the case. In the early part of our term, we did not build the case very well. I had a systemic sustainability study report that could have been taken to the next level. We could have said that the report identified that local government was unsustainable and then tried to work to get a better outcome. At the time, I thought that the Local Government Advisory Board was not the right vehicle to use for wholesome reform, because the advisory board was designed to deal with slight boundary adjustments and board structures. I did not have the right instrument to use. If we were to do it again, no matter where the line is drawn on a map, there will be winners and losers, and the losers will come out to defend their boundary being moved. It is no different to boundary fences between neighbours. That is the main clause or where boundaries need to be.

The Robson report started off referring to about nine local governments in the metropolitan area. Then it stated that that could go down to 15 or 14 local governments. We went down to the lower one. Are eight or nine local governments what we want? I can point to the City of Stirling, which is the biggest local government with 244 000 people—interestingly, about the same as the population of the Northern Territory—and a budget of \$260 million. Members would have seen the mayor on the news the other night turning the sod on the first ocean-side pool. A big local government can do that. The city was not happy that the federal government did not come with funding, but it is going to do it anyway. It is interesting that a large local government can do that.

What we could have done better is look out how we could work better. Clearly, the three local governments that went to the polls on that Saturday prior to the reform process implementation ran very, very strong campaigns. A friend who lives in East Fremantle was doorknocked three times by people asking him to vote no. In the end he had to tell them nicely to go away because he had been asked three times. The local governments worked very strong campaigns to try to undermine the process. The poll provision is definitely flawed. I do not know of any legislation that requires 50 per cent of people to vote, and if 25 per cent of that 50 per cent votes no, it does not go ahead. The yes vote helps the no vote with its case because it helps the vote get up to 50 per cent. Whoever thought up the poll provision was very smart, or otherwise, because it is a very, very flawed argument when put together. By voting yes for the reform process people were actually helping the no campaign. Consequently, we should have talked about that better.

I think all in all we could have built the case for benefits better. Another thing that comes back to me is the business case. There have been 15 reports into reform since 1960 or whenever. What part of that do we want to call a business case? But, point taken, people wanted to see a business case with the benefits for their suburb or their city. The obvious question people wanted answered was: are my rates going to be cheaper? The answer was no, but, to use the classic line, the best way to put downward pressure on rates is to equate the economies of scale. Interestingly, no-one was quite sure of that. When the people being reformed did not like it, they just fearmongered with claims that the library would close, the pool would close and kids would not be able kick a football because the park would disappear once the local government amalgamated with somebody else.

To answer the member for Mandurah's question about what we could have done differently, maybe we could have worked closer with the sector. I think the sector was torn apart. The Western Australian Local Government Association was slightly torn apart. I acknowledge that the president at the time, Troy Pickard, stayed very strong on the reform process and copped a fair bit of grief for that. He tried to hold WALGA together. I think an outcome from that was that one of the western suburbs local governments pulled out of WALGA and still has not returned, which is interesting for the sector. It would be interesting to see how we could get an outcome for local government reform in terms of what we could have done better. I think it is important that we have learned a lesson from the process, but we cannot get back to where we started.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It is sad, but it is now up to the sector if it wants to drive this. I cannot image that any local government would want to. I got the job as minister in March 2013, and in April 2013 there was a vote between the two Narrogin and the Cuballing local governments. A Cuballing councillor commented at the time that he agreed that they should reform because everything in Popanyinning for shopping, eating, playing, schooling and sport was from Narrogin but they paid their rates to the Shire of Cuballing. But he said that he could never bring himself to vote out his community and he would leave it up to the government. That vote in April 2013 went down. There have been big meetings throughout the Town and the Shire of Narrogin. On 1 July this year, I had a great opportunity to go there. Through the process of bringing the shire and the town together it was interesting to see that only one person turned up at the public meeting. The community has possibly got over its angst and realised that the Narrogin local governments should probably come together. It is a classic example of a farming community shire with quite low rates that has one community hall and one oval to look after. At the time, the Town of Narrogin had two pools, ovals, sporting facilities, parking, shopping and everything that everyone was using driving out of town. It was the last doughnut council. It was great to be there on Friday, 1 July to celebrate a great outcome with them. I can say that as minister I took Western Australia from 138 local governments to 137 local governments. I am going to hang my hat on that.

Mr M. McGowan: Bravo!

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That is exactly right. I followed the member for Bunbury's leadership when he merged the Greenough local government. He achieved one merger and I achieved one. This government has cut two local governments and we are certainly getting into that process.

I will lay on the record that it has been an absolutely fantastic opportunity to be the minister and to have travelled all over the state. After the events of the last few days, my phone has not stopped ringing with calls from a lot of friends in local government. Local government is really amazing and I have had an amazing opportunity to meet some amazing people doing a fantastic job in their communities. They really put their hearts and souls full bore into what they try to achieve for their communities. As Minister for Community Services there is a great connection with the local government portfolio. It was a really good decision by the government to bring the two agencies together because local government is the conduit and the Department for Communities funds services in towns. The two come together very nicely when the accommodation is held by the shire and the state government funds the wages for those providing the service. It is really good to have the community sector connected with the volunteering, seniors, youth and local government departments because they work very well together. It is important to acknowledge that local government is the closest government to communities at the moment. It is fantastic to see the work that they do. I have had a fantastic time and I look forward to getting out and doing a couple of road trips really soon to catch up —

Dr A.D. Buti: On your bike.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, member for Armadale, I will be on my bike as well. I have just got my email for the bike ride on Saturday morning with the Armadale boys, but I looked at the weather.

Dr A.D. Buti: I'll be jogging.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will give the member a wave when I go past him.

Mr A. Krsticevic: He's pretty quick.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, he is pretty good. The member for Armadale and I have done a bike ride. The other Saturday, I was out riding, and who ran the other way, but the member for Armadale.

Dr A.D. Buti: I was going faster than you were cycling.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That is a bit tough. In all honesty it was a steep hill and the member was going down it, but I agree.

More importantly, this government has been fully committed to local government. Everywhere I go around Western Australia to talk about what we are doing in local government I get a good response. I will touch on a couple of issues that I think the local government sector will have to look at. I was very keen to push council training. I know that the sector pushed back on me and I was probably being a bit bold when I said that I wanted to bring in mandatory training. I should have said that I would like every new councillor elected after October 2017 to do training. One thing that comes back over and over again is councillors not understanding the Local Government Act. I am not talking about them doing a degree in local government, but I want them to know how to move motions and to declare an interest. Those are the two common areas in which local governments come unstuck. I would like to put that into an online system for regional Western Australia. I want to start upgrading so that everyone does some sort of training—keeping in mind that we gave them quite a reasonable pay rise on 1 July 2013. They are getting paid a reasonable amount of money to do the job and I think the responsibility should be back on the councils to take on some sort of mandatory training in the basic things they are asked to do. I realise that I must have ruffled a lot of people's feathers in the room at the 2014 local government week, because they all told me that they had been councillors for 10 years, 15 years or however many years and they did not need to do training. I may have pushed a little too hard; hence, they pushed back on me a little as well. I learnt that lesson.

Mr W.R. Marmion: You could have made it an incentive, that extra \$5 000.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That process of pay increases had started before I got there, but, looking back, that is something we probably should not have implemented until after the reform process. Once they were into that reform process and had the money, they were more determined to fight the government on the reform process, because they were getting paid a reasonable amount. In that process we actually made a rod for our own back. I was on council in 2001 and councillor's pay was an issue then. I think in my time it was about \$6 000—\$500 a night—plus travel allowance. People did it for the token of being in it. Now, we are paying a reasonable amount, and rightly so. Some local governments vote to do so and some do not. It is very, very much all individual.

In the closing couple of minutes I want to talk about being properly elected. The Robson report referred to that. District wards mean no wards, and everywhere I go I have heard good and bad on both sides of the call.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Darling Range.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: This business is adjourned under standing order 61. I will leave the Chair until the ringing of the bells.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm