

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

Resumed from 22 June on the following motion moved by Hon Stephen Dawson (Minister for Emergency Services) —

That pursuant to standing order 69(1), the Legislative Council take note of tabled papers 2203A–E (2023–24 budget papers) laid upon the table of the house on Thursday, 11 May 2023.

HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan) [2.36 pm]: I rise to take note of the budget papers. The focus of my contribution today will be on a few key issues. Members will not be surprised to learn that children and young people will feature fairly strongly, as well as issues impacting the community services sector and some other issues that I would like the government to strongly consider. I also intend to take the opportunity to reflect, in part of my response, on some of the more glib and non-transparent answers that this government has provided to my questions in recent months in this place. I do so for fairly similar reasons that have been consistently raised by members on this side of the house, particularly since the 2021 election. The fact is that this government treats this Parliament and indeed the opposition with contempt. It is the government's choice to do that, but I just say this —

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: I am sorry to interrupt, member. I can hear conversations emanating from the back of the chamber. They are so busy in conversation they actually cannot hear the Presiding Officer speaking.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I will go back just in case the members wanted to hear this. The fact is that this government treats this Parliament and indeed the opposition with contempt and whilst that is the government's choice to do that, I just say this: the way that the government operates is a disservice to it. It is a disservice to the government generally. It is a disservice to Parliament and, ultimately, it becomes a disservice to the people of Western Australia. Ultimately, this government will be caught out. I have to say, the botched and shambolic implementation of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act—of course, we have seen the announcements today—is one such example.

But it is one of many examples that we could bring to the attention of this house. Rather than taking the time to allow for the proper debate and scrutiny of all manner of legislation in this house, that is not what the government wants to do. Apparently, time and again, the government knows best. I reckon that today a few government members are wishing they had taken a little bit more time to allow for the proper consideration of legislation in this place and outside of it. Quite frankly, they have only themselves to blame. It is not just legislation that is rushed through this house. I think it was Hon Peter Collier in his contribution to the debate on the budget papers who highlighted that since 2021, only one opposition amendment—mine, on a review clause—has been agreed to in this house. One opposition amendment out of 170. Apparently, according to the government, all its legislation is perfect. I have been in opposition and in government and in opposition again. The fact is that not all legislation is perfect. Ministers of all persuasions and members of Parliament know that. Sometimes it helps to give proper consideration to pieces of legislation and actually make them better. That is what I thought this house was all about. I thought that we had the Standing Committee on Legislation to properly scrutinise legislation in a bipartisan way away from this chamber. That is why we have the Standing Committee on Uniform Legislation and Statutes Review. I know that committee might not be the most exciting of committees to some members. It is a great committee for me as chair and for the members of the committee, but the fact is that the only reason bills are referred to that committee is they have to be referred to it. You can bet your bottom dollar that if there were not a requirement in the standing orders to refer those bills to that committee, they would not be referred. The point is that the committee, although not on all occasions, will put forward recommendations for change and improvement. Generally, governments of all persuasions agree to those amendments because they realise that the legislation has gone through a good and proper process.

But it is not just legislation. As I said, it is also the answers that are consistently provided to the opposition on a range of matters. This is not in all cases, as I think that as a general rule the ministers in this house try to answer the questions. We might not like the answer, as a former President would say in this house, but we get an answer. The same cannot be said—not in all cases, but in a number of cases—about answers that emanate from the other house. I say to those ministers who think that they can get away with providing a non-answer or, in some cases, a ridiculous answer, that they will not get away with it. We can go around the mulberry bush as many times as ministers want, but at some point in time, it has to stop. If I consistently get hopeless answers, it might take a few goes, but I will still keep asking questions until I get a reasonable response. I will raise a couple of those today as well as other matters that I think are worthy of consideration.

The first area I would like to raise is the community services sector. On the last day before we entered the parliamentary winter recess, I moved a motion in this place on the community services sector. I think that it was a good debate overall. That motion sought to recognise the invaluable contribution made by the community

services sector within this state. It sought to recognise the unprecedented demand currently faced for the provision of services. It also called on the government to provide an immediate financial uplift to support the sector. The issues that I raised back then remain issues now and, in many cases, have actually become worse, and there does not seem to be any improvement in sight. We know that across WA, whether it is in metro, regional or remote WA, Western Australians are hurting. We have the rising cost of living, mortgage stress, interest rate rises, and housing and rental market pressures. These are the number one top-priority issues for Western Australians right now. We know that those pressures are impacting both individuals and families. Some people are going without, some are living in their cars and some are asking for support for the very first time. As a result, the community services sector is under immense pressure to provide more and more emergency relief, crisis assistance and financial support. As the shadow Minister for Community Services, I regularly meet with organisations, both large and small. Those organisations are specifically focused on supporting some of the most vulnerable in our community. There are obviously the larger organisations like Anglicare, the Salvation Army, the St Vincent de Paul Society and Foodbank of Western Australia. These and other organisations are perhaps more well known. Equally, there are many smaller charitable organisations that are saying that the ability to meet the demand is a constant challenge. I want to reflect on one community organisation that I have come to know in recent months called Dandelions WA. It is a wonderful organisation. I think the Leader of the House is aware of it. It recently moved into the east metro area in Malaga. It prepares and delivers a range of kits into the community, from hospital kits for people who arrive at hospital without any essential items to Christmas kits and kindness kits—you name it. One of the items that it is most well known for and is a significant part of its work is the back-to-school backpacks. I mentioned the Leader of the House because I know that in her former ministerial role she was supportive of Dandelions WA, and I am sure she continues to be supportive.

Hon Sue Ellery: Yes, I gave them some money. You will see that they won a Channel Seven award.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I did. Congratulations to Dandelions WA. I was very pleased for it. I happened to be there in the morning. Dandelions WA told me that the organisation was a finalist but it was not sure how it would go, so I was delighted when I saw that it had won.

For those who are not aware, the charity's aim is to ensure that every child at the start of the school year has all the necessary stationery materials that they need to enter the classroom with confidence. I will give members an understanding of the importance of those kits and the demand for them. The backpacks contain essential school items from pens, exercise books, lunchboxes and water bottles to stationery—the whole lot. In 2021, the organisation produced 220 school backpacks. This year, nearly 7 000 backpacks were delivered throughout WA before the start of the school year. Dandelions WA is calling right now for more support because next year it is expecting to deliver more than 10 000 backpacks to students right across the state.

We have large and small community service organisations, and all of them are seeing a massive increase in demand for the services they provide. That also includes community resource centres, neighbourhood centres and family centres. They are all seeing an increase in demand and are doing the very best they possibly can with the resources they have, but they can do only so much. I spoke on the motion I referred to earlier, but in the context of the budget debate, I feel that I need to raise some matters again today. I have previously spoken about the Western Australian Council of Social Service's *2022 Sustainable funding survey report* that was released earlier this year by WACOSS and the University of Western Australia. That survey examined a range of issues impacting the community services sector, particularly with respect to funding and the extent to which demand is being met as well as a range of other issues impacting the sector. During that motion—again, I will briefly raise a couple of the key points today, although not all—it could be seen that the survey's key findings from 87 community organisations were incredibly concerning. These are some of the key findings from the report —

...

2. Short-, medium- and longer-term sustainability of social services is under threat in Western Australia due to a lack of appropriate commissioning approaches and inadequate indexation of contracts.
3. Funding inadequacy was reported across ALL government funded contract service areas ...
4. 53% of respondents could not meet service demand in 2022.
5. 78% of respondents reported staff burnout.
6. 40% of respondents reported that they had reduced their operations in order to survive in 2022 **thereby reducing services in a time of increased demand.**

The report states that in 2022, services were reduced using the following strategies: turned people away, 38.8 per cent; referred people to other services, 47.1 per cent; reduced operations due to indexation, 40 per cent; increased waiting times, 38.8 per cent; closed a waiting list, 14.1 per cent; replaced face-to-face with online services, 21.2 per cent; targeted services to a smaller group of clients, 20 per cent; increased group work or group sizes, 20 per cent; tried

to find more funding, 72.9 per cent. In addition, 73 per cent of respondents said that they intend to reduce their services and 65 per cent foreshadowed that they will reduce their employee hours in 2023.

What does this mean? If the capacity of these vital community service organisations to provide these services continues to be reduced and impacted, not only will the organisation as well as their staff and those involved in that organisation be directly impacted, but also, most importantly, the individuals and families whom they are seeking to support. That is what boils down to. Remember, these are vulnerable families and individuals who are coming to them because they need help. The opposition has been calling on the government to provide an immediate uplift in funding to help boost the charities and not-for-profit organisations that are helping to fill the gap. This budget provided a golden opportunity to do something significant, but the government has, sadly, missed that opportunity. I will accept that there has been an uplift in funding, but it is not enough. It is not just me saying it. I think the government recognises that the sector is saying it. The fact is that the funding increase is not enough during a period of unprecedented demand.

The government will, no doubt, in its responses to these matters, highlight the fact that individual grants are provided. I noted with interest that a grant of \$927 000 was recently provided to Anglicare WA. I am fully supportive of \$927 000 being provided to Anglicare WA. That grant will provide emergency relief to 10 000 people experiencing financial hardship, homelessness, family and domestic violence and unemployment; it is incredibly important. The issue I will raise is not the amount of funding. That is a magnificent grant; it is fantastic. But I saw press statements that referred to “our government” as “always focused on what we can do to help Western Australian families”. Let me remind the house that this funding has not come from the government’s general revenue; it has come from Lotterywest. Lotterywest has provided grants over many years for many activities across many services and across multiple governments. I take no issue with that. It seems to me, though, that the government is increasingly using Lotterywest as a replacement source of funding across a range of areas, particularly in the community services sector. Funds have not come from the Department of Communities; they have come from Lotterywest. I think that needs to be called out.

There are other areas within the community services sector that cause me some concern. One area is the Supporting Communities Forum. The Supporting Communities Forum does not make mainstream news, but I think it is important. That forum is intended to be a collaborative partnership between the government and the community services sector. It is, by and large, a continuation of the partnership forum established under the former Barnett government. The current government clearly could not bear to call it by the same name as the former government, so it had to change it. In doing so an important word was removed. That word is “partnership”. Despite doing a few good things, the advice I get from across the sector is that it is not living up to expectations from their perspective. In fact, the forum under the previous government was far more collaborative and positive. The various answers, or non-answers, that I have been provided in this house about the workings of the forum do not fill me with any level of confidence. I will give a couple of examples. Last year, I asked whether the government was prepared to follow its own terms of reference and review the effectiveness of the forum, given the concerns that have been raised with me. On two occasions in October and November of last year, the former Premier stated that no formal review was either intended or planned to be undertaken. The question was: why is the government not prepared to evaluate the forum? Is it because it is afraid that some of the responses that it receives might not be positive? I can only presume that the answer is yes.

The second example is how the government handled a very simple question that I asked in this house earlier this year about the forum’s policy topics. The question was —

I refer to the Supporting Communities Forum Terms of Reference 2020–2021, which states ‘Specific policy topics, to be identified by —

Let me be clear —

— the Minister for Community Services, at the commencement of each two-year term of the Forum ... Will the Minister list all policy topics identified since the commencement of the Supporting Communities Forum in 2017, which includes the time each topic was considered by the Forum?

I asked this question to the minister representing the Minister for Community Services, which seems a reasonable thing to do; it is a fairly simple question. Just before question time I was told, “Oh, actually, the Premier is going to answer that one for you.” I thought: okay, the Minister for Community Services has handed it to the Premier. Fine. The answer that I received was —

The Supporting Communities Forum is a collaborative partnership between the community services sector and WA government agencies.

I know that, but, anyway, that is fine. It continued —

In 2023, the Supporting Communities Forum will continue to work on the National Principles for Child Safe Organisation and the State Commissioning Strategy. If the member is seeking information relating to the forum's previous meetings and priorities, which date back to 2017, a question should be placed on notice.

Well, of course that is what I was asking because that was the question! It was a very simple question. I thought: okay, I might get a really good answer, so I put it on notice. The day that I was supposed to receive the answer, I got the notification that the Premier would not be answering it. It then went back to the Minister for Community Services. These people do not know what is going on. It is absolutely hopeless! I got an answer about the priorities between 2017 and 2019: there were seven dot points, then some further information and another four dot points, and then another two dot points about the current priorities of the forum. Did that really require being put on notice? I do not think so.

I will say that like it did with the community services sector, the government continues to miss other opportunities to make good and positive decisions for the benefit of the people of Western Australia. I will turn my attention to health. I read an opinion piece a few weeks ago from the WA president of the Australian Nursing Federation. Two of the lines in her opinion piece stood out. She said —

We have heard repeatedly, and incorrectly, from Ms Sanderson that the health system is “coping”.

When did coping become the new standard for health care in WA?

I could not agree more. Members will not be surprised that I now turn my focus to the current state of child development services, a topic I have been fairly consistent on over the past little while. I will continue at every opportunity to highlight the challenges and frustrations that continue to be felt by families who are waiting to access critical child development services in the state. I do so by saying categorically that none of my concerns relate to the work undertaken by the clinicians, allied health professionals, nurses and support staff working in child development services. They are doing the very best they can under incredibly difficult circumstances. I accept that there has been an explosion in referrals over the past few years, but something needs to be done.

The government agreed to my motion last year to establish a select committee of this house to examine child development services. I acknowledge that, and I thank the government for doing that. In that case, the government actually listened, which was good. That committee, of course, is now underway, and I obviously do not intend to raise matters surrounding the work of that committee. I want to say something in general terms that I have said this in this house before, and I will say it again today: the committee is not an excuse for the government to delay or procrastinate when it comes to child development services, but that is exactly what the government is doing right now. Time and again, in this place and outside of it, I have said that there is no single fix for this issue. It absolutely requires more funding, but it also requires thinking outside the box, and I have said that from the outset.

However, at the moment, I will just look at funding. Funding is critically important. We know that there has not been a significant funding uplift in funding for child development services for years. This is not because the Child and Adolescent Health Service has not been asking for an uplift—it has. I have no doubt that there were business cases before 2020, which is, I suppose, when I was starting to ask specific questions about funding, but we know that since at least 2020 CAHS has been putting forward business cases to the government for more funding support, and those business cases continue to be either set aside or rejected. I do not know why, but the business cases are not being supported. From the answers provided to questions that I asked during the budget estimates and in question time, we know that way back in 2021 a proposal was put to government to increase funding by \$2.5 million. The government did not support that business case. That was done under the former Minister for Health, who is now the Premier of this state. In the end, the department had to redirect its own funds to make that happen, so it was never new funding; it was simply a redirection of funds.

If we fast-forward to last year, did CAHS get a major cash injection in the 2022–23 state budget? No, it did not. In the budget estimates last year, I was informed by the former chief executive of CAHS that a reassessment of the service was happening at the time and that CAHS was expecting to put forward for the 2022 midyear review a business case to enhance the service through budgetary support. Did that business case get supported during the midyear review? No, it did not. The Leader of the House confirmed that during the budget estimates, which took place here a few weeks ago.

If we fast-forward to this year's budget, did CAHS again get a major cash injection? No, it did not. Again, I got ridiculous non-answers from the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Health when I dared to ask simple questions about specific additional funding that might have been provided. The Leader of the House said —

The McGowan government has invested an additional \$406.4 million in non-hospital services in the 2023–24 state budget. The government is looking forward to considering the recommendations of the Select Committee into Child Development Services when its report is tabled.

The next day, I asked another question —

Of the \$406.4 million, how much additional funding has been specifically allocated to the MCDS in the 2023–24 financial year to address the wait times currently being experienced to access these services?

That was pretty specific. The answer I got was —

There is \$73.6 million provided across the system to address an increase in cost and demand across the system. This is inclusive of the metropolitan Child Development Service.

Again, just in case members were wondering, the Leader of the House also said —

The government is looking forward to considering the recommendations of the Select Committee into Child Development Services when its report is tabled.

These answers might fool some people, but they do not fool me, and they certainly do not fool parents and others who have an interest in this area.

I refer to a recent opinion piece by Jessica Page in PerthNow —

In WA, kids wait longer to see a paediatrician than they do to see Santa.

The average wait has blown out to 17.8 months at last check.

It's 17 months for school-age children to access a clinical psychologist, 12.2 months to see a speech pathologist and 11.3 months to see an occupational therapist.

Paediatricians are left trying to delist some patients to make room for more.

One doctor told me this week her receptionist is fielding 40 calls every day from desperate parents.

Perhaps they should be calling the new Premier's office instead.

A parliamentary inquiry is right now investigating reported shortfalls in WA's provision of child development services.

It's revealed 20 per cent of funded positions can't be filled, in regional WA.

There are no clinical psychologists currently employed by the WA Country Health Service.

The executive of Child and Adolescent Health Services has requested an extra 71 FTE to cope with overwhelming demand in Perth.

That is what she says. It continues —

And gave evidence it hasn't received a significant funding increase since 2010, when a \$49 million boost successfully clawed back wait times that had blown out to a similar extent.

The Opposition's Donna Faragher called it "completely unacceptable" that her question in Parliament—asking whether any additional funding from this year's State Budget will be directed to that purpose—still hasn't been answered.

I don't know what's next for Mark McGowan, but I know what should be at the top of his successor's priority list: our kids.

I could not agree more. I say this to the government: committees do not stop governments from governing. The government could make changes. It could increase funding right now. Its own department is asking for funding and has been doing so for a number of years, but it will not do that. It continues to ignore the issue and, in my books, that is not good enough. I want to make it clear that the department and those who work in the services are not ignoring the issue, but they need help and support, and a good start would be some funding.

Another area is regional child care, and I will quickly mention the government's election commitment in this area. Once again, the government has been caught out. Sadly, it took me two attempts in question time to get a proper answer and for the government to finally reveal the actual situation. The budget papers clearly imply that the funds allocated to part of this initiative, some \$1.43 million, were fully allocated in 2023, yet it is now quite clear from the answers provided to me in this house that only \$200 000 of the \$1.43 million has actually been allocated. What is more, the funding allocated so far has gone to only one part of the election commitment, for which further details will be released soon.

Everyone recognises that early childhood education and care services are facing significant challenges, particularly with their workforce. This is relevant across the board—whether in metro or regional WA—but I would say that it has particular relevance to many areas in regional Western Australia.

As a member of the opposition, I will support initiatives that have a positive impact. I think most people know that I am pretty fair and reasonable on things, so if there is a positive initiative that will do good things, I will support it. I will do that. But I will not give a gold star to the government for commitments that are not being delivered and

when it hides behind non-transparent answers given to me in this house. I say to the government: it is one thing to talk big on election commitments; it is quite another for it to deliver on them.

Before I close, I want to raise two final matters about children. The first relates to the women’s and babies’ hospital. Over the last few years, I have taken the opportunity, generally in my contributions to the budget debate, to mention the need for a new hospital. As members know, I am a King Eddy’s mum. I have consistently stated that I fully support a new hospital. In fact, I have perhaps been a little critical of the government when decisions have been made to delay the hospital’s progress, and that has happened. But I absolutely support a new hospital. Sadly, today I have to raise some concerns about the change of the location of the hospital, moving from the Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre site to the Fiona Stanley Hospital precinct. Let us not forget that this hospital has been years in the planning. I think Western Australians want a new hospital—they absolutely want one—yet, overnight, without consultation with parents, clinicians, other health professionals or people involved in the consultation and working groups, the government decided to change its mind. The fact is that WA is the only state in the country that does not have tri-located adult, paediatric and obstetric and neonatal tertiary-level services. Tri-location is accepted as being international best practice, and the QEII proposal was identified as a way to achieve that. It has been accepted by successive governments, and policy decisions have been made around that.

The Australian Medical Association recently released a position paper that identifies its perspective on the importance of tri-location. I will not read all of it, but I think a couple of dot points are important. It says —

- Most importantly, tri-location ensures that:
 - Critically unwell neonates requiring life-saving surgical and other interventions that can only be provided in a tertiary paediatric hospital, and not in a tertiary obstetric setting, are able to receive care in a clinically appropriate timeframe by being urgently transferred to a tertiary paediatric hospital, and
 - Critically unwell adult patients requiring life-saving imaging, interventional radiological procedures, non-gynaecological surgery and intensive care can receive this care in a clinically appropriate timeframe by being urgently transferred to a tertiary Adult hospital.
- Tri-location also enables sub-specialist and academic linkages across sites and supports the advancement of a world class health facility, which has flow-on benefits to secondary and regional care provided within the State.
- Tri-location will benefit children, adolescents, newborns, parents and families.
- Tri-location is the safest, most efficient and effective way of providing quaternary level obstetric and neonatal health services.

That is what the AMA has stated, yet the Minister for Health and Labor government apparently know best. This is what was reported in *The West Australian* of 26 April —

The tearing up of long-held plans to build a replacement for King Edward Memorial Hospital at QEII came after the completion of a business case that Ms Sanderson said identified “unacceptable risks... to cost, disruption and timeframe”.

While clinicians have played a key role in scoping out the requirements of a new maternity hospital, Ms Sanderson confirmed no specialists or staff at KEMH were consulted prior to Cabinet settling on FSH as the new site for the facility, which is now expected to be operational by 2029.

This is a direct quote from the minister —

“We did not consult with staff because we needed to make a decision and I was not prepared to delay the process anymore,” ...

This has obviously been met with alarm and concern. Indeed, that same article referred to Professor Karen Simmer, who formerly led WA’s neonatal ICUs and coordinated the emergency transfer of babies between hospitals. She has raised significant concerns. The article said —

Professor Simmer told talkback radio co-location of the new maternity hospital with PCH was the “gold standard” and that the 20km trip from FSH to the kid’s hospital posed a grave risk for frail babies requiring specialist treatment.

This is a direct quote from her —

“Transporting critically sick infants does increase the risk of things going wrong and unfortunately for this very vulnerable population that includes death or damage to their brains,” ...

Hon Dr Brian Walker also raised similar concerns in his contribution to the budget debate.

There is actually no doubt that any hospital build will create significant challenges and will not be without significant disruption. That is understood and it is not something that anybody wants, but a build of any type will cause disruption. It seems to me, and I have to say to everyone who talks about it, that that is the main driver for this decision. The minister herself has said that time frame, cost and disruption to the existing site were key to the decision. That goes against what the AMA put in its position paper, which is that it should be a healthcare decision based on providing the delivery of international best practice standards of care. In fact, in this same article the minister acknowledged those concerns, but the article quoted the minister as saying —

... the cohort of impacted babies—“around 45 per year out of 24,000”—was very small and “the benefits of this decision clearly outweigh the risks”.

I do not know about other members, but to me, putting any baby at risk, whether it is one, 45 or 1 000—whether that cohort is large or small—actually matters. I ask that the minister speak with the parents and families who are involved with the Miracle Babies Foundation or Helping Little Hands. I am not sure whether the minister has spoken to them, but if she has not, I hope she does; and, if she has, I hope she will speak to them again. I can tell members that they have a very, very strong view on this matter, and I have to say that I support the families in their concerns. I say to the government: do not dismiss the clinicians, do not dismiss the parents—do not dismiss their concerns and anxieties. I simply ask that the government look at this decision again. As I say, I am a King Eddy’s mum. Fortunately, my son did not need to be transferred to the children’s hospital, but I have to say that for nearly nine months we were preparing for that because we did not know until he was literally born. Please do not dismiss the concerns and anxieties being raised about this matter. As I say, whether it is one baby, 45 babies or 1 000 babies, every one of them matters.

Finally, I would like to raise one matter again relating to children and young people. It is one that I would like to think is, and I am sure it is, of importance to everyone in this house. It relates to the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in the state. I will end my contribution to the budget debate with a request on this matter. It is a sincere request and it is important. Members would be well aware of Kids Helpline; it has been around for a very long time. It is a well-established and well-respected helpline. There are, of course, many wonderful organisations, programs and initiatives that support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. This is part of that. Kids Helpline is Australia’s only free, confidential, 24/7 service supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people aged between five and 25 years of age. Kids Helpline also provides other services, including a virtual counselling service and Kids Helpline@School, which offers a free early intervention program for primary schools. As I understand, that is very much taken up by primary schools right across Australia, which is fantastic.

The helpline is a really important and critical resource for children and young people. According to yourtown, the organisation that, if I can put it this way, runs the helpline, of the top concerns for young people in 2022, one in four calls were about emotional wellbeing, one in four were about mental health, one in six were about family relationships, one in six were suicide related, one in 10 were about friend and peer issues, one in 12 were about self-injury and self-harm, one in 13 were about dating and partner relationships, and one in 13 were about child abuse.

Here in WA, Kids Helpline received over 33 000 contacts in 2022. It is important to note that 68 per cent of those calls were made between 5.00 pm and 9.00 am on weeknights and weekends. Those calls were outside the times of nine to five—between 5.00 pm and 9.00 am. I have been asking questions of the government for some time about Kids Helpline, given that the Department of Communities provides a small amount of funding to the Kids Helpline, which is a good thing. The questions I asked are similar to questions that were asked over a period of time by former member of this house Hon Alison Xamon. When looking through those figures, I found that demand for the helpline very concerningly exceeds the current capacity. I want to give members some figures.

The number of contacts refers to telephone, email or webchat. In 2020, the total number of contacts was 32 876 and the number of unanswered calls was 19 164. In 2021, the total number of contacts was 34 053 and there were 20 343 unanswered calls. In 2022, there were 33 094 contacts and 21 547 unanswered calls. I want to clarify those figures and make sure that I am doing this in a proper manner. An answer was provided to me that was also reflected in my conversations with yourtown. It states —

When calling the service, callers will hear an introduction message before their call is progressed to a counsellor. The message advises callers to hang up and call triple zero in case of an emergency, and details legislative disclosure requirements relating to privacy, confidentiality and sharing of information. Approximately 20 per cent of unanswered calls are callers hanging up before the completion of the introduction message. These calls do not enter the phone queuing system, but they are recorded as unanswered.

I want to make it very clear that around 20 per cent of unanswered calls involve a situation in which the child has hung up. If they are calling and need 000, we want them to hang up and call 000. That is an important clarification, notwithstanding that thousands of calls are still not being answered. I want to be very clear that that is not a reflection

on Kids Helpline. Indeed, I have met the CEO of yourtown, Tracy Adams, both virtually via a Zoom meeting and when she recently visited Perth. An article in *The West Australian* states —

Tracy Adams, chief executive of non-profit yourtown that operates Kids Helpline, said there was a mental health crisis among young people.

“As the prevalence of mental health and wellbeing-related issues in childhood rises, the significant gap in accessing support deepens,” she said.

“Kids Helpline continues to be a critical safety net for children and young people, however we cannot keep pace with demand.”

Ms Adams urged the federal government to intervene ...

“Funding for Kids Helpline needs to be a priority for the government. The current serious funding shortfall means many children and young people are simply not getting the timely care they need,” ...

This article specifically related to the federal government and came out around the time of the budget. I absolutely agree that the federal government should be providing more funding, given that this is a national hotline. However, as I have mentioned, the state does provide some funding through the Department of Communities. In answers I received, I was informed that in the 2021–22 budget, \$78 810 was provided; in 2022–2, \$83 865 was provided; and in the current year, \$89 338 will be provided. In the last few years, those figures have not increased by any real extent.

I know from both media interviews with the CEO of yourtown, Tracy Adams, and my own meetings with yourtown that a funding request was put to the state government ahead of this budget. In that request, yourtown asked for about \$1 million to employ more counsellors, increase its visibility in WA and connect more with local mental health providers, which would have been a very good thing. Unfortunately, from the answers that I have been provided, it appears that that budget request was not approved. I have to say that I am really disappointed by that. We are not talking millions here; we are talking around \$1 million to help reduce the gap in the number of children who are not able to get support when they need it. Again, I remind members that the bulk of those calls occur after normal hours, between 5.00 pm and 9.00 am. They are not made only at 2.00 in the afternoon; they are also made at 2.00 in the morning when it is not quite as easy to get a support service.

I think there is scope for the government to do a little more in this space, particularly given the fact that across Australia over 50 per cent of yourtown’s funding comes through the community. Surely it is not too much to ask for some additional support from the state government and the federal government, particularly when we know that under any press statement, news article or government document raising the issue of child wellbeing and mental health, the hotline number is often the first point of call provided. We provide that number, and because of that I do not think it is unreasonable for the government to increase its support.

I understand that yourtown is now putting together a further proposal for the government to consider in due course to have a permanent base here in WA. At the moment, it does not have a permanent base, but it is what yourtown would like. That is something that I would certainly support, and I would like to think that when a proposal is put to government, the government will too. In the meantime, I implore the government to provide some additional funding for the Kids Helpline—not next year or the year after, but now.

I want to draw my comments to a close by reading one perspective from the *Kids Helpline impact report 2022*. The story is from a 13-year-old named Emma; obviously, the name and image of the person in the report has been changed. It states —

It feels like I have been waiting my whole life for Kids Helpline

Thank you for talking to me. I was worried what it might be like making my first contact to Kids Helpline, but I now recommend it to my friends.

I always felt so alone. I grew up in a house—but it never felt like a home.

Kids Helpline counsellors helped me to understand that what someone did to you has absolutely nothing to do with you and was never your fault. Someone’s inability to love you doesn’t make you unlovable.

I was not in a good place literally when my counsellor gave me the resources to survive. Honestly, I was terrified asking for help.

The whispers turned into white noise, my mind kept thinking other people are hurting more, I just need to be resilient. My Kids Helpline counsellor listened and said “Yes, other people have it hard, but that doesn’t mean you don’t deserve help. You’re not ok and that is something you should never have to apologise for.”

I did say sorry a lot, nevertheless.

Kids Helpline supported and helped me teaching me that I can love myself. I began to notice that I now try to have boundaries and to say no. I am more confident but I'm still not better. And that's ok, trauma can't just vanish, but I promise there are more good days. I still have waves but I'm not drowning anymore.

As Tracy Adams, the CEO of yourtown, has said, there should be no wrong-door approach to supporting children and young people in crisis and no child should ever feel they are alone. Magnificent services are available and being provided to children and young people every day. This is one of those, and it is complementary to a number of services.

I again implore the government to provide, through its enormous surplus, some additional funds to this vital service. Again, I remind members that the majority of the calls made to Kids Helpline, perhaps for the first time, are made outside of normal hours—at 2.00 am, 3.00 am, 4.00 am. This is a really important service. With a little bit of funding, we could help Kids Helpline help more children, and we could actually make a significant difference to the children and young people that it supports.

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.31 pm]: I, too, rise to contribute to the noting of the budget papers for the 2023–24 state budget—the last budget of the McGowan government. Before I do that, I want to acknowledge the remarks made by Hon Donna Faragher, and in particular her continued passionate advocacy for our kids. All of us in this place acknowledge that we all need to ensure we do what we can to help young people who need help. As members would be aware, I have spoken on a number of occasions in this place about my own family and my kids' journey with various mental health issues and so on. I want to reiterate what Hon Donna Faragher said about the support of those external third-party services that provide mental health support for kids when they are most vulnerable. They all need funding. Yes, there are a lot of them, but it is horses for courses. I do not think we can say that any one particular service should be prioritised over another, but we need to make sure that our kids have access to those services at any time they need it and to get the help they need when they need it. Again, thank you to all the people who work in those services and for the services they provide to our kids. Thank you, Hon Donna Faragher, for your continued advocacy in this space.

I want to remark on some of the headline numbers in the budget. Obviously, the good news was the \$3.3 billion projected surplus and projections of a surplus carrying on through the out years. We have strong economic growth here in Western Australia, which is obviously largely driven by our export economy. They are great numbers. However, it is a surplus that is delivered by hardworking Western Australians. I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge those hardworking Western Australians from all walks of life, no matter where they work or what they do. Their contribution to our state's economic success should not be forgotten, so I thank those people.

I notice that the clock is not running. I am not sure whether it should be. I did have lots more to say.

I want to turn to some more specific areas of the budget. I will start by looking at Westport. I note the ongoing development of the Labor government's Westport project and another blowout in costs associated with the business case for this project, which is referenced in the budget. Funds have also been allocated to extend to 2024 the completion of that business case, yet the government is still telling us that it will be completed by mid-2024. It is now roughly six years since the Labor government was elected and its dispatch of Roe 8 during that election. As members would recall, the government killed off that project on the premise that it would deliver a container terminal at Kwinana. What has been delivered since then? We do not even have a business case, let alone a terminal.

Hon Martin Aldridge: I think Hon Ben Wyatt committed to resign if he didn't deliver in his first term, and he delivered on his commitment as well.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: Yes, he delivered on his commitment.

We have had lots of planning, lots of focus groups and lots of navel-gazing, although not a lot else. There was lots of "consultation" in the special way that this government does it. Even if this government had stuck to its time lines for delivery of the business case, which is highly doubtful given its track record, as I have said before in this place, there is absolutely no way an outer harbour will be delivered within the next two decades. The Labor Party probably should have let the voters know that when it decided to kill off Roe 8 back in 2017. The government has a conundrum, one of its own making. The government relies on a compound annual growth rate of container freight. The assumption made by the government back then was 3.25 per cent. This is the justification that the government used in its decision to proceed with the Kwinana outer harbour. If that 3.25 per cent justification is correct and even if it shifts as many containers as possible onto rail in that time, at the very least, that would see an additional 175 000 containers on roads by 2029–30, well ahead of any new port and the diversion of that freight traffic to a new port. That will also occur in the absence of any substantial enhancements being undertaken on the roads out there. We have this increase in container traffic and not much happening to the roads to handle that additional freight task. If we put that in line with the projected increases in normal traffic, the scenario is for those roads to become a congestion nightmare, which is not good for anyone.

The conundrum I talked about earlier is that in the event that that growth rate of 3.25 per cent, which the government relied on to underpin this project, is not able to be achieved, the justification for the outer harbour will be thrown out the window as well.

Over the past 18 months—since about 2021—I have been asking questions about the projected growth rates that the government is using, along with updates to those. We get the same answer each time. We do not get an answer on what the compound annual growth rate is for that container trade, which underpins the project, as I have said. I asked a question on 26 October 2021 of the Leader of the House, who at the time was representing the Minister for Ports. She responded —

The Westport office is continuing to develop updated long-term container trade forecasts. Following this process, further refinement of truck and rail movement assumptions will be undertaken.

Again, almost a year later, on 1 September 2022, the following similar question was asked —

Has the government now developed updated long-term container trade forecasts?

The response was —

The Westport business case is currently under development. Long-term container trade forecasts will continue to be updated as truck and rail movement assumptions are refined.

Essentially, it was a case of, “Nothing to see here, nothing we can tell you, we don’t have an answer to that question.” There is probably a very good reason we have not been provided with an answer or why the government was so cagey in its response to those questions about providing any level of detail.

I now turn to the 2023–24 budget estimates hearings that were held in June this year. During an exchange between the respective minister, a member of the department and me, the government essentially admitted that it did not have a clue what those container trade forecasts were and what the growth rate was. I refer to the transcript of evidence from the budget estimates hearings of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations on 28 June. This was the hearing with the Department of Transport, Main Roads and the Public Transport Authority. I refer particularly to an exchange between me; the Minister for Emergency Services representing the Minister for Transport, Hon Stephen Dawson; and Mr Patrick Seares, who is the managing director of Westport. I asked questions around the land acquisition process and the \$50 million that has already been spent on land acquisition, and I then led into some questions about the compound annual growth rates. Mr Seares responded —

In terms of the compound growth rates year to year, because of the disruption around COVID at the moment, all forecasting in the immediate future is a little bit uncertain. We continue to revisit the trade forecasts as we move forwards, however I think the minister has said previously in response to parliamentary questions that the information around trade forecasts will be provided as part of the business case.

I followed up by asking, again —

So there is no way we can ascertain what those estimates are, even though they are fundamental to the business case and land purchases are occurring in anticipation of the project, but we do not know what those fundamental underpinnings of the project are?

The minister responded —

Not at this stage, and that will be worked out as part of the business case, which, of course, as I have mentioned, is due for the middle of 2024.

I then asked —

But to be clear, minister, they are known?

The minister responded —

Not to my knowledge. I think it is a moving feast; it depends on where we end up, but they will form part of that business case.

I then asked —

There are estimates of what that must be already; there must be?

The minister responded —

I think Mr Seares has kind of alluded to it as a moving feast, so we do not know until we know what the project is—the routes et cetera and where it will end up.

At that point I left off with questioning, because we obviously were not going to get any answers. Essentially, to gain an insight into why the government is so reticent about answering that question, we should turn to the actual growth rates for container trade at Fremantle port over the last six years. We do not see in those figures a growth

rate anywhere near that which was used by the government to justify its decision to proceed with the Kwinana outer harbour project. In fact, instead of the growth rate of 3.25 per cent upon which the government was pinning this project, we actually see a growth rate of 0.57 per cent. Even if we remove the COVID year of 2020–21, we see a compound growth rate of 1.2 per cent, which is still significantly lower than the 3.25 per cent that the government used as its justification for the need for this project. The COVID effect was referred to in the exchange I referred to earlier in the estimates hearings, but in actual fact the decline in growth of container freight occurred before COVID; we were already on that declining traffic trajectory before COVID.

That presents a very significant problem for the government: what can it do when the growth rates do not match the projections it used to embark on this project? What can it do? It has already spent \$50 million on land acquisition, and probably the same amount on overall project costs. What can the government do when it has already killed the freight link project that was critical for managing the existing freight task, let alone any future freight growth which, as I said, could cause some significant problems by 2029–30? What will the government do when the constituents of the electorates that will suffer daily congestion nightmares as a result of that container freight traffic learn that the government actually sold them a lie—that the sad reality is that they are doomed to suffer at least two more decades of container trucks on a road system that is fundamentally ill-equipped to handle that task? The certainty is that this is a problem of the government’s own making, and it is going to be interesting to watch and see how the government tries to spin its way out of it.

In the end, the numbers do not lie. Either the business case will deliver a new set of numbers that will see a massive increase in freight onto an already overstretched freight network, or it will deliver a set of numbers that will make it difficult to justify the project. That is quite the conundrum. Of course, it may not stop the project, but it could very well push it out even further, which would mean that the congestion problem could be around for a lot longer.

That, in turn, leads to another issue in respect of Westport—one that has the potential to severely impact on the ongoing operations of Fremantle port. We all know that the infrastructure at any port is very expensive. The businesses that use ports make large capital investments that are ordinarily amortised over quite a long period of time to recover costs. When port users, such as container handlers, have no line of sight on the transition time lines or on how the transition from one port to another will occur, it is very difficult for them to make investment decisions. How can they justify that decision to their organisation? In view of the things I have already outlined, it is very likely that container operations will continue at Fremantle for another two decades. I think we can safely say that we will not see Westport for another two decades.

I acknowledge that in parallel with the Westport process, the Fremantle Port Authority is producing a port development plan that will articulate how the port will develop in the near future to ensure that there is business continuity while the broader planning work for the government’s Westport and future Fremantle projects is completed. However, it is absolutely vital that that process engages, as early as possible, with all the port users, because they need to know what the time lines are so that they can make investments to keep the systems they have operating into the future long enough for the transition to occur; otherwise there is a very real chance that they will end up with inefficiencies and/or stranded assets, in the event of a full transition to the outer harbour, if they do not have a clear line of sight on when those investment decisions will be made.

I turn now to another part of the budget: agriculture. There are a couple of areas of this portfolio that I want to talk about today. I will start with biosecurity, which is something I think we can all agree is incredibly important for our agriculture industry and that has certainly been in the news over the last couple of years. I could go on about the dysfunction that occurred within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development after the machinery-of-government changes and six years of quite shambolic and directionless leadership, but I will not do that. Instead, I am going to talk about the fact that I very much welcome the decision by this government to provide an additional \$10.4 million to enhance WA’s ability to respond to animal disease outbreaks. That is a good investment. Part of that investment is to increase field personnel and improve veterinary pathology and capacity, and that is a step in the right direction. It is something that the opposition called for ahead of the outbreaks of foot and mouth disease and lumpy skin disease in Indonesia.

It is also a good thing that the government is seeking to bring in early career veterinarians, which will be critical for enhancing the future veterinary capacity within the agency. I would, however, advocate that as many of those additional veterinarian positions as possible be based in regional locations, and certainly more than the number that the government has identified. Nevertheless, it is a good thing to bring those early career veterinarians into the system. I note also that the department has already identified a number of regional locations for consideration of those vets, with one exclusion being Esperance. I would like to see a vet embedded in Esperance as well, obviously. It is absolutely vital that vets are in all the regional locations where they are needed most and certainly where the livestock industry exists in strength.

The other crucial element of biosecurity is the management of declared pests, which obviously occurs throughout our regional agricultural areas. I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge the role that our recognised biosecurity groups play in managing declared pests not only on private freehold land, but also throughout significant areas of land that are under the management and control of the state government. These recognised biosecurity groups are

run by volunteers who invest a hell of a lot of their own time, resources and effort to protect the communities that they represent and the primary industries in which they work. I want to acknowledge all those volunteers for the work that they do. It is hard work and sometimes unrewarding work. Nonetheless, it is incredibly important work and I, personally, am very grateful for the work that they do.

In today's world those volunteers are being thrust further and further into dealing with quite complex legal liabilities and statutory requirements imposed by governments and sometimes the fraught area of negotiating land access and gaining permission to carry out their tasks, especially when it comes to baiting activities. In the words of some of those volunteers, the business of being an RBG seems to be getting more and more difficult. It is often exacerbated by the need to liaise with multiple government agencies that often do not talk to each other and in some cases are at odds with each other. I have asked numerous questions in this place around those sorts of issues and it is specific, really, to the statutory responsibilities of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the representing minister—that is, the Minister for Agriculture and Food—in ensuring that state government agencies comply with their responsibilities. I am referring to other agencies outside of DPIRD, but all agencies responsible for managing state government land have a requirement under the act to comply with that act and to control declared pests on land under their control.

I want to find out whether DPIRD actively monitors and investigates the compliance of those agencies. Unfortunately, it has been very difficult to get a clear answer on that. Often, that responsibility has been pushed to the RBGs. In response to the question, the responsibility has been pushed to those RBGs. As I said before, they are largely made up of volunteers working in their own time to do an increasingly complex and difficult job. I implore the government to make sure that the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is equipped to ensure compliance from other agencies with their responsibilities for managing declared pests. I think it is incredibly important that that occurs. If everyone is talking to everyone, at least we can get some way towards improving that. If we ask any landowner whose property is next door to a state forest or a national park or a crown reserve, they will all tell us the single biggest issue they have in controlling feral animals is the failure of the agencies responsible for that land to meet their responsibilities under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act. We still cannot get a straight answer on that. I again implore the minister to look into this matter and ensure that those agencies comply with their responsibilities under the act.

We know that a review of the BAM act is underway at the moment. My proposition is that regardless of any outcomes of that review, DPIRD must have the necessary resources, whatever that is, to administer that act, including all the personnel needed to carry out the legislative and compliance activities on the numerous government agencies that also have feral pests to deal with on their land. It is a critically important issue for Western Australian agriculture and I think it is not unreasonable to ask that the government agencies that are responsible for managing land are doing their bit under the act to comply and ensure that we are controlling those pests.

I want to talk a little about the live export industry. I note the tabling of a number of documents by the Minister for Agriculture and Food today, which I am very grateful for. I asked her to table one of those reports earlier—in June, I think it was. I am very grateful that she has done that and has advocated to the federal live export review panel, but I want to make some further comments on this industry. The industry has undergone a lot of transformation in recent years and Australia's and Western Australia's live export industries are world leaders in the animal welfare practices that we adopt. Through the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock and the ESCAS, or Australian Exporters Supply Chain Assurance System, our industry is world leading—and we have needed to change. We have adopted a prohibition on live exports during selected Northern Hemisphere summer months as a result of some outcomes that were less than acceptable—by a long way—and that has led to vast improvements in animal welfare.

Notwithstanding all that progress, the federal Albanese Labor government has decided it still wants to kill off this industry. That threatens the livelihoods of many people in Western Australia, as well as a very viable and reputable business. Although the federal government is saying that this will not happen in this term of government, unfortunately, our customers, international markets and the commercial world will not operate on those time lines. They will operate on the time lines they need to ensure food security for their people and to ensure that they have continued supply of whatever they need product-wise. I have said before in this place that there will be impacts on a number of products that we export to those countries—obviously, in livestock but it will probably extend further than that. That is why I think any sensible government would have people on a plane going over to those countries to visit them and make sure that we try to shore up a market for at least some of the other products we sell to those people. In May, I asked the minister questions about what the department had been doing to assess the extent of the damage done to the industry following that announcement. A bit later, I asked the minister to table any assessments she had done. That was done today. I am very grateful for that. It will be interesting reading. Obviously, as it was tabled only earlier today, I have not had the opportunity to read through it in any detail, but I look forward to taking the opportunity to do that later.

I had planned to talk at some length about Aboriginal cultural heritage. I will talk a little bit about that today. I note significant changes have been announced or mooted. As an opposition we will have a chance to be briefed on new legislation at 6.00 pm tonight. We will be interested to see the government's plans for the changes it has announced. I guess the question becomes: what will happen to the all the money allocated under the to-be-repealed 2021 act and how will those funds be utilised? Hopefully, we will get some answers on that during the briefing tonight.

Obviously, there has been significant pressure on the government to make some changes in the wake of what has been described by a number of people on both sides of the chamber as the botched implementation of the 2021 act. It appears that the government has taken heed of the significant pressure that people outside this place have put on the government to listen to, and consult with, people. We will see some changes occurring soon. As I said, I look forward to having a briefing on that piece of legislation and seeing what will happen as a result of that and whether it will allay the concerns people have and be delivered in a way that does not cause greater confusion than that which already exists.

In the time remaining, I want to talk about a couple more issues, particularly around fisheries, for a start. Back on 1 July this year, 76 of the 97 fishing charter operators were actually banned from catching demersal scalefish within the west coast bioregion. In June 2023, as a precursor to that proposal to ban those fishers, the Minister for Fisheries announced the infamous catch-and-cook initiative. That proposition allowed charter operators to catch demersal fish such as pink snapper and dhufish as long as they were consumed on the boat. I do not know what difference it makes for sustainability if they can catch them and eat them on the boat as opposed to catching them and taking them back to shore. I am sure there are people who can explain that. In any event, it was a pretty bizarre announcement and seemed like an effort to address the decimation of that charter industry and the real and significant concerns held by the people who operate within that industry. It was a bizarre proposal because it did not do anything to address the concerns that had been raised by those charter operators and the opposition about the process by which those fishing tour operators and licence holders failed to get access to demersal scalefish under their allowable catch quota allocations that were determined in May. The model used by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to determine the catch allocation was flawed insofar as it was solely based on historical catch data. Given the relatively small number of fishing tour operator licences holders involved—FTOL holders—and the consequences to the viability of their businesses, one would have thought that the department would have undertaken a more comprehensive assessment process to the industry and analysed each of the individual businesses for their commercial and financial circumstances, the extent to which they were reliant on the catch to underpin their viability as well as the inherent operating model of the operators and their ability to use that operating model to pivot to not catching at all and to change their business model.

Fishing tour operator licence holders also raised the matter of financial compensation. Commercial licence holders have been provided access to compensation through the voluntary fisheries adjustment scheme—VFAS. In theory, that would provide them with compensation that is commensurate with the loss they have suffered through any surrender of their units of entitlement under their fishing boat licence. Those FTOL holders were provided with one-off grants of \$5 000 or \$20 000 depending on their historical catch, but in most circumstances that will not come close to compensating them for the losses they will incur now and into the future. Interestingly, further to that, those FTOL holders who were not given any allowable catch were barred from accessing the scheme due to the catch-related criteria. Not only were they refused an allowable catch quota—effectively, they were told they could not catch any of those fish—but also, they could not access the compensation scheme because it relied on the catch information, which was the same thing that kicked them out in the first place. It seems to me quite illogical that that methodology was used rather than sitting down with the 90-odd FTOL holders and looking at their businesses and providing them with a level of support to pivot so that they could keep doing what they have been doing. Members must remember that those people have made significant investments in equipment and boats or whatever based on their business going on for years. People do not make those investments thinking their business will be shut in six months or a year or whatever. They have operated as any business would. They made investment decisions based on the lay of the land and then they had the rug pulled out from under them and have not been given the opportunity to pivot their businesses and some of them have not been given any compensation either. In all in, it has been an incredibly frustrating process for the people involved in that industry and it has caused enormous distress to the families and individuals involved. Concerns have been expressed directly to me and more widely in the media that there are significant mental health concerns for many of those operators and that the additional stress of not being able to receive any fair compensation has really taken its toll on those people. I think it is incumbent on the government to revisit this. I doubt that will happen, but it needs to do more than provide window-dressing with catch-and-cook initiatives; the government needed to get this process right to start with.

I will move on to another issue that is dear to my heart, which is the proposed south coast marine park. I note that the parliamentary secretary tabled what appears to be a draft of a newsletter that did not go out from the committee looking into the south coast marine park. It does not look like a very well put together newsletter, but we will see what comes of that when I have a chance to review it. This whole process has been a complete train wreck. It was deeply compromised from the outset. This came about as a result of a commitment made by the McGowan

government, as it was then, during the 2021 election campaign under its Plan for Our Parks initiative, which aimed to create five million hectares of new national parks, marine parks and conservation reserves over a five-year period. It is a noble and somewhat aspirational target, at least on the surface. However, as is true to form, what was set out as a noble aspiration has fallen victim to what can only be described as the sledgehammer approach of this government: no compromises; we are doing this and that is it—we do not need to listen. That does not end well, as we saw earlier today. I am speculating, but I imagine that the selection process for the coastline area—the 1 000 kilometres of coastline that extends from Bremer Bay across to the South Australian border—went something like this: Does it involve any Labor lower house electorates? Will it have an exceptionally large footprint that will help us achieve our aspirational target of five million hectares? Is there a 30-year-old report that we can dig up that we can use to say there is some scientific methodology behind our decision-making? I give a big tick for all those speculative questions that I have put. Let us do a quick and dirty consultation process that ticks the community engagement box and we are off and running. Unfortunately, that is when the wheels fell off. To the government’s credit, its response was to restart the entire consultation process. Further, it sought to do so under the framework of what can be described as an industry best practice community engagement strategy. The process, as it was outlined, should be industry best practice. In an acknowledgement of the concerns raised, with the scientific basis behind this report, the government also commissioned a review into the south coast marine environment and the proposed areas for the state marine reservation between Albany and Eucla. That is known as the Carijoa report. Inconveniently, it has been pointed out to the government that the June 1994 Wilson report, which is titled *A representative marine reserve system for Western Australia*, which was referenced as a justification for the proposed marine park, did not provide an unequivocal recommendation for the establishment of a marine park of the scale and scope being proposed. In fact, that report recognised the paucity of scientific data relevant to the south coast and acknowledged that further research was required to identify specific areas of conservation. It is interesting that Carijoa Marine Consulting’s report from June 2021 came to exactly the same conclusion. In fact, it says so in the executive summary —

The information, recommendations and knowledge gaps presented in this review are based on the most current scientific literature, however, it is acknowledged that the WA south coast is relatively understudied compared to other areas.

The Carijoa report goes on to devote an entire chapter to “Gaps relevant to marine park planning along the south coast”. Notwithstanding the absence of any specific data, the report made recommendations on proposed boundary adjustments for any proposed marine reservations. It drew on the findings of the 1994 Wilson report and any further scientific research that had been undertaken since 1994. However, it was clear from the report that there was insufficient scientific data or research on which decisions could be made on the extent and location of any proposed sanctuary and exclusion zones, and how commercial and recreational fishing, tourism, and community access would be managed within any proposed marine park.

Not surprisingly, following the release of the Carijoa report, I asked the minister a question or it was asked on my behalf by Hon Tjorn Sibma. It is question without notice 663 —

I refer to the report *A review of the south coast marine environment and proposed areas for state marine reservation between Albany and Eucla, Western Australia*, by Carijoa Marine Consulting, dated June 2021, which was undertaken as part of the proposed south coast marine park.

- (1) Does the minister acknowledge that the review identified an absence of comprehensive biodiversity information?
- (2) Will the minister commit to undertake the additional research ... as set out in chapter 8, “Gaps relevant to marine park planning along the south coast”, prior to the formulation of the marine park zoning scheme?
- (3) If no to (2), why not?

Hon Stephen Dawson replied on behalf of the Minister for Environment —

- (1) Yes.

That was the answer to question (1), so the government acknowledged that the report identified an absence of comprehensive biodiversity information. In response to the question about undertaking additional research, as recommended in chapter 8, the response from the minister on behalf of the Minister for Environment was —

- (2) Gaps in information required to formulate the marine park boundary and zoning scheme will be addressed during the planning process. The marine park management plan will direct research priorities to inform adaptive management of the park.

Given that that response was about whether any additional research was commissioned, as recommended by the Carijoa report and as part of the formulation and the boundary and zoning scheme for the proposed marine park,

I think the answer to the question is no. Instead of doing that, the government decided to move the goalposts. Rather than following the usual scientific orthodoxy as had been recommended in a report it had commissioned itself, the government chose to adopt the precautionary principles approach. Essentially, that means the government kind of thinks these areas are important and worth protecting so it will lock them away in exclusion zones and then will do the research later. As I understand it, this issue was consistently raised by industry and community representatives through the government's so-called best practice community engagement process.

In March 2023, I called out the government for not releasing the socio-economic impact studies it had undertaken, which were used to help justify the establishment of the south coast marine park. My intention in seeking the release of those studies was not to make political points; it is incumbent on any government to substantiate its case, especially in the event that the proposed marine park and the exclusion zones within it would adversely affect our commercial and recreational fishing industries and the many businesses and communities that rely on them. When a government chooses a course of action that has the potential to destroy livelihoods, it is obligated to put forward a very strong argument that doing so is the only available option and that that option is for the greater good of our state. Instead, this government has chosen to hide behind a veil of secrecy, reinforcing the fact that there is no scientific data; the government does not possess any scientific data. It does not have the social or economic data on which it has based its decision, so it is difficult to see how communities like those in Esperance for example on the south coast will be delivered an economic windfall if their commercial and recreational fishing sectors are decimated by extensive exclusion zones proposed in the marine park. Any losses associated with commercial and recreational fishing industries would need to be offset by a pretty big upswing in tourism but, as I am sure other members are well aware, particularly if we are looking at the town of Esperance again for example, it is already filled to capacity with every form of accommodation booked out for months on end. There has been a bizarre suggestion by the government that it could be our next Ningaloo or Great Barrier Reef but it is already a tourism hotspot down there. Anyone with a rudimentary understanding of the local economy would tell members that there is a significant risk that the economic base of the town could shrink rather than grow if this proposal goes ahead and we were to lose the recreational and commercial fishing industries from the area.

I want to talk now a little bit more about the so-called best practice consultation model that was undertaken by this government. By all accounts, it could only be described as a sham at best. The recent Western Australian Fishing Industries Council revealed that US-based environmental lobby group, The Pew Charitable Trusts, had been given a key advisory role in the planning process for the marine park. Why do we need a foreign-based lobby group involved in these decisions? It is never a good look, for very good reasons: it undermines the perceptions of impartiality and objectivity; and it leads to a lack of community confidence in the process that is occurring and it is a process that is already very low in community confidence. It is very bizarre, in my view, that the government has chosen to go down the path of involving this charitable organisation in these key roles.

Numerous reports show that the whole community reference committee process descended into a farce at its final meeting where no common ground was reached on the draft zoning scheme. From what I understand, even the government's own departments in that meeting could not come to an agreement. That is an issue for the government to manage. Following the impasse at the final CRC meeting, there has been silence. It is interesting that there has been absolute silence. However, I imagine that it is because no matter how hard the government is trying to engineer an outcome that it wanted from this process, it was not able to bully or coerce industry and community members of that committee who stood firm on what they believed and what they stood for, for their communities and their industries. In May this year, we also learnt that the person the government had specifically appointed and located on the south coast to manage this process and ensure all those community views were considered during the planning process was sacked. That is despite the consultation process supposedly entering its most important phase—that is, the public consultation phase, with the release of the draft indicative management plan.

Anyone with experience in community engagement would understand that consultation is not about having a beautifully crafted process. Any number of fancy consultants could be paid all the money in the world to knock up a process, but it is the intent that sits behind the process that matters the most—that is, a genuine endeavour to engage with and listen to in good faith all those community and industry people. Unfortunately, that has been absent in this process, and I wonder whether the government and the Minister for Environment, in particular, understand that the wheels have well and truly fallen off the process. Unfortunately, I do not think they really understand that, but we will see. No doubt, if the time lines are to be stuck to, the public consultation process will begin at some point in the relatively near future. As a consequence of that, we will see the indicative management plan. I am unsure what involvement the community reference committee has had in that, given that it has not met since the final meeting, when it did not sign off on the indicative management plan. It will be interesting to see where that goes.

In the time remaining, I want to turn to another matter that is dear to my heart, which is Esperance Senior High School, a school I spent five years of my life at. It is down on the south coast in Esperance, and I reckon it is a great school in its ability to cater for its students and face some of its challenges. I noted with interest in the budget—I have mentioned this in this place before—the allocation of \$100 million to upgrades to Rockingham Senior High

School Education Support Centre and Safety Bay Senior High School. Apparently, this new commitment will deliver a wide range of significant improvements to both education facilities, which were constructed in the 1970s. I am interested in this allocation of \$100 million because Esperance Senior High School has been desperately seeking funding for upgrades for its ageing infrastructure. It is a 1960s school and has been quite dilapidated for at least the last three years. In fact, the former Premier, the former Minister for Education and Training, the current Minister for Education and any other members of the current government who have been to Esperance would have done a walk-through of that school and seen how dire the situation is and how desperately needed the funding is. It has issues of structural integrity, degraded concrete, leaking windows and roofs, compromised sanitary conditions, of all things, and dilapidated ablutions. It is a school design that is not equipped to deliver contemporary education outcomes. It has poor amenity and so on.

Community representatives and members of Parliament have met with bureaucrats from the department on a number of occasions in an effort to highlight the condition of the school. Time and again, the bureaucrats and the minister's office have advised the Esperance community to just be patient because there is a process. The Department of Education will undertake a condition assessment of all state government schools during 2023, and I understand that the assessment of Esperance has been completed. That was asked during budget estimates. From that assessment will come the prioritisation of works for those schools. That is a reasonable process: work out what the condition of schools is across the state, work out which schools are most in need of attention and then prioritise the budget bids from there. The bottom line, of course, is that no decisions will be made until the condition assessments are completed and the funding priorities are worked out. That sounds fair and reasonable.

When were those assessments done for Rockingham and Safety Bay? Why did they get additional priority over all the other schools? I have no doubt that there are more schools in need than just Esperance Senior High School. Their needs must certainly be more important than all the others, especially more important than schools that are 700 kilometres away. As a politician, I have kind of become hardened and, sadly, almost pragmatically cynical when decisions like this are made, but the parents and students of the communities that suffer the impact of these decisions are left embittered and disillusioned. The only conclusion left available to them is that they do not matter; they live in the wrong postcode or electorate.

In that context, I offer an open invitation to members opposite to take the opportunity, if they are ever in that town, to pop into the school and see firsthand the conditions that the students and staff have to endure every day. I have no doubt that schools across all our electorates need attention, but I believe that this school should be at the top of the list for any opportunity for funding. I hope that an outcome of the report that has been done is that that will happen.

At this point, President, I will conclude my remarks. This is the last opportunity for members to debate the noting of the budget papers and present their various views about what the government has proposed in the years ahead. I thank the chamber and members for the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Emergency Services) [4.25 pm] — in reply: I thank all the members who have made a contribution to the debate during the past nine or 10 sitting days. I will certainly bring the contributions to the attention of the Treasurer to make sure that the Treasurer's office, at the very least, understands the issues that concern the honourable members who made a contribution in this place. With that, I commend the motion to the house.

Question put and passed.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, members! I know that you love chatting amongst yourselves; it is one of your favourite pastimes. However, I will take the opportunity to leave the chair until the ringing of the bells and the arrival of the folders.

Sitting suspended from 4.26 to 4.30 pm