



Parliamentary Debates

(HANSARD)

FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION
2022

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 6 April 2022

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 6 April 2022

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

PAPERS TABLED

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

CHARITABLE TRUSTS BILL 2022

Notice of Motion to Introduce

Notice of motion given by **Mr D.A. Templeman (Leader of the House)** on behalf of Mr J.R. Quigley (Attorney General).

EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Esther Foundation and Unregulated Private Health Facilities — Notice of Motion

Ms S.F. McGurk (Minister for Child Protection) gave notice that at the next sitting of the house she would move —

That this house requests the Education and Health Standing Committee inquire into and report by 1 December 2022 on —

- (1) complaints and allegations concerning the Esther Foundation, including from former residents, staff and volunteers;
- (2) adequacy of actions taken by the organisation to address the above concerns; and
- (3) current regulatory and legislative provisions, and those proposed provisions currently before the Parliament to address the above concerns, including —
 - (a) options for regulating facilities not covered by the definition of “health service” or “hospital” in the Private Hospitals and Health Services Act 1927.

ANIMAL RESOURCES AUTHORITY AMENDMENT AND REPEAL BILL 2021

Returned

Bill returned from the Council without amendment.

POLICE — GREAT SOUTHERN

Statement by Minister for Police

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Police) [12.04 pm]: Last week, I had the pleasure of visiting police stations in the great southern and goldfields–Esperance police districts. Over two days, I visited Walpole, Denmark, Esperance, Norseman and the great southern district headquarters in Albany. Policing in these regions comes with unique challenges. Police in Norseman have played a crucial role in protecting our state on the front line, helping to ensure that our borders remained safe during a global pandemic. It was a pleasure to meet Sergeant Aaron Honey and the three members of his team, which, happily, includes his partner, Kate. This close-knit group recently had a visit from the commissioner and deputy commissioner, Col Blanch, which confirms how important the team in Norseman is to policing in Western Australia.

Police in Walpole, Denmark, Albany and Esperance have recently provided vital assistance to their communities when members of the public have needed to be rescued from their waterways and when their towns were impacted by the recent bushfires. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the officers at these stations and their families for their dedication and tireless efforts during what have been difficult times for their communities. I would like to acknowledge Sergeant Dave Murphy in Walpole and wish him all the best in retirement. I would also like to acknowledge Sergeant Matt Hartfield in Denmark. Although I could not meet with Matt in person, I would like to thank Matt and his team, which was led by the acting OIC, Acting Sergeant Chris Macaulay, during my visit, for their outstanding efforts during the recent bushfires and water rescues. Meeting the teams in Albany and Esperance, including District Superintendent Kim Travers and OIC Hugh Letessier in Albany, and OIC Peter Arancini in Esperance, provided great insight into the challenges faced by both districts.

It was fantastic to be joined by the member for Warren–Blackwood, the member for Albany and Hon Shelley Payne, MLC, in each of their electorates. It is clear that each of these members are well connected with and supportive of their local police and dedicated to ensuring that community safety is a priority for their electorates. Their local communities should be proud to have such outstanding representation in this Parliament.

Between visiting police stations, I took the opportunity to meet with the Shire of Esperance, the City of Albany and the Albany RSL sub-branch. With Albany being a place of significance for the Anzac legacy, it was good to

meet with the Albany RSL ahead of its Anzac Day commemoration. I would like to acknowledge the Albany RSL president, Helen Tasker, and her dedicated committee for their tireless efforts in the lead-up to Anzac Day each year. I look forward to continuing to visit as many police stations as possible throughout 2022.

AGRICULTURE — WORKPLACE SAFETY

Statement by Minister for Industrial Relations

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Industrial Relations) [12.07 pm]: I rise to inform the house of the safety performance in the agricultural industry. During the period 2010–11 to 2019–20, 172 people were fatally injured in work-related traumatic incidents in Western Australia and 41 of those incidents occurred in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors. In the last five years alone, there have been 18 work-related deaths in the agricultural industry. Despite a relatively small workforce compared with other industries such as construction and mining, the agricultural industry has both the highest number of work-related fatalities and the highest frequency rate. In fact, during the aforementioned period, agriculture, forestry and fishing represented 25 per cent of all work-related fatalities but were only three per cent of the hours worked. These statistics are unacceptable and illustrate the significant challenges in achieving a zero harm safety culture in the agricultural industry. As the minister responsible for work health and safety, the over-representation of agricultural workers in work-related fatalities is of significant concern to me. The agricultural industry needs to do more to improve workplace safety. The McGowan government is committed to working with the industry to achieve better work health and safety outcomes for their workers. In line with this commitment, the new Work Health and Safety Act 2020 will improve protections for all Western Australian workers, including those in the agricultural industry.

Under the new laws, the Agriculture Safety Advisory Committee will be formed to advise the Work Health and Safety Commission on matters relating to safety in the agricultural industry. The committee will work to identify major health and safety issues in the industry as a part of the government and industry's shared efforts to improve safety and achieve zero harm and zero deaths for agricultural workers. The Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety is undertaking significant work in this space. This includes directing departmental resources to the areas of most need and developing strategic relationships with agricultural societies, distributors and grower groups to identify how to best support industry in achieving better health and safety outcomes. I am hopeful that developing positive networks with the agricultural community will help achieve improved compliance and lead to fewer fatalities and injuries. The data cannot be ignored and demonstrates the need for workplaces in the agricultural industry to review their existing risk management approaches to ensure the safety of their workers. These shocking figures and the terrible tragedy they represent cannot be allowed to continue. I urge the agricultural industry to demonstrate its commitment to safety and work together on developing coordinated strategies. It will be important to see how the industry can change its culture to improve safety for its workers. The McGowan government is serious about reducing fatalities and injuries in the agricultural industry and is committed to working with industry to achieve this vital objective.

RESOURCES SECTOR — PERFORMANCE

Statement by Minister for Mines and Petroleum

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Mines and Petroleum) [12.10 pm]: The strength of Western Australia's resources sector is presented in the latest *Statistics digest 2020–21* released by the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety. The digest is published annually and is used by a range of global market analysts, investment banks and industry associations. This year's digest reflects the brilliant way WA managed to successfully navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. Miners were able to operate and trade uninterrupted in the past financial year, delivering mineral and petroleum sales valued at a record \$210 billion. This eclipsed the previous sales value of \$177 billion in 2020.

Western Australia's resources sector employed 149 400 people during 2020–21, representing another record. The result was driven by higher iron ore sales valued at a massive \$155 billion on the back of all-time record iron ore prices. Gold sales were valued at \$16.6 billion, with the price of gold reaching record levels. Alumina and bauxite sales were valued at \$5.6 billion on the back of record sales values, while nickel sales were valued at \$3.5 billion as prices increased. This was the nickel industry's highest sales value in seven years. Copper, lead and zinc sales were also up to \$1.7 billion—up six per cent from \$1.6 billion in 2019–20, the highest level since 2014. There were also positive signs in the lithium industry as prices began to rise. In a sign of improving market conditions, sales volumes increased for the first time in three years. The sale of mineral sands and other minerals, including critical rare earths and manganese, also increased. The future also looks bright with mineral exploration expenditure in Western Australia valued at \$2.1 billion in 2020–21. That is an increase of 21 per cent from \$1.7 billion in 2019–20 and its highest level since 2012.

It is pleasing to see an increasing number of applications pursuing rare earths through the latest round of the state government's exploration incentive scheme co-funding drilling program.

The SPEAKER: At least we have the appropriate minister on his feet!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It is obviously an internal matter—if the audiovisual system is still in operation!

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The member will have to take it up with building management; it is nothing to do with Western Power.

Applications for round 25 closed on 4 March this year with 108 applications, the second highest number of applications since 2010.

Almost \$21 billion was invested into Western Australia's mining and petroleum sector, up from \$19 billion in 2019–20. Around \$127 billion worth of resources projects are in the development pipeline.

DRIVING ACCESS AND EQUITY PILOT PROGRAM

Statement by Minister for Transport

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [12.12 pm]: Today I wish to update the house on the driving access and equity pilot program. This program was established last year following the state government's skills summit, which highlighted lack of access to driving services, instructors and suitable vehicles as a key barrier for youth employment in some parts of regional WA.

The Kimberley and Pilbara regions were prioritised for program support after being identified as having a high concentration of disadvantaged drivers. Almost \$3.5 million in grants has since been announced for 12 organisations throughout the Kimberley and Pilbara regions to support hundreds of people to gain their driver's licence. This includes improved access to professional driving instructors, supervisors to help complete logbook hours and access to a vehicle. The grants will help the organisations fund the purchase of up to 24 vehicles to help people through the licensing process across these regions. The 12 successful grant recipients demonstrated an understanding of the barriers some people face in the process to obtain a driver's licence and how they will deliver on the program objectives, often by working with other organisations. They also indicated that they will be working with over 1 000 disadvantaged learners, which should result in over 550 provisional drivers' licences and over 350 employment opportunities. Eight trainees from Derby, Broome and Fitzroy Crossing have successfully completed their certificate IV in transport and logistics and are now able to become qualified driving instructors. When licensed, this will represent a 50 per cent increase in the number of licensed driving instructors for the Kimberley region.

A second driving instructor training session will commence on 26 April 2022 in Kununurra, with seven people, including three Aboriginal women, nominated to attend. A subsequent course will be held in South Hedland in late May 2022, member for Pilbara.

Although COVID-19 is impacting the delivery of remote services to some communities, we continue to provide services using regional hubs where people from remote communities can access services. Since January 2022, additional remote service officers in the Pilbara and Kimberley have performed more than 130 driving assessments, resulting in licences for more than 70 people, unlocking access to employment opportunities. Work has also commenced to translate key documents for pre-learners into plain English to assist when language and literacy are a barrier for participation in the licensing process. An oral theory testing provider has also been engaged in Fitzroy Crossing.

ABORIGINAL LANDS TRUST ESTATE — DIVESTMENT

Statement by Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale — Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [12.16 pm]: I rise today to inform the house of the state government's progress in amending the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act 1972 to advance our commitment to divest the Aboriginal Lands Trust estate to Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal Lands Trust estate consists of 302 properties, covering some 22 million hectares, which is about 8.7 per cent of Western Australia's landmass. Divestment of the Aboriginal Lands Trust estate is crucial to increasing direct Aboriginal control of land to strengthen communities, foster economic activity and secure improved outcomes for Aboriginal people in Western Australia. Members may be aware that the relevant parts of the act have, essentially, remained unchanged since it was enacted 50 years ago. The proposed reforms provide a unique, historic opportunity to significantly progress our commitment to divesting the Aboriginal Lands Trust estate and will bring the act in line with the state government's objectives of agreement making, partnerships, co-design and Aboriginal-led solutions.

The proposed changes will streamline the divestment of reserved lands and allow them to be returned to an Aboriginal person or entity. The reforms will also replace outdated terms to clearly define Aboriginal stakeholders —

The SPEAKER: We will just pause for a moment. Leader of the House, the light on your phone is shining.

Mr D.A. Templeman: I can't turn it off!

The SPEAKER: Bring it up here and I will sort it out for you, if you like!

Dr A.D. BUTI: I thought he was using it to help me read!

The reforms will provide greater clarity and definition of consultation requirements for stakeholders and the Aboriginal Lands Trust.

Over the next few months, the government, through the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, will conduct consultations to inform the drafting of the amendment bill. Feedback will be sought through information sessions, stakeholder meetings and online submissions. I encourage everyone with an interest in the Aboriginal Lands Trust estate to participate in those consultations.

Members and community members can find out more online at <https://wa.gov.au/aapa-act>. These reforms aim to remove current barriers so that these lands can be rightfully returned to the management and control of Aboriginal people. With that control and responsibility for land management, it is hoped that new social, cultural and economic opportunities will emerge for many Aboriginal people and communities across Western Australia. Returning the 22 million-hectare ALT estate to Aboriginal people will also make an important contribution to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and Western Australia's implementation target of a 15 per cent increase in land the subject of rights or interests of Aboriginal people.

I ask that members encourage people and organisations in their electorates to participate in these important consultations and play their part in shaping these historic reforms.

COERCIVE CONTROL — DISCUSSION PAPER

Statement by Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence) [12.19 pm]:

I rise to inform the house about significant work underway to improve Western Australia's response to family and domestic violence. Last week, the Attorney General and I announced that consultation is commencing on the important issue of coercive control. Coercive control is a pattern of persistent abuse behaviour that aims to manipulate, intimidate and isolate victims mentally, emotionally, socially and financially. Coercive control is a red flag for further intimate partner violence and homicide. It is clear we need to do more to help victim-survivors and improve the justice system's understanding of non-physical abuse and its impacts.

This issue has been brought to the forefront of the public conversation as a result of high-profile cases such as that of Hannah Clarke and her three children, who were tragically murdered by her former partner. This case is one of many examples that highlight the seriousness of these patterns of controlling behaviour and how they can be a precursor for physical and often fatal violence.

Journalist Jess Hill has also been a significant advocate for criminalisation of this issue, with the release of her book and subsequent TV series *See What You Made Me Do*, which provides a comprehensive insight into domestic abuse in Australia. That is why we are seeking the community's views about whether laws should be changed to criminalise this type of abuse. Criminalisation sends a message to perpetrators that this is serious unlawful behaviour. However, we know that criminalisation alone cannot stop this behaviour. This state has laws that already recognise and respond to coercive control, including the criminal offence of persistent family violence. Further legal responses need to benefit victim-survivors and not result in further adverse impacts for them. It is important that we consider the range of government responses to coercive control, including how to improve community understanding, provide the right supports for victims and hold perpetrators to account.

A discussion paper about coercive control and further information is available at the website of the Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime. People are encouraged to take part in the consultation and can do so in several ways, including online and by email and telephone. This work is part of the McGowan government's unprecedented \$126 million investment in the family and domestic violence sector and our commitment to support victim-survivors and to ensure that we continually improve the way we respond to this issue in WA. Everyone has a part to play in understanding, preventing and responding to family violence.

YOUTH WEEK WA

Statement by Minister for Youth

MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean — Minister for Youth) [12.22 pm]: I rise to inform the house that Youth Week WA is on again in 2022, with a packed program that includes digital and in-person events. Youth Week WA is the single largest celebration of young people in Western Australia. From 8 to 16 April, young people across the state can participate in a wide range of events, such as workshops, career expos, mural making, market stalls and art installations. This year's theme is "Courage to Change"—an important reminder that young people are the voices of not just tomorrow, but today. Young people are involved in every stage of the planning, designing and running of Youth Week WA, and it is great to see yet again that such a fantastic program has been put together through the KickstART Festival 2022.

As part of Youth Week WA, I also appoint two Youth Week ambassadors to assist in the planning and advocacy of the events. This year's ambassadors are Amy Astill and Amber Ugle-Hayward, two passionate advocates for change and for elevating the voices of young people. Amy Astill is 20 years old and lives in Kalgoorlie. In 2021, Amy was appointed as a member of my Ministerial Youth Advisory Council; in 2017, she was elected the Youth Mayor of Kalgoorlie-Boulder; and in 2021, she was elected as a councillor for the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder.

Amber Ugle-Hayward is 22 years old and a Noongar woman who has lived in Perth and regional WA. Amber is the first Aboriginal-identifying young person to be appointed as a Youth Week WA ambassador. She is also a 2020 graduate of the Western Australian Aboriginal Leadership Institute's emerging Aboriginal leaders program and has been the keynote speaker for ATCO National Reconciliation Week.

I would like to thank the Youth Week ambassadors, Propel Youth Arts WA, the Department of Communities and, of course, all the young people who have worked tirelessly to put this week together. I encourage all young people to check out the events happening near them and to have fun during Youth Week 2022.

DUTIES AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Introduction and First Reading

Bill introduced, on motion by **Dr A.D. Buti (Minister for Finance)**, and read a first time.

Explanatory memorandum presented by the minister.

Second Reading

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale — Minister for Finance) [12.25 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a second time.

The bill seeks to amend the Duties Act 2008 to introduce the recently announced tax simplification measures relating to transfer duty that will be reported in the 2022–23 budget. These measures will reduce the tax burden for some taxpayers and simplify tax administration. A key measure in the bill is the reduction of the general rate of duty to the equivalent of the residential rate of duty. Currently, transfers of residential property receive a concessional rate of duty. The general rate applies to transfers of non-residential property such as commercial property, vacant land not used for residential dwellings and business assets. Aligning the general rate with the residential rate will effectively apply the residential rate to all dutiable transactions, not just those involving residential property.

No taxpayers will be worse off under this proposal. It is estimated that 3 000 to 5 000 transactions a year will be assessed with the lower rate of duty under this change. It will benefit taxpayers who transfer non-residential property valued at more than \$200 000. The maximum benefit to a taxpayer will be \$2 800 for transactions valued at \$725 000 or more. The measure will reduce recordkeeping obligations and other administrative burdens on licensed settlement agents and conveyancers who self-assess more than 80 per cent of all transactions. Purchasers will no longer be required to complete an application for the residential rate of duty for each lodgement or self-assessment involving residential property.

The measure will also reduce administrative overheads for RevenueWA. A reassessment and refund of duty will no longer be required when a taxpayer purchases vacant land, pays duty at the general rate and later enters into a residential building contract.

The concessional transfer duty scale for transfers of owner-occupied homes and business property valued at less than \$200 000 will be adjusted as a result of aligning the general and residential rates of duty. The concessional scale currently provides no benefit to transfers of owner-occupied homes when the dutiable value of the property exceeds \$116 000. Instead, the residential rate provides a greater benefit for these properties. This is a consequence of the concession being designed to provide a benefit for eligible dutiable transactions valued below \$200 000 when compared with the current general rate rather than the residential rate. The amendments in the bill will ensure that once the general and residential rates are aligned, the concession will apply to all eligible dutiable transactions valued at less than \$200 000. The changes to the general and concessional rates of duty for transactions valued at less than \$200 000 will take effect from 1 July 2022.

The bill will abolish duty on transactions for mining tenements that are prospecting licences unless they include other dutiable property. This will simplify the process of transferring prospecting licences and reduce the administration costs of assessing these transactions, which raises minimal revenue. This measure will take effect from 1 July 2022.

The bill will also introduce two new vehicle licence duty exemptions. The first exemption from vehicle licence duty will apply if a vehicle is returned to the seller for a refund of the purchase price or a replacement vehicle, or if the agreement to purchase the vehicle is cancelled before the purchaser takes possession of the vehicle. This measure will address the situation in which a person returns a faulty vehicle and must pay duty a second time when they acquire a replacement vehicle.

The second exemption will apply to the grant of a vehicle licence for a new vehicle acquired by a dealer for use as a “service demonstrator vehicle”. A service demonstrator vehicle is a vehicle loaned by the dealer without charge, or for a nominal charge, to customers who are having their vehicle serviced or repaired at the dealership. The purpose of the loan is to entice the customer into upgrading their vehicle after experiencing the features of the service demonstrator vehicle. These vehicles do not currently qualify for the existing “demonstrator” exemption because they are not acquired solely for demonstration purposes. Introducing this exemption will reduce the number of disputes about the issue, more accurately reflect industry practices and resolve some of the administrative difficulties with auditing dealer exemptions.

The final measure in the bill exempts Family Court orders made following a marriage or de facto relationship breakdown. This means that nominal duty will apply only when property is transferred under the order if the eligibility criteria are met, rather than on the order itself. This measure will simplify administration by allowing Family Court orders to be self-assessed by settlement agents or conveyancers through Revenue Online.

The vehicle licence duty exemptions and the exemption for Family Court orders will commence on the day after the act receives the royal assent. The associated explanatory memorandum contains further details on the amendments.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr P.J. Rundle**.

FAMILY COURT AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Introduction and First Reading

Bill introduced, on motion by **Mr D.A. Templeman (Leader of the House)** on behalf of Mr J.R. Quigley (Attorney General), and read a first time.

Explanatory memorandum presented by the Leader of the House.

Second Reading

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Leader of the House) [12.32 pm]: On behalf of the Attorney General, I move —

That the bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce to the house the Family Court Amendment Bill 2022, which will allow separating de facto couples in Western Australia to split their superannuation. Presently, in family law proceedings between de facto couples the Family Court of Western Australia has no power to distribute superannuation interests to reflect the relative contributions of the partners of the relationship. This is because superannuation is a matter governed by commonwealth legislation.

Currently, the Family Court of Western Australia may take into account the value of a superannuation fund held by a de facto partner and offset that value by providing the other de facto partner with a greater share of other assets. However, that may not be possible because the superannuation fund may be the only asset of significant value. As members will be aware, superannuation was made compulsory under the Keating government by the commonwealth Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act in 1992. Since that time, increasingly, superannuation savings have become a valuable financial asset and may be the largest single asset in the property pool of a separating couple. In those circumstances, the absence of jurisdiction to split superannuation means that the distribution of assets is unfair to the non-member of the fund, although the non-member, disproportionately women, may have made a valuable contribution to the accumulation of that fund as homemaker and by caring for children of the relationship.

The quest by Hon Jim McGinty, then Attorney General of Western Australia, to secure super splitting for separating Western Australian de facto couples in family law proceedings began even before the commonwealth amended the Family Law Act 1975 in 2001 to provide this benefit to married couples. As Hon Jim McGinty advised Parliament in his second reading speech on 20 October 2005 on the Western Australian Commonwealth Powers (De Facto Relationships) Bill 2005, the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General agreed in 2001 that there should be a reference of power by the states to the commonwealth in relation to de facto couples. In the case of Western Australia, the reference of power would be limited to the superannuation interests of de facto couples.

In 2003, the Commonwealth Powers (De Facto Relationships) Bill 2003 was introduced into the Parliament of Western Australia, which effected a compromise—a narrow referral of legislative power in respect of heterosexual de facto couples and same-sex de facto couples. That meant that if the commonwealth changed its attitude, legislation would be in place to facilitate superannuation splitting also for same-sex de facto couples. However, the bill lapsed when Parliament was prorogued and was reintroduced in the next Parliament in 2005. It received royal assent on 26 June 2006 and was enacted as the Commonwealth Powers (De Facto Relationships) Act 2006, by which the Parliament of Western Australia referred state legislative power to the commonwealth Parliament confined to the distribution of superannuation entitlements between separating de facto couples in Western Australia. All other matters would continue to be adjudicated under state law according to the provisions of the Family Court Act 1997.

The commonwealth declined to accept the referral on the basis it was too narrow; evidently, it wanted a complete subject referral of all aspects of a de facto relationship to the commonwealth as the other states had done. However, we have our own state Family Court of Western Australia established pursuant to section 41 of the commonwealth Family Law Act 1975 and our own state legislation, which more than once has proven to be a significant advantage.

It was not until strong advocacy by this government that the commonwealth in 2018 agreed to accept and implement the narrow referral of legislative power from Western Australia. The required federal jurisdiction was vested in the Family Court of Western Australia by the commonwealth Parliament's enactment of the Family Law

Amendment (Western Australia De Facto Superannuation Splitting and Bankruptcy) Act 2020, which gives effect to the Parliament of Western Australia's referral of legislative power by the Commonwealth Powers (De Facto Relationships) Act 2006 and also confers jurisdiction in respect of bankruptcy when that is relevant to proceedings.

The narrow nature of the referral in respect of superannuation splitting made the drafting of the bill difficult, for both the commonwealth and for us. The commonwealth implemented the referral of power in respect of superannuation splitting by amending the Family Law Act 1975 to include a new part VIIC, which deals only with superannuation splitting between separating de facto couples in family law proceedings in Western Australia. De facto couples in Western Australia will be able to split superannuation by court order or by agreement. Under new part VIIC of the commonwealth Family Law Act 1975, an agreement on superannuation may form part of a wider agreement made under the provisions of the Family Court Act 1997, the state law. Appeals relating to superannuation will mirror the existing appeal pathways for matters under the property provisions of the Western Australian Family Court Act 1997. I hope members are following me.

Since the referral of legislative power was restricted to superannuation with all other matters remaining under the provisions of the Western Australian Family Court Act 1997, it means that in the same proceedings the Family Court of Western Australia will adjudicate under the federal provisions of the commonwealth Family Law Act 1975 and the state provisions of the Western Australian Family Court Act 1997.

The limited nature of the referral resulting in the concurrent proceedings under both federal and state law has presented complex issues of constitutional law. Bear with me. The commonwealth Family Law Amendment (Western Australia De Facto Superannuation Splitting and Bankruptcy) Act 2020 also amends the commonwealth Bankruptcy Act 1966 to enable bankruptcy matters related to de facto couples to be heard by the Family Court of Western Australia concurrently with family law proceedings. Presently, when one of the de facto partners is bankrupt, the bankruptcy proceedings must be heard in Division 2 of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia separately from the proceedings before the Family Court of Western Australia. The changes brought about by this bill will mean that the parties will not only incur less expense than if they commenced proceedings in two different courts, but also may allow for a more equitable distribution of assets than is available to the Federal Court under the provisions of the commonwealth Bankruptcy Act 1966 alone. For example, the Family Court of Western Australia will have jurisdiction to take into account the contributions of the non-bankrupt de facto partner to the property that may not be evidenced in formal ownership documentation. Before the Federal Court, the claim of the non-bankrupt de facto partner may have less priority than that of the creditors of the bankrupt. This is unfair to both the non-bankrupt de facto partner who has made a valuable contribution to the acquisition and preservation of the property and to any children of the relationship.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr P.J. Rundle**.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER AMENDMENT (REPORTABLE CONDUCT) BILL 2021

Consideration in Detail

Clause 1 put and passed.

Clause 2: Commencement —

Mr R.S. LOVE: I want to get an idea about this clause from the minister. I know that there are two separate tranches, if you like, in division 2 that are to be phased in 12 months after the rest of the provisions are enacted or enforced. Can the minister indicate why there is a difference in timing for the other matters in division 2? On what basis was it determined that they had to be phased in under these two different time lines, and who made that determination?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I thank the member for the question. The phased implementation is intended to provide an appropriate amount of time for relevant entities to prepare for their reporting obligations as well as enable the Commissioner for Children and Young People to provide effective guidance and assistance to the entities over the implementation period. In fact, on page 296, volume 7, of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse's report, the commission recommended a phased approach to the implementation of the provisions. The approach in other jurisdictions also supports a phased approach. For instance, the Victorian scheme was introduced in three phases, which commenced in July 2017. I think it is a fairly obvious and common sense approach, considering we are talking about a new scheme.

I mentioned yesterday in my closing statements of the second reading reply that this applies in particular when a whole lot of organisations and members of the public are not aware of the concept of having a reportable conduct scheme. I think the build-up will help organisations get ready to implement this scheme. Also, they will have obligations, so it is important that we do not set them up to fail. They will need to understand their obligations. The Ombudsman's office has done a lot of preparatory work to ensure that it is able to roll out the education capacity building for those who will be subject to the new scheme.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I thank the minister. There are a couple of matters. Part 2, division 2 contains the two provisions that are to be phased in. The provision at clause 26 talks about the significant neglect of a child. I do not want to talk about the clause in the detail, but why will that particular clause be delayed for an extra 12 months as well as the entities listed under clause 27? My reading of the bill is that clause 26 will also be delayed. Is that correct?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The organisations and conduct subject to the phased commencement will be as follows: childcare services, child protection and out-of-home care services, education services, health services, and justice and detention services. They will be covered by the scheme in the first year and the remaining services will be covered after 12 months of the scheme's operation. The issues that the member spoke about—sexual offences, sexual misconduct, physical assault and other prescribed offences—will be covered by the scheme in the first year and the remaining types of conduct will be covered after 12 months of the scheme's operation.

I think I have outlined the rationale in my previous answer, but I will perhaps quote from the royal commission's final report, which said —

A reportable conduct scheme has administrative and cost implications for institutions and governments. It will take time for governments to mobilise the necessary machinery for implementing their schemes. Further, institutions will need time to understand what is required and how they can implement the scheme in their context.

I think that outlines the obligations of the organisations themselves. Given the serious nature of some of the offences, the organisations will have to understand their reporting requirements. That is why the phased approach has been taken.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Therefore, is the minister saying that—if we are talking about clause 26 and the significant neglect of a child or any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child—it will take some time for organisations that will be part of the first tranche to include that in their reporting structure? Otherwise, why would there be a delay? Surely, if an organisation is reporting on the other behaviours outlined in the bill, it could report on the behaviours outlined in clause 26.

Ms S.F. McGURK: We will get to clause 26 in due course, but, as the member said, the clause provides for an inclusion of additional categories of reportable conduct after 12 months. Further details on the definition are outlined in other clauses of the bill, but it is important that we make distinctions between the type of abuse that is being reported here. This is an extension to the other categories of abuse that professional organisations are mandated to report. Clause 26 extends the type of abuse that is required to be reported, and there needs to be a time for familiarisation and education about what that means exactly. This is venturing into new territory for not only the body that will oversee this new scheme, but also many organisations themselves, so I think it is important that we take the time to get this right because not only are they sensitive matters, but also there will be, as I said, obligations on those organisations under this scheme. The delay is not a reflection of the other types of abuse being less important; it is a reflection of the new territory that is being entered into, so it will take the time to familiarise those organisations with their obligations.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 3 and 4 put and passed.

Clause 5: Section 4 amended —

Mr R.S. LOVE: Clause 5 inserts a number of definitions in section 4. In terms of the relevant entity to which the reportable conduct scheme will apply under section 19I, there is a list of those entities later on in the legislation. I want to understand proposed section 19I. I could ask about it now; I am in the minister's hands as far as that goes. Proposed section 19I states —

Entities to which reportable conduct scheme applies

The reportable conduct scheme applies to an entity set out in column 2 of Schedule 2 that —

- (a) exercises care, supervision or authority over children as part of its primary functions or otherwise; and
- (b) is not exempt under section 19O(1).

What I am trying to get at is the depth of some of the departments that might be picked up. I do not know whether now is the right time to do this. It could be better to ask about this later on when we come to the schedules, but it is in the definitions, so can I ask a couple of questions about it?

Ms S.F. McGURK: This is in your hands, Acting Speaker, but I would advise that we get into that sort of detail as we go into the relevant clauses—for instance, proposed section 19I that the member mentioned—because quite a lot of thought has gone into the relevant entities and the sections within the relevant entities that will be covered by this legislation.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 6 put and passed.**Clause 7: Part III Division 3B inserted —**

Mr R.S. LOVE: Clause 7 is really the major thrust of the legislation. It has a lot of conditions around the reportable conduct scheme, and I have a couple of questions for the minister about that scheme. Proposed section 19C of division 3B, on page 5 of the bill, defines “physical assault”. Can the minister outline some examples of what constitutes such an assault? So that we can have some guidance about what that proposed section is referring to, what is encapsulated by those definitions?

Ms S.F. McGURK: One of the questions that was raised, which the member may be referring to, was why the criminal definition of “assault” was not used. This was raised by stakeholders during the investigation. The criminal definition of assault is narrower than the definition that the government chose for this scheme. The definition used for this scheme is appropriate for a civil jurisdiction aimed at protecting children from abuse. In regard to the issues that the member raised, the royal commission noted that reportable conduct schemes should require the reporting of conduct of employees that is broader than conduct that would constitute a criminal offence.

In regard to the approach of other jurisdictions, I will go through some of these considerations because I think they will address some of the member’s concerns. The broader definition of “physical assault” in the bill is consistent with other jurisdictions with reportable conduct schemes, and is the same as the definition of assault used in New South Wales. New South Wales defines assault to mean the intentional or reckless application of physical force without lawful justification or excuse, or any act that intentionally or recklessly causes another to apprehend immediate and unlawful violence. Victoria uses the term “physical violence”, which is not further defined. The Australian Capital Territory includes “ill-treatment of a child”, which is not further defined in the definition of reportable conduct. It includes offences against a person under part 2 of the Crimes Act.

Physical contact that forms part of normal professional duties, such as restraining a child to prevent them from hurting themselves or others, should not be reportable conduct. I think that is important to note, and that question was also asked by stakeholders during consultation. The distinction is made and physical contact that might take place during normal professional duties is not included in reportable conduct. Distinctions made for family and domestic violence by an employee are included in reportable conduct.

New section 19G defines “reportable conduct” and sets out the relevant conduct intended to be captured by this scheme, including physical assault, sexual misconduct and sexual assault. I can go into more detail if that is helpful to the member.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The definition of physical assault states that there needs to be an application of physical force or —
any act that intentionally or recklessly causes another person to apprehend immediate and unlawful violence;

The effect on the person has to be immediate. Would locking someone in a room or leaving someone in a vehicle where they may suffer some harm be something that would fall under that provision, or not? We regularly see it reported in the news when someone who has care of a child has left them in a vehicle or restrained them in a way that is not what one would consider to be the normal application of physical force. I am wondering about the effect of the need for the violence to manifest immediately, or whether, in fact, there is a bit more room for other considerations in that circumstance.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I reiterate that we have adopted the New South Wales definition. New South Wales has the longest reportable conduct scheme that has been in operation in the country. It is not intended that it would capture only immediate physical abuse. The definition that the member referred to states —

- (a) the intentional or reckless application of physical force without lawful justification or excuse;
- (b) any act that intentionally or recklessly causes another person to apprehend immediate and unlawful violence;

It is not the intention or the understanding of those words that it would require only an immediate physical action. I do not know whether we would then call on any discussion in the New South Wales statutes to inform how this would apply in practice, but, as I said, this definition has been adopted from the New South Wales scheme.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I will leave that one there because I think we will not get much more information on that one. Perhaps some information could be provided in the later stages of the discussion in the other place, where there might be an understanding from New South Wales about how that has been applied in the past and what there might be to actually guide us in that one.

I continue on proposed section 19C and the definition of sexual misconduct. I think the minister said that was not what we might understand as a sexual offence—an act of that sort—but it is misconduct that is sexual by nature. Could the minister provide some explanation, some further guidance, about what would be encapsulated under that definition?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I referred to this briefly before. Sexual misconduct and sexual offence is captured by the definition. The definitions of physical assault, sexual misconduct and sexual offence are relevant to the definition

of reportable conduct in new section 19G, which sets out the conduct that is intended to be captured by the scheme. The definition of investigation information is relevant and provides a system of how that will then be received. The definition of sexual misconduct is intended to protect children from harm by capturing a broad range of inappropriate behaviours of a sexual nature that occur against or in the presence of a child. The definition is also intended to be consistent with the relevant recommendations of the royal commission and for national consistency. The comparative legislation in New South Wales provides examples of sexual misconduct including descriptions of sexual acts without a legitimate reason to provide the descriptions, sexual comments, and conversations or communications and comments to a child that express a desire to act in a sexual manner toward the child or another child. As I have said, this is intended to be broader than a sexual act in itself and is consistent with the royal commission and what has been adopted in other jurisdictions.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Still on the same provision and moving to the next offence, sexual offence, I assume that is an offence that is well understood and perhaps there is plenty of definition in the Criminal Code et cetera about that, but does this also apply if the offence was committed outside Western Australia or even if it is committed outside Australia in some circumstances, if that is captured by Western Australian law?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, it is.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I move on to proposed section 19D, “Employees of relevant entities”. I am looking at the definition of an employee on page 8. Proposed subsection (4) states —

- (a) an officer of, or a person employed or engaged to work for, a contractor;
- (b) a subcontractor of a contractor;
- (c) an officer ...
- (d) a volunteer working for a contractor ...

Regarding the definition of a volunteer, volunteers could actually be involved in many different ways in various organisations. Could the minister explain whether it is only if that person is, strictly speaking, working under the direction of and in the work carried out by that entity that they have to make the conduct report? What if it becomes aware of activities not directly related to the work that the person is volunteering for, but may be closely related or ancillary to that?

Ms S.F. McGURK: This is an important provision and discussion actually, member. As he said, proposed section 19D(4) outlines the people employed or relating to the entity who will be captured, and that includes —

- (a) an officer of, or a person employed or engaged to work for, a contractor;
- (b) a subcontractor of a contractor;
- (c) an officer of, or a person employed or engaged to work for, a subcontractor;

And, importantly —

- (d) a volunteer working for a contractor or a subcontractor.

This is intended to ensure that when we have organisations that have a lot of interaction with children in the course of their operations, those children are protected and this scheme will apply to all those involved whether or not they receive remuneration for that interaction and that work. Again, we were guided by the royal commission in that regard. In volume 7, the royal commission noted —

... reportable conduct schemes should require the reporting of conduct by any individual engaged by an institution to provide services to children, whether or not they are a paid employee.

It also said —

The New South Wales legislation provides that an employee of an agency includes ‘any employee of the agency, whether or not employed in connection with any work or activities of the agency that relates to children’ and ‘any individual engaged by the agency to provide services to children (including in the capacity of a volunteer)’.

That was actually pointed out by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which recommended that reportable conduct schemes include a definition of “employee” that covers paid employees, volunteers and contractors; in fact, specifically, recommendation 7.10, which states —

Reportable conduct schemes should provide for:

...

- e. a definition of employee that covers paid employees, volunteers and contractors

Mr R.S. LOVE: I want to talk a bit more about volunteers because there are some interesting nuances, I think, with the definition of “volunteer” and what constitutes a volunteer when we move to the second group, religious

organisations, which will come into effect after 12 months; for instance, choirs and music groups are two of the activities that will be covered in a religious body. Will a volunteer be only the person who organised the choir or will it be any person participating in the choir, and how will an organisation have an understanding of the activities of that diverse number of people? I am wondering where the line will be drawn, especially when we are talking about religious groups, between who is a volunteer and who is just another participant.

Ms S.F. McGURK: In the application of this scheme, volunteers will be captured only to the extent that they are working with children in the entity that is covered. The scheme's coverage of volunteers will be limited to their engagement with children and the particular entity covered by the scheme.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to proposed section 19E, "Head of a relevant entity". I am trying to get an understanding of what will happen in a circumstance in which the hierarchy and structure of a religious group, for instance, is supported in Western Australia but administered from another place. I know the capacity will be there to nominate someone, but in terms of that person being able to provide the service that the government wants them to provide—the administrative function—they would have to be in a position of real authority. Is there an understanding of how that might work in a diverse group that is based elsewhere and only represented in Western Australia?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am advised that it will be the CEO or head of the organisation wherever they are located if that organisation has operations here in Western Australia. The member will see under proposed section 19E that there are a number of different alternatives to ensure that there is an ability to identify a person responsible in an organisation, including under proposed section 19Q, "Commissioner may approve head of relevant entity in certain circumstances".

Again, I envisage that that is the sort of work that the Ombudsman and his office will do with organisations to ensure that there are clear lines of authority and persons responsible for the scheme.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thanks for that, minister; that is a good answer to what I wanted to know.

Moving on to proposed section 19F, the definition of a "reportable allegation" is —

... any information that leads a person to form the belief on reasonable grounds that an employee of a relevant entity has engaged in reportable conduct or conduct that may involve reportable conduct, whether or not the conduct is alleged to have occurred in the course of the employee's employment.

Can the minister explain what are reasonable grounds? That also goes back to what we were discussing a bit earlier about volunteers. This tries to narrow it a little bit to where responsibility lies within an organisation.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The member may or may not be aware that this terminology has been adopted intentionally to make sure that it is consistent with other reporting requirements in Western Australian legislation for the reporting of child sex abuse. That terminology is used in the Children and Community Services Act 2004 for what is called mandatory reporting. The threshold of belief on reasonable grounds has been used to align with the threshold used in other Western Australian legislation to protect children under other reportable conduct schemes. It will enable consistency in education and guidance of persons and entities with multiple reporting requirements under WA legislation, consistency of information requirements for different reporting purposes under WA legislation and an alignment of definitions and reporting thresholds in two of the three other reportable conduct jurisdictions to enable consistency of treatment in multiple jurisdictions. Alignment means that the scheme can interact effectively and be compatible with other action to protect children in our state, including mandatory reporting with the working with children check scheme. Examples of the use of belief on reasonable grounds in WA legislation and other reportable conduct schemes include, as I mentioned before, mandatory reporting under the Children and Community Services Act and assessment notices under the Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004. The reportable conduct schemes in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory both use belief on reasonable grounds or a reasonable belief as the threshold for reporting reportable conduct.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I note the provision in proposed section 19G(1)(d), which states "an offence prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this paragraph." Can the minister outline what sort of offences, other than those conducts that will not come into statutory effect for another 12 months, as we spoke about earlier, could reasonably be prescribed by these regulations? The minister spoke before about New South Wales; are there examples from there of offences that have been prescribed by regulations that are not referred to in this legislation?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am advised that it was decided to include other prescribed offences to ensure that if there are offences that have not been envisaged in the legislation, they can be captured. That will be worked through in the regulations and there will be consultation about that. But I think it is important to ensure that, particularly when we are talking about reportable conduct that is broader than sexual offences and sexual abuse, which is the case with the Children and Community Services Act, we are clear about what other offences might take place and keep our options open in the regulations.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am still in the same clause. I ask this because I had in mind that when we talk about the other offences, none of these offences refer to online activity, which is probably one of the most common types of oppression that we see now. I have not asked specifically about that at any other point, but I wonder whether the

minister could see that as being required in the future, because it is not really outlined anywhere in this act as such. I can see that it could reasonably be brought into, for instance, the sexual offence area. However, it could be online bullying or a whole range of online activities that are not necessarily sexual in nature but could still lead to oppression of a person to a degree. I am wondering whether that is something that the minister envisaged or had in mind at any point when this legislation was being drawn up.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is important to understand that we are trying to capture a broad range of abuse of children, no matter what mechanism is used to apply that abuse, whether the abuse is sexual, psychological or physical. However, in the context of this scheme, it has to be done by an employee, contractor or volunteer—the definitions we have talked about—of the organisation. The scheme limits will be not the type of abuse, but rather who is alleged to have conducted that abuse and their relationship with the relevant entity that will be covered by this scheme. In answer to the member’s question about an employee, contractor or volunteer who conducts some sort of abusive behaviour but uses online mechanisms to do that, I would envisage that, yes, that will be covered.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I thank the minister for that, I thought it could be more explicitly laid out, because that is a form of abuse that can be used very easily. We know how easy it is for people to use those types of platforms to intimidate or offend.

The next point I would like to talk about is also in proposed section 19G(2), which states —

... *reportable conduct* does not include conduct that is —

- (a) reasonable for the discipline, management or care of a child or of another person in the presence of a child, having regard to —
 - (i) the characteristics of the child, including the age, health and developmental stage of the child; and
 - (ii) any relevant code of conduct or professional standard that at the time applied to the discipline, management or care of the child or the other person;

or

- (b) trivial or negligible and that has been or will be investigated and recorded as part of another workplace procedure ...

Could the minister just explain those matters? What will determine whether something falls under the test of being reasonable for the discipline, management or care of a child, and what might be regarded as trivial or negligible conduct?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I thank the member for the question. Again, we are helpfully instructed by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which covered off a number of these areas in its deliberations. In its final report, in volume 7, the royal commission noted the importance of legislation describing conduct that is not intended to be covered by reportable conduct schemes. The report states —

... legislation should define key terms, such as sexual misconduct, by describing the included behaviours or acts and also providing examples of excluded behaviours or acts that are not intended to be prohibited as part of the scheme. An example of the latter approach is found in the Australian Capital Territory legislation, which provides that reportable conduct does not include conduct:

- a. that is reasonable discipline, management or care of a child taking into account the characteristics of the child, and any relevant code of conduct or professional standard that at the time applied to the discipline, management or care of the child;

or

- b. if the conduct is investigated and recorded as part of workplace procedure—that is trivial or negligible ...

The *Ombudsman Act 1989* (ACT) provides the following examples of conduct that is not reportable conduct: touching a child to attract the child’s attention, to guide a child, or to comfort a distressed child; a school teacher raising their voice to attract attention or restore order in a classroom; accidental conduct.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I imagine in many circumstances it will be a rather subjective test. I am just reminded of behaviours that may not necessarily be physical in the sense of touching someone or disciplining them in that way, but perhaps more verbal abuse such as shouting or screaming in a child’s face. Will that be covered by this legislation? If there are codes of conduct that are applicable for the professional groups, do we know whether they will be the codes of conduct that will be applicable at any time in the future—they might not exist at the moment—or are they things that we now have access to?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am advised that the Ombudsman’s office has already begun scoping out the necessity to work with each sector that will be covered by this scheme to ensure that these sorts of issues are worked through and that there are guidance notes and discussions beforehand so that these issues can be made clear within the

context of each sector. For instance, in education settings, I would imagine in disability group homes as an example, or any number of different environments, a number of these issues of what is considered reasonable physical or verbal force in interacting with children would have been previously contemplated. A lot of this work will have already been done, but it will then be clear for those organisations and through the guidance notes, as I said, prepared by the Ombudsman's office. An important characteristic of this scheme is that it is not simply setting out a series of requirements that will apply across a range of different organisations, notwithstanding the different characteristics of those organisations, and then people are required to adhere to them overnight. In fact, many of those organisations will have their own schemes and practice guidelines, and the Ombudsman's office will work with them to ensure that people understand how the reportable conduct arrangement will apply in the context of those existing schemes. I think I referred to that yesterday in the second reading debate.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to proposed section 19I, "Entities to which the reportable conduct scheme applies". It refers to column 2 of schedule 2. As we know, there is a two-stage process in schedule 2, with some bodies already picked up. They are public bodies, which include a department or authority, providers of education services and providers of health services. I have a question relating to public bodies that provide services. I am asking this question specifically because I am also the shadow Minister for Transport. What is the situation in New South Wales and other jurisdictions with school bus services? In our case, School Bus Services is a subsection of the Public Transport Authority under the Department of Transport. Would that organisation be expected to have such a reportable conduct scheme? If so, will it be down to the manager of the business or someone at departmental level? For instance, who in School Bus Services would be responsible for reporting?

Ms S.F. McGURK: A government agency will be covered to the extent that it provides services to children. Again, this was instructed by the royal commission in its final report, which states —

Our starting point is that the handling of child sexual abuse complaints should only be subject to the oversight of a reportable conduct scheme where institutions:

- exercise a high degree of responsibility for children;
- engage in activities that involve a heightened risk of child sexual abuse, due to institutional characteristics, the nature of the activities involving children, or the additional vulnerability of the children the institution engages with.

Then it outlines a whole series of different organisations that could be covered. I would envisage that either public or private organisations running bus services for children would very much be covered by this setting. It is not just at a managerial or senior level within the organisation. All employees, contractors and volunteers, where the entity is covered, will be covered by the reportable conduct scheme.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I understand that they will be covered, but my question relates more to the level at which they will report to the commissioner. Who will be responsible? It is a bit like what we were talking about before about the head of a body or organisation. In this case, which organisation in the chain would be responsible for making the report? For instance, would it be a school bus operator, the school or School Bus Services itself as part of a government department? For instance, the orange school buses are run by private contractors in the main. They may have many buses or they may have one. Who will be responsible for that? If an answer is not available today, it would be helpful if the minister has an answer when the bill goes to the other place. I will sit down and let the minister say something and then I will ask another question in a similar vein.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am advised that in the example the member gave, the bus service contracts to the Public Transport Authority, so the director general, the head of the Department of Transport, will be the relevant CEO. All these issues—that depth of application and how this will apply in practice—will be clear when it is worked through, so organisations, such as the Department of Transport, in this case, will look at how this applies to the work that it does when large numbers of children are involved and the relevant entities covered underneath that. In this case, it would be a contractor.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to proposed section 19K, "Paramount consideration", which states —

The Commissioner and any other person performing functions under this Division must regard the best interests of children as the paramount consideration.

I do not think anybody in the room would have any difficulty with the sentiment of that section. Could the minister explain what that means in terms of the carriage of activities under this bill? What does that add to the bill other than stating something with which I think we would all agree?

Ms S.F. McGURK: As the member said, this proposed section mandates that anyone performing functions under the scheme must regard the best interests of the children as the paramount consideration. It is intended to guide the decision-making of the commissioner and relevant entities as to the approach that will be most protective of children at risk and to ensure consistency with relevant child protection legislation in our state, namely, the Children and Community Services Act 2004 and the Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004. This

terminology is used in other Western Australian legislation. In fact, the royal commission also referred to this in its final report. It supported paramouncy principles in reportable conduct scheme legislation. It went on to refer to the Victorian reportable conduct scheme and the protection of children as the paramount consideration in the context of child abuse.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to the next section, proposed section 19L, “Certain provisions not applicable if entity is agent of the Crown”. A series of provisions do not apply if the relevant entity is an agent of the Crown. Basically, these are offence provisions. I think the penalty is \$5 000, without flicking through them all. Can the minister explain why they do not apply if the entity is an agent of the Crown, even though there is designated reporting?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am advised that this is standard for Western Australian legislation.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to proposed section 19M, “Functions of Commissioner in relation to scheme”. Under proposed section 19M(1)(a), the commissioner will be responsible for overseeing and monitoring the scheme. The proposed section lists a series of functions, going over two pages. How will the commissioner be resourced to do that? What level of resourcing will be required? I think I saw in some of the texts that there was enough resourcing already but I would have thought this would need extra resources. Is there any expectation of how much this will cost to instigate? The amount of money will be directly related to how much work the commissioner can do in following up a matter that if he or she believed was not being fully reported but perhaps not at the point at which they felt there was an imminent problem, so a level of resourcing will be needed to make this work. Can the minister explain what that will be?

Ms S.F. McGURK: A budget allocation has already been made to the Ombudsman and his office. The budget is \$1.54 million for nine FTEs through to 15 FTEs in 2023–24. A total of \$6.611 million has been allocated over three years. As the member said, the Ombudsman has advised us that he thinks that that will be adequate to deal with the proportionate number of notifications that have been made in other states.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am still on the commissioner’s role. Proposed section 19M(1)(e) states —

if the Commissioner considers it to be in the public interest to do so—to investigate reportable allegations and reportable convictions;

Again, there is a public interest test in proposed paragraph (f). Is the definition of “public interest” known? Does the commissioner have to provide some guidance on how he or she would provide a test to see whether something is in the public interest? How would that be determined?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am advised that the consideration of public interest is found elsewhere in the Ombudsman’s legislation. It is a consideration that he and his office are required to take into account through a variety of their functions.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I will move to proposed paragraph (j), which asks the Ombudsman to report to Parliament on the reportable conduct scheme. Can the minister advise me how often that report will be made? Does that mean an annual report? What will be the expectation of the nature and frequency of the reporting?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Member, this bill requires that there be an annual report, but if the Ombudsman decided on an own-motion investigation to look at a particular issue, that could trigger a separate report from the annual report.

Mr R.S. LOVE: If there is a serious situation with a government department, for instance, could we expect to see a report tabled in Parliament specifically about that situation?

Ms S.F. McGURK: If the Ombudsman decides on his own motion that an investigation is warranted, then yes.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I will move to proposed section 19N, which allows the commissioner to exempt certain types of conduct of employees of a relevant entity, or a class or kind of relevant entity, from being reportable conduct. Can the minister explain why this provision is here and perhaps give an example of the type of class of activity, or the class or kind of relevant entity considered to be exempt under this provision? When the minister has done that, I will ask her further questions about why.

Ms S.F. McGURK: One of the considerations in this exemption is to ensure that the Ombudsman can focus his or his office’s efforts on the most serious matters and on relevant entities that have not demonstrated a satisfactory level of competence in investigating. The member asked which entities will be exempt. An organisation will be exempt if the Ombudsman is satisfied that the organisation had dealt with the matter adequately within its own context of investigations; if the conduct has not created a heightened risk for children and, therefore, does not need to be captured by the scheme; and if entities have established effective investigation processes and demonstrated an ability to respond to investigations to an appropriate standard. This will ensure that if the Ombudsman or his office is satisfied that that organisation has undertaken a proper investigation and action with regard to the conduct of its employees, contractors or volunteers, the Ombudsman and his office do not repeat the work done by that organisation.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am really a bit perplexed by this because I do not understand a circumstance in which one would exempt conduct that should be reported from being reported, unless there is some alternative method of reporting. Is

that the reason for the exemption? Surely, it is not there to allow the conduct to go unnoticed. Perhaps the minister could elaborate on why such an exemption would be made and perhaps give some examples of organisations that she expects will be exempt.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Again, we have helpful guidance from the royal commission. In its final report, volume 7, the royal commission recommended that reportable conduct schemes include provisions for the oversight body to exempt a class or kind of conduct. It said in recommendation 7.10 —

Reportable conduct schemes should provide for:

...

g. oversight body powers and functions that include

...

iv. power to exempt any class or kind of conduct from being reportable conduct

Mr R.S. LOVE: I know that the minister is trying to represent the royal commission finding as much as possible, but it would really be instructive if she could give me a reason, other than the fact that it is in the royal commission's report, for an organisation to be exempt from the provisions of the act.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I think I have answered this previously. I will read the explanatory memorandum; it might be clearer. It states —

This section is intended to enable future exemption of a class or kind of conduct where it was inadvertently included in, or it is no longer appropriate or necessary for, the conduct to be captured by, the Scheme. It is also intended that this clause will minimise any inappropriate or unnecessary regulatory burden in relation to specified conduct which does not create a heightened risk for children, while maintaining protection for children from conduct that puts them at risk; to be consistent with the relevant recommendations of the Royal Commission; and for national consistency.

I think the important consideration is that it is conduct that has been identified as not creating a heightened risk for children and, therefore, does not need to be captured by the scheme, or specified conduct for entities that have established effective investigative processes et cetera. It is to exempt conduct that does not create a heightened risk for children.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I note that the bill says that the commissioner may do so in accordance with regulation. These are regulations that are not yet drawn up. When they are drawn up, they might be instructive about the types of circumstances and give a little bit more detail to illustrate exactly what we are trying to get at here. I think that would be valuable.

One other matter that I hope will be covered by regulations—it is not covered in the legislation—would be some level of periodic review of that exemption. It seems to me that once it is published on the website, that is it, there is no further requirement. Perhaps there could be consideration in the regulations at least of some level of review of those exemptions or some culling, say, of the classes of entities if a lot of entities appear in the same circumstance. That is a comment. I do not really expect the minister to answer.

With the Acting Speaker's indulgence, I will move to proposed section 19O, "Commissioner may exempt entities". Before we were talking about a class of entities, and that might be, I do not know, offenders with fewer than five children—a class of entity—and this is an individual entity that might be exempted from the reportable conduct scheme. The bill says that the commissioner must give written notice to the organisation. Further, over the page it says that the exemption continues until the commissioner gives written notice that it is revoked. That is an exemption given to the organisation, but I note that unlike in proposed section 19N, there is no requirement for publishing it. I wonder whether the minister could outline why it would not be desirable to provide a list of entities that have been granted an exemption.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The intention of this exemption is that it would apply to a specific entity and that would be communicated directly to that entity by the Ombudsman or his office, as the member said. It is important to understand the reason for the exemption; that is, those entities have been identified as not creating a heightened risk for children and, therefore, do not need to be captured by the scheme. This also covers entities that have established effective investigative processes and demonstrated ability to respond to investigations to an appropriate standard. The exemption can be revoked if changed circumstances mean that it should no longer apply. I think this really goes to ensuring that the focus is on those sectors or organisations in which there is a heightened risk of possible abuse so that resources are applied to them. That really has been a cornerstone of our approach to mandatory reporting more broadly, as well as this reportable conduct scheme.

Mr R.S. LOVE: If there is no public knowledge of the exemptions given, would there be a requirement or an expectation that the Ombudsman would report some sort of metric on how many organisations are routinely being exempted so that there is some level of understanding about the quantum of organisations being exempted and perhaps even some idea of what sectors those entities may lay in?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I envisage that some sort of reporting on that, perhaps not specifically, but, as the member said, some sort of metric, could be included in the annual reporting by the Ombudsman. There is some opportunity for members to examine the budget of the Ombudsman's office in budget estimates, so there might be opportunities there to drill down on what sort of exemptions for entities have been applied by the Ombudsman.

Mr R.S. LOVE: If I could move on to proposed section 19P, which is the exemption from the requirement to undertake investigations. I just note proposed section 19P(3), which gives the reasons why an entity may be exempted if it has already been dealt with by another appropriate person or body. We do not want to duplicate investigations, for instance. It is not good for the entity or the child or children involved, I would imagine, to have multiple investigations going at the same time. The explanatory memorandum says —

- the Commissioner is of the opinion that the report of the matter to the relevant entity under section 19T ... is frivolous or vexatious or not made in good faith; or —

So, there is some sort of repetition; as politicians, we often we get letters from people who repeat the same allegations or make the same frivolous complaints —

- the head of the relevant entity has made a request for the exemption in a notice under section 19Y ...

Could the minister just explain some of the circumstances in which she would envisage a relevant entity wanting to make such a request? We are going to run out of time, I think.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I hope this addresses the member's question. Examples of investigations that may be exempted by the commissioner include when the alleged conduct is not reportable conduct; or the report of the matter is trivial or not made in good faith, as the member referred to; or when another appropriate body such as the police or a regulatory body has already investigated the conduct and the investigation would compromise an ongoing investigation by police or another appropriate body. The exemption can be revoked if changed circumstances mean the investigation should proceed.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Similar to the reporting provisions in other proposed sections, there is no requirement for this to be published anywhere. The exemption will be communicated to the organisation and, presumably, other relevant organisations would also need to be notified. For instance, if there are numerous investigations happening, just how will that be reported to the other entities, say the police, the Corruption and Crime Commission or some other group that might be looking into the situation?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We have disclosure and consultation with other relevant entities such as the police and the CCC elsewhere in the bill.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Proposed section 19Q deals with the approval of the heads of relevant entities in certain circumstances. We touched before on how it might work in the case in which a person who is outside of the state is the head of the organisation. Can the minister outline some examples of entities that might not have someone who could be described as a CEO? As would be reasonably expected, there would be a hierarchy in a religious order, with a person who could be nominated. Can the minister outline how that would be determined, given that even small not-for-profit organisations generally have some sort of constitution and structure?

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 1680.]

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

WAGES POLICY — INFLATION

218. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:

I refer to the \$1.2 billion provision in the 2021–22 *Government mid-year financial projections statement* for the Premier's commitment for either a 2.5 per cent annual wage increase, with a \$1 000 sign-on bonus, or a 2.5 per cent annual increase, with a further 0.25 per cent per annum for reform measures to be negotiated. Given that this increase reflects an expected consumer price index rate of 2.5 per cent, will he guarantee to increase this policy to maintain real wages if inflation increases?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. The opposition leader is correct. We announced a new wages policy at the end of last year, which was, I am advised, the most generous of all the state governments of Australia. It reflects our new and improved financial position as a result of the government getting the finances back under control over our time in office, the fact that we managed to keep the mining industry open and, therefore, continued to keep the revenues from it coming in over the COVID period, against the objection of many people in the east and locally, and the fact that we secured the new GST deal. The wages policy is as the Leader of the Opposition outlined it, which is a 2.5 per cent wage increase per annum and a \$1 000 sign-on bonus for two years or, alternatively, a 2.5 per cent wage increase per annum plus a 0.25 per cent per annum increase for negotiated workforce reform measures. That remains the government's wages policy and, as I said, I am advised that it is the most generous in Australia.

What has occurred with the Russian invasion of Ukraine—as odd as it is to say that, that is what has occurred—has increased the cost of some products and some cost-of-living measures, which may well be, and hopefully are, very temporary. That remains the government’s wages policy, as we outlined before. As I said, I am advised that it is—it certainly was at the time we announced it—the most generous in Australia.

WAGES POLICY — INFLATION

219. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:

I have a supplementary question. I thank the Premier. Can I confirm that there will be no change to the wages policy in the upcoming state budget and that if inflation increases, there will be no matching by this government to ensure that there is not an erosion of real wages for our public sector workers?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

As I outlined to the member, and have outlined a number of times, the budget will come down on 12 May, in which many things will be revealed. It will have a strong focus on cost-of-living pressures on families and individuals across the state.

In terms of the issues surrounding cost-of-living pressures and inflation, hopefully they are temporary because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Hopefully, that situation resolves as quickly as possible and some of those inflationary pressures come out of both the Australian economy and economies around the world.

GST DISTRIBUTION

220. Mr D.R. MICHAEL to the Premier:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government’s strong response to the COVID-19 pandemic that has delivered a strong economy and a strong mining industry.

- (1) Can the Premier outline to the house how the Western Australian economy has supported the rest of the country throughout the COVID-19 pandemic?
- (2) Can the Premier advise the house whether it is correct that other states are subsidising Western Australia through the distribution of the GST?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for Balcatta for the question.

- (1)–(2) It is true that the government, upon its arrival in office in March 2017, certainly worked hard to secure a better deal from the GST. We secured that in 2018, after many governments over many years had tried and failed. We secured the floor of 70¢, rising to 75¢, via the strenuous efforts of various people in the government working with the commonwealth government and Treasury to get that better deal. No state or territory across Australia has lost a cent from these reforms. In fact, they have had massive windfalls. Every state and territory across Australia benefits from the strength of the Western Australian economy. We receive only 70¢ for every \$1 we put in; in other words, 30¢ of every \$1 we put in is redistributed to the other states and territories.

I was pleased to see today that Anthony Albanese guaranteed that the deal will not change. The Prime Minister says that it will not change, yet the other states are working themselves into a frenzy on the issue, as though their financial failures somehow should be blamed on the people of Western Australia. Some of them even claimed that they are subsidising Western Australia. It is very odd for states like Tasmania or South Australia, or, in fact, any of them, to suggest that somehow they are subsidising Western Australia when clearly this state sends enormous amounts of revenue in their direction. Western Australia gets 70¢ for every \$1 it puts in; New South Wales gets 96¢; Victoria gets 92¢; Queensland gets \$1.06; South Australia gets \$1.35; Tasmania gets \$1.96; and the Northern Territory, from memory, gets about \$4.50. Tasmania basically for every \$1 it puts in gets \$2 back. It is a remarkable electronic gaming machine that the Tasmanians have supporting them under this system!

Over the last 10 years, Western Australia has subsidised the other states via this system to the tune of \$32.2 billion. As I have said many times before, despite their best efforts, we managed to keep our industries open and COVID-free over the course of the last two years, which meant that enormous revenues flowed to the commonwealth, which then did those massive bailout packages, particularly for New South Wales and Victoria when they were overrun with COVID. By keeping our industries strong and putting in place the measures we did, we ensured that those states were the recipients of much commonwealth revenue, which Western Australia will play a large part in paying for.

On top of that, because we kept the mining industry strong over the course of the last two years, Qantas made money out of WA—the only place it made money in the last two years. It is now buying four new planes for the Western Australian fleet to meet the demand. It was odd to have heard the comments of Qantas considering that Western Australia was its only profitable jurisdiction over this period. Be that as it may, we are on good terms with Qantas and we will continue to ensure that we support it into the future.

All I would say to the other states is that they need to look at their own budget management rather than blame Western Australia. I know that New South Wales in particular leads the charge on these things. It thinks that it is kind of a big deal. To quote Ron Burgundy, I think it should get out of its glass case of emotion and start focusing on managing its own finances. New South Wales sold all its assets and then blew its spending and its debt. As Ron said, it escalated quickly in New South Wales, and it should not look to the people of Western Australia to bail it out for its own failures.

SYNERGY — HARDSHIP SUPPORT

221. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Energy:

I remind the minister of the \$600 million pre-election inducement in the form of the \$600 Synergy electricity credit for customers that came at a time when there were not anywhere near the cost-of-living pressures that we currently face.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Dr D.J. HONEY: With the budget surplus projections now bigger than before the election, will the minister commit to a similar electricity cost relief for households that are struggling with the pressures of cost of living today; and, if not, why not?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

I thank the member very much for the question and the Speaker for the call. It is interesting that the member for Cottesloe is asking me to implement a policy that he rejects. He is opposed to the electricity credit that we gave when we were able to in 2020. He said that it was middle-class welfare and we were giving money to rich people. That was his position. It is not a surprise that he is inconsistent because members will remember that at the last sitting of Parliament I reminded the member about the false claims he made about a grievance in this chamber and about a claim that it was a Western Power outage when it was in fact a matter in his own electorate that had nothing to do with Western Power. He has not used his opportunity to correct the record for either of those issues that he raised in the chamber.

Another thing that the member has never used his opportunity to correct the record on is his claim of 11 March 2021 that the chief executive officers of all three government trading enterprises had supported the Liberal Party's energy policy in the 2021 state election.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I just want to remind the member about a letter that he received from Ed Kalajzic, the chief executive officer of Western Power, dated 12 March 2021. I will read it in part —

You stated that you had met with the CEO's of all three GTE's and that they (myself included) —

Point of Order

Mr R.S. LOVE: The question clearly was about the cost of living and the \$600 that had previously been granted, not a grievance or other matter that is not relevant to this matter at all.

The SPEAKER: Minister, perhaps you can take those comments into account, but I am not upholding it as a point of order.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I will read it again. The letter that the member has received is dated 12 March 2021— one year and 25 days ago. The CEO said —

I wish to put on record that at no stage of that meeting did I or Western Power staff express support for your ... policies.

Dr D.J. Honey: You can't answer the question, can you? One, you are misleading the house, and, two, you can't answer the question.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: What I want to do is get the member to fulfil his obligations to this Parliament to correct the record at the first available opportunity. He falsely claimed that the chief executive officer of Western Power supported his policies when he knew that was not true. He came in here and falsely claimed that there had been a grievance about Roleystone power outages when he knew it was not true. He falsely claimed that Western Power disconnected communities in his own electorate when he knew that was not true either.

Point of Order

Dr D.J. HONEY: Under standing order 98, the minister is misleading the house. He is claiming that I said things that I did not say at all, and he is not answering the question.

The SPEAKER: I am not upholding that as a point of order. You are effectively attempting to enter into a debate on this topic. If you would like to accuse the minister of misleading the house, I would suggest that you do that by way of a substantive motion. Minister, I will ask you to perhaps draw your answer to a close because I suspect you will have an opportunity in answer to a supplementary question to add some further information.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: As I say, this is a member who is happy to leave this incorrect information there.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: He needs to use his opportunity to apologise and correct the record.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: As I said already —

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: — I cannot believe that this member comes into the house and asks me —

The SPEAKER: Order! Sorry, one moment. Member for Cottesloe, if you continue to interject, you will not necessarily get a supplementary question, so make your choice now whether you want to continue to interject or whether you would like a supplementary question.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I cannot believe that the member comes into the house and asks me to implement a policy that he opposes.

SYNERGY — HARDSHIP SUPPORT

222. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Energy:

I have a supplementary question. Is the minister incapable or incompetent? Can he simply say whether he will provide cost relief to the people of Western Australia in regard to electricity prices?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

The one thing that we will not do is follow the Liberal Party and double the cost of electricity. That is what the Liberal Party did. Electricity prices increased by 97 per cent when it was in government. That is what the Liberal Party did. The first thing it did in government was to put up the price of electricity by 25 per cent.

Dr D.J. Honey: What are you doing?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: We have held the price of the household model to a very low level during our period of government. In fact, in 2021 it went backwards because of the \$600 credit that the member opposed. I cannot believe the gall of this member who comes in here and makes false claims and then calls for a policy that he objects to and rejects. He criticises us for reducing household costs yet the Liberal Party has a history in government of increasing household costs.

DIRECT FLIGHTS — BUSSELTON–MELBOURNE

223. Ms E.J. KELSBIE to the Minister for Tourism:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to supporting jobs and businesses in Western Australia's tourism industry. Can the minister update the house on the measures the McGowan Labor government is taking to support the state's tourism operators and attract more interstate visitors to WA, including its efforts to support the new direct flights between Melbourne and Busselton?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I thank the member for the question. It is a great question and really highlights a terrific milestone that has taken place today. I have just now returned from Busselton–Margaret River Airport where I was proud to welcome Jetstar's first ever commercial air service between Melbourne and Busselton. I was joined by Hon Alannah MacTiernan, the Minister for Regional Development, and local members from the state and federal government, including the Mayor of Busselton, who were all there to celebrate this great milestone that means people will now be able to travel from Melbourne to Busselton or from Busselton to Melbourne and take advantage of this great new air link. This fabulous new air service will offer a gateway into Western Australia that is set to boost the tourism industry, allowing interstate visitors to fly direct to the south west. We know that the south west and the Margaret River region is one of the jewels in the crown of Western Australia's tourism product. It is exciting to now see that people have the option to fly directly into the south west to really take advantage of all there is to offer. The direct flights will now run three times a week, providing a regular service that will unlock new opportunities for investment and job creation.

This government, through the South West Development Commission and Tourism WA, has worked closely with the City of Busselton, which has done a great deal of work to get this up and running and take the project from a business case to development to securing the airline service. This does more than just welcome tourists. Obviously, it provides job opportunities for people in the tourism industry. Looking around that airport we saw baggage handlers, people doing security screening and people working in the car hire bays. They are really taking advantage of this great

new opportunity. This morning, 185 people flew in from Melbourne, and it was great to speak with some of them. The twin sister of a young family who came over to visit friends and relatives in Busselton said that it was much easier to fly directly into Busselton without having to go through Perth. A young family that was travelling back to Narrogin thought it would be easier to go to Busselton first and travel on to Narrogin rather than go into the City of Perth.

The McGowan government is also giving visitors another reason to explore the region with the South West Wanderer Pass. The regional tourism organisation called Australia's South West has an initiative offering visitors who book the new Melbourne to Busselton route \$100 towards participating in tours, experiences and attractions around Margaret River and beyond. The McGowan government is also supporting tour operators right around the state with the recently announced incentive offering out-of-state visitors 50 per cent off WA tourism experiences. That \$500 000 campaign will see more than a million dollars injected directly into WA tour and experience companies while also helping to promote the incredible activities on offer around the state. The campaign will provide discounts on more than 300 tours and attractions, whether it is camels in Broome, whale sharks in Exmouth or cultural tours in Margaret River. This is a great opportunity for people to wander out yonder and really explore WA.

Finally, I think we should all acknowledge that over the last couple of years we have all heard the stories about how hospitality and accommodation in some areas in the state have gone gangbusters and have had a great couple of seasons. We should all reflect on the fact that tour operators, generally, wherever they are in the state, rely more upon interstate and international arrivals, and so they have done it tough. They have done it tough and they are looking forward to a great year now that we have the borders open and WA is open for business. This new voucher package will hopefully provide them with a great boost, and that is because the McGowan government is committed to making sure that everyone knows that we are open for visitors and we cannot wait for them to come.

The SPEAKER: Sorry; member for Warren–Blackwood, do you have a subsequent question?

Ms E.J. Kelsbie: No; I have another question.

The SPEAKER: Okay. Leader of the Opposition.

STATE BUDGET — COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES

224. **Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:**

I am not sitting down this time!

I refer to reports that demand for Foodbank services has more than doubled since 2020, with daily average customer numbers in Bunbury alone jumping from 20 to nearly 80, despite our state's financial position. How is it that in a state as wealthy as Western Australia, with an eye-watering budget surplus, we have so many families struggling to make ends meet in not only Perth city, but also our regions?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

That was a very broad question. Obviously, when you are in government, you do lots of things. We have taken the stance in our time in office that we had to concentrate on getting Western Australians back to work, and that is what we have done. We have created over 150 000 new jobs in Western Australia during our time in office, despite going through a global pandemic that floored economies all over the world. We have been the only mainland state that did not go into recession over the course of the pandemic. At the same time, because we managed to keep COVID out and because we put in place, admittedly, reforms that had been talked about forever and never been put in place, we managed to diversify the economy and ensure that far more Western Australians have an array of jobs and opportunities than they did before. We then put in place measures to ensure that more Western Australians could get trained more affordably than ever before. We reversed many of the massive cost increases for Western Australians to go and get trained that members opposite had put in place. The cost of some courses went down by 72 per cent over our time in office, which has meant that a surge of young Western Australians in particular, but also mature age students, took the opportunity to go and get trained over this period.

Then, as a consequence of our good financial management, we have invested in numerous things. The public housing package that we announced last year was the biggest investment in public housing ever seen in Western Australia. We put that in place last year. We put a package in place to ensure that private owners who wanted to go and own their own house could do so. We put that in place. We then ensured, over COVID in particular, that we put in place a whole range of measures to fund some of those not-for-profit organisations that help people in need. I even went and met with the Lotteries Commission and asked it to totally reorient its operations to support organisations like the one the member mentioned and to make sure they had enough resources to support people over this period.

We then come to the cost-of-living pressures. We put up fees and charges by less than half of what members opposite did in office over similar periods of time. As the Minister for Energy said a minute ago, in some years the previous government put up the price of electricity by 25 per cent for ordinary families. We put in place a \$600 credit on people's electricity bills and opposition members attacked it and said they did not support it. They then had the temerity and the hide to come in here and complain about it and say that they now support it. I am actually not sure whether members opposite support it or not. I do not think much of what they say makes sense. I do not know whether members opposite support it, but all those things we put in place over this period were to support Western Australians.

It is true that we have also focused on proper financial management, which the opposition did not do in office and it was unsustainable. The opposition had us heading to \$44 billion worth of debt off a \$5 billion base when it arrived in office, and somehow it thought that was a good thing—loading up the debt, losing the credit rating, increasing the interest payments.

What Western Australia needs and has is a government that not only focuses on keeping the state strong, but also has a strong stream of fairness running through it, which is exactly what we do. All those things I just mentioned are in a strong stream of fairness so that Western Australians can have opportunities they could not have before. That is what we will do and what we continue to do. As the Minister for Community Services will tell members, we have actually increased the base funding for many of the not-for-profit organisations out there that support people across the community to ensure that they have ongoing funding to provide all those services. Our time in office has been punctuated by good financial management, job creation and a whole range of social, health and other programs that have helped families, and, at the same time, we are keeping a real focus on cost-of-living pressures.

STATE BUDGET — COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES

225. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:

I have a supplementary question. If the Premier's management, as he has just outlined, of the state's economy has been so good and has been the creation of so many jobs over the last two years, why are services like Foodbank Western Australia being inundated by demand? The numbers are there. The numbers of people accessing services like Foodbank have doubled under this government's watch.

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

We have focused on getting people back to work and we have focused on properly funding organisations out there like those ones. But as some of the ministers have just commented, there is a range of competing factors in there, including the commonwealth government. But I will just make sure that you are aware of one thing: during your time as the Minister for Water, the average cost per household went up by \$288. For five years in government, our average cost went up by \$116 per household. In other words, when you were in office for a shorter time, it went up by more than double in the same period that we have been in office. Your record is there. We will continue to remind people of your record when you were in office. It was an appalling record. The government blew debt, blew deficits and blew cost-of-living pressures on households all over Western Australia. Then, when we put in place cost-of-living measures to assist people, you attack them and you criticise them. You still have not worked out what you stand for—the lot of you. The six of you have not worked out what you stand for. The only thing you stand for, which is not a very smart thing to do, is to oppose whatever the government does. That is the only thing you stand for. No matter how right it is, how justified it is, how sensible it is, the only thing you stand for is to oppose what the government does, and if you think that is a recipe for winning elections, it is not.

MAIN ROADS — MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS

226. Ms E.J. KELSBIE to the Minister for Transport:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's decision to end the outsourcing of road maintenance and bring those jobs back in-house to Main Roads.

- (1) Can the minister please outline to the house what this means for regional jobs, including employment opportunities for Aboriginal people?
- (2) Can the minister outline to the house how this decision will support economic growth in regional Western Australia?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:

I thank the member for Warren–Blackwood for the question. Of course, the member for Warren–Blackwood joined the Premier and me last week in Manjimup where we announced the end to those long-term maintenance contracts.

- (1)–(2) I think everyone would be aware that the wholesale privatisation of Main Roads work occurred under the stewardship of a Liberal–National government. What we saw was a massive reduction in the number of jobs in Main Roads. We saw the loss of hundreds of jobs in regional WA. We all knew the impact that it had on towns, yet it was something that again demonstrated how all the Liberal and National Parties do when in government is create job uncertainty and take jobs from the regions.

We commissioned a significant accounting firm to undertake an economic analysis, and that analysis showed that bringing those jobs back in-house at the end of those long-term maintenance contracts would do a lot of things. It would assist with employing and training young people in the regions. It would assist and allow for a greater direct employment of Aboriginal people. Remember that under that wholesale privatisation we saw the number of Aboriginal people involved in our road construction and maintenance fall dramatically. We have started to reverse that, and this will again be reversed even more as we go down our path of bringing those jobs in-house.

We also saw, of course, as I said, many regional towns being impacted. The analysis shows that 419 permanent jobs will be created in regional WA. Workers will have access to better pay and better leave conditions. It will be value for money and cost taxpayers less, and the gross state product will actually increase as a result. It is a very, very strong recognition of the strong case to end that wholesale privatisation.

It also allows us to create new Main Roads offices in Broome, Karratha, Manjimup and Esperance and to expand other existing facilities.

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is funny that the Leader of the Opposition says that, because I refer to an opposition —
Several members interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I am glad the opposition leader seems to now support it, because the opposition alliance went out to criticise what we were doing. It criticised that decision of supporting regional Western Australia by saying —

“While the State Government intends to hire locals wherever possible, they will inevitably have to bring in new workers to fill all the roles.

...

“It’s all well and good for WA Labor to announce new regional jobs, but the tricky part is actually delivering them.

It went on to say that we will need to do more for housing, and people do not want them in their towns because there is not enough housing. You actually oppose the commitment. You opposed our decision.

Several members interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: What a ridiculous—you stripped workers from regional WA and you should be ashamed of yourself for what you did to regional WA. When you won government, all you did was run around and you did not address the core issues in regional WA, like job security and more jobs in the regions. That is what we are doing, members. We believe in regional WA. No wonder they call you the “FIFO Nats”, because all you want to do is have the same FIFO for these sorts of road maintenance jobs in the regions.

This is an excellent policy backed up by economics and it will deliver excellent results. Again, the opposition alliance does not know what it stands for. Does it want more jobs in the regions? It does not sound like it does. Members opposite go out and criticise more jobs in the regions. Again, they never —

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yesterday, you said there were 1 000 empty ones. Is that still true?

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: You are all over the place. Yesterday, you said there were 1 000 empty ones, and now you are saying that there is not enough housing. I do not understand. You are not consistent in 24 hours.

Again, we are delivering —

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Honestly; you should be embarrassed. As a minister of the previous government, you privatised Water Corporation jobs and stripped jobs out of regional WA. You did nothing for roads in regional WA—nothing! You flew in and out of here, you never cared and you never delivered. Look at this house and look at your side now. You did nothing when you were in government.

WATER PRICES

227. **Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Water:**

I remind the minister of his government’s significant water price increases, up to 16 per cent in one year alone, 2018, for consumption above 500 kilolitres, which the minister claimed was needed to manage the budget and was aimed at water guzzlers in the western suburbs. I further remind the minister that Water Corporation data exposed the fallacy of this claim by showing that high water-consuming homes are mainly families across the suburbs who happen to have four or more people in their house. Noting that the budget position does not need added revenue from higher water prices and as those large increases are an attack on larger families who are feeling the pinch of the rising cost of living, will the minister rescind the large water price increase that he inflicted upon families for consumption above 500 kilolitres; and, if not, why not?

The SPEAKER: Just before the minister answers, Leader of the Liberal Party, there is a lot of discussion in your question. I would urge you to consider in future how much argument you should actually have in a question. Although you need sometimes to add some context at the start, that preamble was rather long. The minister in response, please.

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

I thank the member for the question. I welcome him back to the water portfolio. I think members opposite have never really taken the water portfolio seriously. When they were in government, they had four water ministers in eight years. I thought that was pretty bad. In the five years they have been in opposition, they have already had four different spokespersons for water: David Honey, Steve Thomas, David Honey for a second time and James Hayward.

Point of Order

Dr D.J. HONEY: I believe it is appropriate to refer to members not by their name, but by their designation—their seat.

The SPEAKER: That is quite right. I give the minister guidance that members of this house should be referred to by their seat title and members of the upper house need to be referred to with the title “honourable”.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr D.J. KELLY: I take that on board.

The point is that the opposition has had four shadow spokespersons for water in the past five years. I welcome the member back to the portfolio so that he can renew his interest in the issue of water.

There are questions from the other side about water pricing increases. The opposition’s record in government was horrendous. At the end of its period in government, it was cutting off 2 500 Western Australian families, having their water reduced to a trickle because they could not pay their bills. That was 2 500 WA families a year, when the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Water. It is a terribly humiliating thing for families to find that they cannot shower their children or wash their clothes. That was the opposition’s record in government.

When we came to government, we asked the Water Corporation to review the way it dealt with hardship issues. In the full year before COVID hit, that number of customers had gone down from 2 500 to just under 800. That is a massive decline in the number of customers who experienced that, because we were proactive with families who were struggling to pay their water bills. We introduced a whole range of new schemes to assist people who may be finding it difficult. We were so successful that the Financial Counsellors’ Association of Western Australia wrote two letters to us in two years outlining and congratulating the government for the hardship measures we put in place through the Water Corporation. Our record, compared with the previous government, has been outstanding.

The previous government increased the price of water. Again, the Leader of the Opposition sat in the Minister for Water’s position for a considerable time at the end of that government. Every year, for the eight years it was in office, it increased the price water by above the rate of inflation—6.7 per cent, 10.8 per cent, 8.5 per cent, 6.8 per cent, six per cent, 5.2 per cent, 4.5 per cent and 4.5 per cent. Compare that with our record in office—six per cent, 5.5 per cent and 2.5 per cent. The residential price of water actually went down during COVID. The increases under this government have been significantly less than those during the term of the previous government.

The particular increase that the member is talking about, the increase in the upper tier for customers who use in excess of 500 kilolitres, was to encourage high water users to use less water and, therefore, save more money. Interestingly, at the time, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia congratulated the government for that move. It saw it as a very useful price signal to send —

Dr D.J. Honey: But you’ve targeted big families—that’s all.

Mr D.J. KELLY: If the member looks at where those customers are, he will see that most of the people who use more than 500 kilolitres are those on very big blocks, many of them in your electorate, member for Cottesloe.

We stand on our record. We have done everything we can to assist struggling families when they have needed assistance to pay their water bills. We have a much better record than you ever had in government.

WATER PRICES**228. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Water:**

I have a supplementary question. What drives the minister’s hostility to families with two or more children that he would punish them financially just because they happen to need more water than smaller families?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

The member for Cottesloe obviously did not listen to the answer to the question. I reminded you that when you were in government and the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Water, the water supply of 2 500 families was reduced to a trickle every year because they were struggling to pay their water bills. That is how you dealt with families.

Prior to COVID, we reduced that number by 60 or 70 per cent. During COVID, we actually stopped that practice altogether. I am not going to be lectured by you about what we can do to assist families. Through the processes we have put in place, we discovered that over 100 households had significantly high water bills because a member of the household was doing home dialysis. That is something that saves taxpayers’ money because they are not having dialysis in hospitals. What did we do? We started the Medical Assist program whereby we gave families who have a family member on home dialysis 30 000 litres of free water every two months so that they could do

dialysis at home and not end up with a huge water bill. We actually care about workers and we care about their families, and through the structures that we have put in place through the Water Corporation, we are helping those families who, for whatever reason, may be struggling to pay their water bills.

FOSTER CARERS

229. Mrs L.A. MUNDAY to the Minister for Child Protection:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to supporting foster carers in Western Australia and to keeping children safe. Can the minister update the house on the initiatives this government is delivering to provide support to foster carers who are looking after Western Australia's most vulnerable children?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I thank the member for the question and also the support she gives carers in her electorate. I have spoken to her many times about some of the network and support organisations and I know she is very engaged with them.

Western Australia is home to a number of quiet heroes—people who step up, often outside the limelight and with not much fanfare, and do an amazing job. Foster carers in our state are amongst those quiet heroes. These people take children in care into their homes and into their hearts. Often they do that for short periods knowing that the child protection system path and plan for those children is for them to be reunited with their families, provided, of course, that it is safe to do so. At other times they will take children into their homes and families for a number of years. I know that in their time, many members would have met foster carers and carers who have cared for scores of children in their foster caring lives. We are very grateful to them as a government and also as a state.

We take our responsibility to work with those foster carers very seriously. Since becoming the Minister for Child Protection, I have worked very closely with individual foster carers and the Foster Care Association of Western Australia to ensure that we are giving the right support. The Foster Care Association provides not only individual case support for foster carers, but also advocacy. Those of you who have met Fay Alford, the head of the Foster Care Association of Western Australia, will know that she is very forthright; you will never die wondering with Fay Alford in her advocacy role. In 2019, we gave \$150 000 to the Foster Care Association to employ three new additional part-time staff members to increase its level of support. Since this initial grant, the Department of Communities has continued to provide funding to the association to boost these additional supports. I was pleased to be able to ring Fay Alford the other day to tell her that a further grant of \$225 000 has been allocated to the association to fund the continuation of these additional support services through to June next year.

In addition, the Department of Communities has appointed a new director of fostering and family care to ensure that there is a focus on ensuring a culturally appropriate, inclusive and supportive approach to recruiting and retaining foster and family carers in our state. We are conscious that when people express an interest and make some inquiries to be a foster or family carer, it can take time to get approvals through because we need to go through a proper process. Sometimes that can take time and we are trying to expedite that and make it as quick as possible. But this new position of director of fostering and family care will provide focus to ensure that we get those processes done as quickly as possible.

The *Foster care refresh project* report, which we tabled in Parliament in August last year, was an opportunity to look at improvements to our system. The partnership between the Department of Communities, the Foster Care Association, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, and the Child and Family Alliance WA is all part of a network of organisations designed to improve outcomes for children in care and to work with foster carers and family and significant other carers, with community sector organisations all working together and across government agencies. Last time we were in Parliament, I mentioned the \$3.5 million Health Navigator pilot, which is a really significant investment by Health, understanding that we have particular obligations to young people in care. I am grateful to my parliamentary secretary, the member for Swan Hills, who will help us work through that process to ensure that we have some dedicated health professionals in two districts—one in the metro area and the other in the regional area—to help, as the name implies, to work their way through the health system and make sure that the health needs of children in care are met.

Thanks again to foster carers in our state; we are very indebted to you and we hope that we are demonstrating as a government that we are providing resources and attention to your needs so that you can best provide support for children in care.

FIREARMS OWNERSHIP

230. Mr V.A. CATANIA to the Minister for Police:

I refer to the comments made by Assistant Commissioner Brad Royce in 2021 —

“When you look at the violence that we're seeing at a growing rate in Perth ... you see that the firearms they use are not licensed firearms ...

- (1) Given that it is illegal firearms, not registered ones, that are responsible for violent crime, why did the minister publish maps identifying the location of law-abiding firearm owners?
- (2) How has the publishing of maps made Western Australians safe?

Mr P. PAPALIA replied:

- (1)–(2) The answer is that we did not publish maps identifying the locations of law-abiding citizens who are firearms owners.

FIREARMS OWNERSHIP

231. Mr V.A. CATANIA to the Minister for Police:

I have a supplementary question. Minister, criminals care about where firearms may be, not the owners of them.

The SPEAKER: Sorry, because this is supplementary, you just have to ask a direct question and not provide a preamble.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Okay.

Firearm owners are not concerned about where firearms are; it is the criminals. How can publishing the locations of where firearms are stored be in any way justified?

Mr P. PAPALIA replied:

It is the same question. The locations of firearms licence holders were not published. Some de-identified maps were published. They demonstrated that every single suburb in Perth, almost every single street in Perth, has a licensed firearm. Licensed firearms can be stolen. They then become unlicensed firearms—illegal firearms—and they are used in committing crimes. That is why it was of interest to everyone in Western Australia that there has been a 60 per cent growth in licensed firearms in the last 13 years. That is of interest, I would expect. I would expect it would be of interest to every member of Parliament that the number of licence holders has remained static, and yet the number of licensed firearms has increased dramatically in that period. Apart from that, the Firearms Act has not been rewritten in Western Australia since 1974 when it was introduced. Every other jurisdiction in the nation has completely rewritten their firearms acts since the National Firearms Agreement in 1996. We intend to do the same.

STUDYPERTH — STUDENT HUB

232. Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE to the Minister for International Education:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to supporting the return of international students to Western Australia.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on the new StudyPerth student hub?
- (2) Can the minister outline to the house how this government's significant investment in other support packages is helping to ensure the return of international students to Western Australia and to make sure that return is as seamless as possible?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN replied:

- (1)–(2) Yes, I can. I thank the member for Thornlie for his question. It is a very important question. I want to assure the house that everything is being done to ensure not only that our international student sector is strong, but also, of course, that international students to Western Australia return. They are returning in their thousands because of the commitment by the McGowan government to ensure that they are welcomed and supported when they arrive.

Recently, I attended the opening of the new StudyPerth student hub, which is in the centre of the city. The hub will provide international students with facilities to support them, allow them to connect with each other and assist them to enmesh themselves in the Western Australian lifestyle. It will be strongly supported and encouraged. When I was there, there was an opportunity to talk to a number of our education sector representatives who were present and learn from them firsthand about the increase in the number of international students for semester 1, and, of course, they are also experiencing increased demand for semester 2 of this year. Of course, the state government has announced and is implementing a range of support mechanisms funded by significant funding. This is an important consideration. As part of our \$77 million state transition industry support package, some \$16 million of that is specifically focused on international education and supports. That includes an industry support fund, which includes a \$6 million provision to medium and small-sized international education providers. This allows for between \$50 000 and \$100 000 to assist those small and medium providers to ensure that they can continue to build and strengthen as they seek to support and encourage international student numbers. An \$8 million student quarantine support program has been provided and a \$2 million university support services for students program, as well.

I want to highlight that as soon as we announced these very important measures, the take-up has already been quite remarkable. I want to highlight an example of that. The accommodation subsidy and the English language intensive courses for overseas students—ELICOS—bursary are also open, through these programs by the McGowan government, for international students to apply. Since last Friday, already, over 1 200 applications have been received. The airport welcome desks—I know that the Minister for Tourism

has been to the welcome desk at the airport—opened on 3 March. They are located in terminal 1 and terminals 3 and 4 at Perth Airport and continue to operate and welcome international students who arrive on those international flights. The students are met upon arrival by StudyPerth team members—I want to pay tribute to the StudyPerth team members—and are greeted by an international student greeter. All of this is focused on making sure that we continue to position Western Australia as the place to come to study at our outstanding educational facilities and educational institutions here. If students are seeking to learn English, they can come across through our ELICOS program to do that. Of course, we are also focused on looking at new markets and strengthening existing markets, so that work will continue.

We all know that Western Australia is a great place to live and work, but we want to open that up to even more international students to come here to the safest place on earth to live, work, study and learn, because we know that those international students ensure that we have an even more diverse and vibrant community. That is what they bring to this community when they come across to Western Australia. We welcome them; we have welcomed them with a huge investment in international education, and it is now paying off, because we are seeing thousands and thousands of students enrolling and making their way back to Western Australia, and I am looking forward to those numbers improving as we move forwards towards semester 2. I can assure members that in terms of market, we will be in market with those countries and selling Western Australia to them as a great place to come and learn and live and enjoy what this magnificent state has to offer.

The SPEAKER: The member for Roe with the last question.

RUGBY UNION TEST MATCH

233. **Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Minister for Tourism:**

I refer to the Wallabies versus England rugby union test in July, for which the minister said potentially thousands of people will be coming to WA.

- (1) How many tickets are being released for the game?
- (2) Is the advice on stadium numbers dictated by the Premier, the Minister for Health, the Minister for Tourism or the Minister for Sport and Recreation?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question. There is nothing I like talking about more than rugby! It is great to have had the opportunity to stand with Mike McKenna from Optus Stadium yesterday to talk about the upcoming game against England—Wallabies versus England. Not since 2010 has the English rugby union side come to Western Australia to play the Wallabies. At that stage, of course, they were playing at Subiaco Oval. I think the English Rugby Football Union authorities will be overwhelmed by just what a spectacle it is going to be on 2 July. In 2010, we defeated England 27–17. Let us hope we have a repeat of that, and we make sure that England well and truly understand what they should in relation to rugby union.

I also provided details of the upcoming State of Origin, which of course will be just one week earlier, when we will see the Maroons thump the Blues, to the Minister for Mines and Petroleum's great unhappiness. When we made the announcement about the State of Origin on 26 June, I made it quite clear that all ticket sales are in line with the Chief Health Officer's advice and the COVID arrangements that are in place at any particular point in time. In relation to the State of Origin, we have released 50 per cent of the tickets for sale, and I assume that as we now have 75 per cent capacity, we will obviously be releasing more tickets. I see no reason the rugby union match will not be under the same arrangements. Of course, we are confident that by the time these two great sporting spectacles—great events that will see many people come to Western Australia—come about, we will be up to full capacity. We are confident of that because of the great work that the Premier and the Minister for Health are doing under the guidance from the Chief Health Officer and the Commissioner of Police, who is the emergency management coordinator. From that perspective, we are very much looking forward to seeing the full spectacle roll out.

Rugby union is a very interesting sport, which reminds me of another interesting point about rugby union.

The SPEAKER: Minister, we have already had a few too many interesting points today.

Mr R.H. COOK: Let me just finish with this one —

The SPEAKER: Ministers' answers have been very lengthy, so I would ask you to make this your last interesting point.

Mr R.H. COOK: There are so many interesting points, Madam Speaker. The one that I will finish on is that, as many people know, rugby union fans love to travel. On 2 July we will see a large contingent of rugby fans coming from South-East Asia, the United Kingdom and other parts of the world to watch this spectacle. That is what we want to see. We want events to not only play an important role in boosting visitations to Western Australia, but also showcasing Perth and really showing people what a great place Western Australia is. I am very much looking forward to the game.

RUGBY UNION TEST MATCH

234. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Minister for Tourism:

I have a supplementary question.

The SPEAKER: The member has a supplementary question. It is another chance for you here, minister.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given the minister's confidence and the fact that he expects a full stadium, when will the minister, or whichever minister is responsible, announce capacity numbers for this event, bearing in mind that ticket sales are now open and overseas supporters need some clarity on ticket availability?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

That reminds me of another interesting point about rugby union. I will take this opportunity to speak about these things. I turn to the question that the member asked. Obviously, we will continue to be guided on these matters. The match will not be held for another three months. Obviously, all these fans will be looking forward to taking advantage of the reconnected direct flights between London and Perth, and obviously between Perth and London. We are very much looking forward to welcoming all those fans to Western Australia, but most of all, of course, we are very much looking forward to welcoming the English rugby union side so we can give them a jolly good beating!

The SPEAKER: Members, that concludes question time.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER AMENDMENT (REPORTABLE CONDUCT) BILL 2021*Consideration in Detail*

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

Clause 7: Part III Division 3B inserted —

Debate was interrupted after the clause had been partly considered.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I commence with a question that I put to the minister before the debate was interrupted. I will repeat the question. It relates to clause 7. We were talking about proposed section 19Q, and the approval of heads of relevant entities in certain circumstances. The minister was going to provide examples of entities that would need the approval of a particular head other than the CEO or the normal structure that we would expect to see in an organisation, like a chair, president, CEO or whoever it might be.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It would be a rare event that an obvious person would not be the CEO or in an equivalent position in an organisation. The idea of this provision is to ensure that the Ombudsman has the capacity to identify someone under a reportable conduct scheme. Churches are an obvious example in which there may not be a traditional hierarchy like there would be in a private or government organisation, but there may be other community organisations and the like that do not have an obvious titular head. This provision will give the Ombudsman the capacity to make determinations by nominating a clearly responsible person.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to proposed section 19R, "Head of relevant entity must ensure systems in place" under subdivision 3, "Systems to deal with reportable conduct". The section lists quite a detailed and lengthy set of criteria that the relevant entity must have in place. A lot of information would need to be kept, and a way of handling that information and reporting et cetera will have to be part of this system to deal with the reportable conduct. I guess this will be a new requirement for some organisations. What resources will be made available to ensure that the heads of these entities can comply with the requirements? Will some standard training or resources be made available to ensure that people are up to speed with the requirements of ensuring that a system is in place? People would have to understand the system requirements and the legislation. There is a lot to take in, especially for those in some of the smaller organisations, and it might be an arduous task to get on top of all that quickly. We should bear in mind that some of the requirements are completely new, so they have been given that extra year to come in. What support will be provided to ensure that people are able to administer such a system?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is recognised in this scheme that some organisations that will be covered by reportable conduct may not have a complaints process or some way of dealing with the sorts of matters that will be captured by reportable conduct to ensure some sort of accountability within the organisation. That is understood. It is proposed that the Ombudsman's office will work with and have resources available relevant to each industry, so organisations can access guidance notes and some common resources rather than the government giving out grants and organisations then developing their own processes, which may duplicate work that has already been done. Guidance will be available from the Ombudsman's office relevant to the appropriate industry or sector.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to proposed section 19T and the information that leads to the belief that an employee has engaged in reportable conduct. What sort of evidence is required to ensure that the information is reasonable and sufficient to make such a report of alleged reportable conduct?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It will not be necessary to make initial inquiries for a person to form a belief on reasonable grounds that an employee has engaged in reportable conduct or conduct that may involve reportable conduct. This

assessment may be made based on the information of which the person has become aware—for example, the disclosure of a child. The commissioner has a function to educate and provide advice to relevant entities to assist them to identify and prevent reportable conduct, including assisting entities to identify what information may lead to the belief on reasonable grounds that the employee has engaged in reportable conduct or conduct that may involve reportable conduct. This really goes to the previous question about what resources might be given to organisations, particularly those that have not been regulated or would not have thought through these sorts of issues in the past. The Ombudsman’s office will work with each industry or sector and make sure that common resources are available that are relevant so that people can understand the examples of conduct that might lead the organisation to believe on reasonable grounds that abuse may have taken place.

Ms L. METTAM: Will a person be held to account if they do not consider on reasonable grounds that an employee of a relevant agency or entity has engaged in reportable conduct? Can that individual be held to account if they do not consider that the requirement of reasonable grounds has been met?

Ms S.F. McGURK: If, in good faith, they do not believe that abuse of any description has taken place, they will not be required to report it. The requirement under this scheme is that if they form a belief, they are required to report it. To answer the member’s question, they will not be punished if they did not form a reasonable belief.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to proposed section 19T(2)(b). What protection will be offered to a person who makes a report to a commissioner about the head of an entity?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The following relates to proposed section 19T(2)(b). The bill provides for protection from liability. A person acting in good faith who gives a report, notification or information to the commissioner or head of the relevant entity, or gives information to the investigation, will not incur civil or criminal liability or liability to be punished for a contempt of court. They will not be taken to have breached any duty of confidentiality or secrecy imposed by the law, and they will not be taken to have breached any professional ethics or standards or any principles of conduct applicable to the person’s employment or to have engaged in unprofessional conduct. These protections are similar to those contained in other Western Australian child protection legislation, including the Children and Community Services Act 2004 and the Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004. Similarly, there will be protection from victimisation. A person cannot do anything likely to be to the detriment of another person because they have made or will make in the future a complaint, have provided information in the course of or for the purpose of any investigation under the act, have made a report to the head of a relevant entity or the commissioner or given notification to the commissioner of a reportable allegation or a reportable conviction, have provided information of an investigation of a reportable allegation or reportable conviction to the commissioner or head of the relevant entity, or have exercised a power or performed a duty imposed by the act unless there are penalties associated with that victimisation.

Ms L. METTAM: I have a question about proposed section 19U(2), which states —

The head of the relevant entity must give written notice to the Commissioner of the following information within 7 working days after becoming aware of the reportable allegation or reportable conviction ...

On what basis was it determined that seven days should be the required time frame in which to provide this written notice to the commissioner?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The information provided within a seven-day working time frame facilitates the protection of children. The notice that is required to be provided to the Ombudsman within seven working days includes information on whether the police have been contacted about the matter, details of the reportable allegation and reportable conviction, the risk assessment made and the risk management action taken or proposed to be taken by the relevant entity. Based on extensive consultation by the Ombudsman’s office with stakeholders, the time frame of seven days was selected to strike a balance between the importance of responding expeditiously to serious matters, while also allowing sufficient time for the relevant entity to form a view that the allegation is a reportable allegation and prepare the notice.

Ms L. METTAM: Given the different sizes of relevant entities that will be captured by this legislation, does the minister accept that this will be easy to comply with for some entities but quite challenging for others? What will be in place to ensure a level playing field for all entities to be able to respond appropriately?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yesterday we discussed how extensions can be applied for, but the whole idea of this scheme is to put in place systems within the organisation and a process by which the organisation, and in this case it will be the head of the organisation, is required to notify the Ombudsman that reportable conduct has occurred. That is important to note. Even organisations that have not done this in the past will be required to, under this legislation, avail themselves of the material that the Ombudsman’s office will make available to them that is relevant to their industry and to take on board their obligations. Provisions have been included to enable the heads of relevant entities to meet this time frame and provide additional information later if required. These include providing for the relevant entity to only provide information of which they are aware, a request for extension to provide notification, as I mentioned previously, and a request for an exemption from providing certain information in the notification—that is, a component of the information.

Ms L. METTAM: I have a further question about proposed section 19U(4), which states —

The Commissioner, at the request of the head of the relevant entity, may, in writing —

- (a) extend the time for giving a notice under this section; or
- (b) exempt the relevant entity from providing information that the entity would otherwise be required to provide under this section.

Is it intended that the commissioner will provide an easy and seamless process for making such requests? For example, by providing an online pro forma for extending the time to give notice or an exemption to the entity?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, that is the intention. I think we have talked about in the order of 4 000 organisations that will be covered by this scheme and they cover a range of different industries. There will be a phasing in period of the sorts of entities that will be incorporated within a certain time frame and then the sort of conduct that needs to be reported so that the Ombudsman's office can build up the sorts of resources to which the member refers and also so that the organisations required to report understand their obligations. This work has been begun by the Ombudsman's office. We tabled a green bill in 2020, so there has been quite a bit of discussion. There was a decision by government that the Ombudsman will provide independent oversight and facilitate this system. There has been a lot of work done by his office with the Department of Communities and others to ensure that these systems are in the process of being established.

Ms L. METTAM: I now refer to proposed section 19U(6), which states —

It is an offence for the head of a relevant entity to fail, without reasonable excuse, to comply with subsection (2).

It states that a \$5 000 fine will apply. How has the government determined and come up with such a penalty?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There are two points to make in response to that question. One is that the level of penalty is consistent with the sorts of penalties that apply in other states and our own state. The penalties contained within the Children and Community Services Act for failure to mandatorily report is a fine of \$6 000 and for failure to provide a written report as soon as possible after an oral report is a fine of \$3 000. Similarly, the penalty for failure to report to the CEO about a mandatory report is a \$6 000 fine and breaching the confidentiality of a report also attracts a fine of \$6 000. This is consistent with similar legislation within our own state and the penalties in other states.

Ms L. METTAM: I think the minister answered this question before, but what is a reasonable excuse with respect to the application of a fine for noncompliance? Who is that? Is it the commissioner? Who makes that determination?

Ms S.F. McGURK: If I understand the question, it is: who determines whether a fine is warranted and how much—whether a full or part fine? If that is what the member is asking, the answer is that advice would be taken from the State Solicitor in due course in the event that a fine is required. There are clear penalties outlined in the legislation for breaches of a range of different requirements. I am not sure whether the member is asking about the technical ways of who would be authorised to apply the penalty.

Ms L. METTAM: My question was about who makes the determination of what a reasonable excuse is under this proposed legislation.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That would be for the Ombudsman to decide and give consideration to.

Ms L. METTAM: I go to proposed section 19W. Proposed section 19W(1)(a)(ii) of the bill provides that an employee of a relevant entity may investigate the reportable allegation or conviction and permits engagement of an external investigator. What skills and qualifications will be required by the employee to undertake the investigation, given the potential nature of the allegations?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Questions were raised during consultation and some people said that the definition of “investigator” was very broad. There was a question about the level of expertise or capacity required to adequately and appropriately investigate allegations or convictions. In answer to that, the broad definition of “investigator” in the bill is consistent with legislation in New South Wales, the Children's Guardian Act 2019, which defines an investigator as a person conducting an investigation on behalf of the head of the relevant entity, including a delegate. The office of the Ombudsman has extensively consulted those responsible for the reportable conduct scheme in New South Wales and Victoria, and I am informed that no issue of significance regarding the expertise of investigators for the proper operation of the reportable conduct scheme has been identified. Nevertheless, the office of the Ombudsman will work closely and cooperatively with stakeholders in key sectors and individual organisations included in the reportable conduct scheme to provide education, advice and guidance to assist in building their capacity to comply with the scheme. We have talked before about making sure that there is tailored guidance and support material available and providing advice and guidance to organisations to assist in the handling of individual investigations.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to proposed section 19W(3), which provides —

As soon as practicable after conducting an investigation in relation to an employee under subsection (1), the head of a relevant entity must either —

- (a) make a finding of reportable conduct in relation to the employee ... or

- (b) make a finding that there are no grounds, or no reasonable grounds, for the head of the relevant entity to form the view that reportable conduct involving the employee has occurred.

What guidance does the head of the relevant entity have to make such a finding?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There will be capacity for the organisation to get advice from the Ombudsman's office. There will be online resources, for instance, particularly for smaller organisations to help their capacity to understand their obligations. It is not intended to be a process by which organisations are tripped up, but they are required to have their own procedures in place and then to adhere to those procedures. Presumably, they will have done some thinking about this if they are required to have their own systems in place internally and, as I said, how they might adhere to them. There will be an advice line available for smaller organisations or any organisations and some assistance given. The example given to me is that it is not dissimilar to a human resources question. It will still be the responsibility of the organisation itself, but it could at times get outside advice about how it conducts any processes properly with procedural fairness and rigour.

Ms L. METTAM: What information will the head of the entity need to provide to back up their finding?

Ms S.F. McGURK: They must provide a copy of the report to the Ombudsman and any submissions that were made in making that report.

Ms L. METTAM: What liability may apply if the commissioner does not accept or agree with the finding?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The Ombudsman might, for instance, decide on their own motion to conduct their own investigation of a matter that came before them. They might ask the organisation to redo its report, or part of its report, of what occurred. If the Ombudsman or their office were of the view that the organisation had not met its obligations, they would have the opportunity to make recommendations on how to improve the processes internally or, in fact, penalties might apply. I was wrong about the penalties. It could then be reported to either Parliament or the Premier.

Ms L. METTAM: Under what circumstances would the minister imagine that it would be reported to Parliament or the Premier?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I think the sort of circumstance would be if the Ombudsman had made recommendations to the organisation and the organisation did not implement those recommendations or show some cooperation in overcoming any issues of disagreement; that is, there was an impasse and those issues of substance were not able to be resolved. The tone of how the legislation has been crafted and the guidance it has taken from other jurisdictions, as well as from the royal commission's recommendations, will ensure that there is some capacity in organisations that are subject to this scheme to understand their obligations. However, if those organisations, with proper guidance and assistance, ultimately disagree with that guidance and assistance, there will need to be some avenue by which that is exposed.

Ms L. METTAM: I now refer to proposed section 19W(4), which states —

As soon as practicable after making a finding of reportable conduct in relation to an employee under this Act, the head of the relevant entity must ensure that —

- (a) appropriate action is taken in relation to the employee in response to the finding ...

Can the minister advise what is "appropriate action" specifically in relation to this proposed subsection ?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It would depend on the circumstances and the severity of the issue at hand. It could be that it is appropriate for an employee to be moved within the organisation or it could be a lot more serious than that, such as dismissal. Certainly, there is provision in the bill—I think we spoke about it in the second reading debate—about the obligation for any sort of criminal investigations to take precedence under this scheme. Some of that might occur in parallel with these investigations.

Ms L. METTAM: I now move on to proposed section 19X. This proposed section requires significant activity by the head of the relevant entity. What support will be provided to assist all entities that are required to comply with this proposed section?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We went through some of these issues in the member's absence. The idea is that the Ombudsman's office will work with the various sectors to ensure that some resources are available. It might be provided online or it might be face-to-face training that is done with the sector to ensure that there is a good understanding of these processes and the obligations of the organisation on reportable conduct. It is quite likely that a number of organisations will have their own internal disciplinary processes to deal with, for instance, misconduct. The idea is not to duplicate that or sit alongside the existing processes, but to see how this can complement those processes. It would mean that we are more likely to get compliance because there would be a good understanding by the organisation of its obligations and processes.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to proposed section 19Z, which deals with the written report that is required to be provided to the commissioner. What does the minister consider to be a sufficiently practicable period after the end of an investigation?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It will depend on the scale of the issue that is being reported. If, for instance, a police investigation is occurring, the more fulsome report could be suspended as it awaits the outcome of a police investigation, as occurs now with the disciplinary process for employees more generally. If the Ombudsman had not heard back from the CEO of the entity with the report, there would be communication. There will not be a specific hard time frame for the more fulsome report, but, as I say, it will depend on what other circumstances are at play.

Ms L. METTAM: I now refer to proposed section 19ZB under which the commissioner may conduct their own investigation. Given the various reasons that the commissioner may undertake their own investigation, whether by their own initiative or otherwise, what is the minister's expectation about the investigations that will be required under this proposed section, and how many are anticipated for each year?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am advised that it is envisaged this will be a rare event. The experience of the other states is that it is no more than one or two investigations a year. Of course, the Ombudsman now, in other functions that he has, can initiate inquiries on his own motion. I know that has been relevant in my portfolio in regard to domestic violence and child deaths, for instance, but it will be the exception. I think it will take some time to bed down the implementation of the scheme and we will need to understand which trends or issues might warrant the focus of the Ombudsman's own investigations.

Ms L. METTAM: I now jump to proposed section 19ZF. Can the minister confirm whether this provision will enable the head of a relevant entity to refer a matter to the State Administrative Tribunal?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The circumstances in which the State Administrative Tribunal might be called upon to review the scheme are to ensure procedural fairness or as an opportunity to review a finding of the Ombudsman's own investigation. An employee would have an opportunity for a finding to be reconsidered if they felt that the Ombudsman had failed to apply the law. I think the terms are spelt out there, but it will be very much the exception. Certainly, as it stands now with the Ombudsman's office, there is no process for appeal, if you like, or opportunity to review the Ombudsman's normal functions.

Ms L. METTAM: I have a further question on proposed section 19ZH(3), which states —

The Commissioner or the head of a relevant entity must not disclose information under subsection (1) —

- (a) if the disclosure would —
 - (i) put the wellbeing of the child, or the safety of any other person, at risk; or
 - (ii) contravene the CCS Act ...

Is the head of the relevant entity the best person to determine the maturity and understanding of a child, as outlined under that proposed section, especially given the conflict of interest that may exist?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Provisions relating to the non-disclosure of information to persons with parental responsibility when the child has sufficient maturity and understanding to consent to the disclosure and the child does not consent to the disclosure are consistent with the principle of child participation in proposed section 19J(2); namely, the reportable conduct scheme is based on the principle that if the child is able to form a view on a matter concerning a report or allegation or reportable conviction and it is appropriate in the circumstances to consult the child, the child must be given the opportunity to express the views freely, and the views are to be given due weight in the investigation in accordance with the developmental capacity of the child and the circumstances. Actually, member, these provisions are aligned with the Children and Community Services Act 2004, in which decisions are similarly underpinned by the principle of child participation. This reflects the nationally consistent approach with all other jurisdictions with established reportable conduct schemes authorising the head of a relevant entity to make these judgements. As with all aspects of the reportable conduct scheme, the Ombudsman will provide oversight of these decisions. In addition to, and consistent with, other jurisdictions, the Ombudsman will provide education, advice and guidance to assist organisations to disclose information responsibly.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 8 to 17 put and passed.

Clause 18: Section 28 inserted —

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the inclusion in the annual report of the accountable authority report on the operation of the reportable conduct scheme and the description of the activities of the commissioner under the reportable conduct scheme. Will the report include the number of investigations conducted by entities and the reports submitted by those entities to the commissioner?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The report will include the sort of data the member is talking about, but not the specifics of who reported to the Ombudsman. Certainly, we envisage that the annual report will reference the number and provide analysis of any trends and any findings or issues arising from investigations that the Ombudsman himself made under this scheme.

Ms L. METTAM: Will it also include any referrals to the State Administrative Tribunal and any investigations by the commissioner? I think the minister referred to that anyway.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, I imagine that the information about the State Administrative Tribunal will be picked up in the annual reporting on the implementation of this scheme.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 19 to 24 put and passed.

Clause 25: Schedule 2 inserted —

Ms L. METTAM: Is this schedule consistent with legislation in other jurisdictions? Will it capture all such entities envisaged by the royal commission that are prescribed in other jurisdictions?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Member, the institutions covered by the scheme reflect those recommended by the royal commission in its final report, volume 7, recommendation 7.12. It is also a nationally consistent approach to the protection of children. The types of organisations covered by the scheme in the first year—I think the member is aware—will include child protection and out-of-home care services, childcare services, education services, health and justice services, detention services and, after 12 months of operation, accommodation and residential services, religious institutions and disability services. The scheme will not apply to organisations that do not exercise care, supervision or authority over children as part of their primary functions. To answer the member's question, then: yes, it is consistent with the position in other states. I think that is important. Wherever possible we have endeavoured to ensure some national consistency or we have certainly looked closely at the other states. The other states' provisions are not identical, but in this regard they are. As I said, the royal commission was quite clear in its recommendations about a number of things. The royal commission says that at a minimum the institutions that are covered should provide accommodation and residential services for children; activities or services of any kind under the auspices of a particular religious denomination or faith through which adults have contact with children; childcare services; child protection services; out-of-home care, disability services and supports for children with a disability; education, health and justice and detention services for children.

Clause put and passed.

Clauses 26 and 27 put and passed.

Title put and passed.

[Leave granted to proceed forthwith to third reading.]

Third Reading

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Child Protection) [3.52 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a third time.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) [3.52 pm]: I rise in support of the Parliamentary Commissioner Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Bill 2021 that has been presented. I thank the Minister for Child Protection for providing some clarification to the bill, and I thank the minister's advisers as well who have assisted with briefing the opposition and providing a level of clarity and support throughout this process.

This bill is in response to the final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. We share with everyone in the chamber the sense that child abuse is one of the most heinous crimes. It is understood that 80 per cent of boys or 90 per cent of girls who are sexually abused are abused by somebody they know. The measures that will be put in place today will establish the reportable conduct scheme as recommended by the royal commission, and will compel the heads of organisations to a standard that will include notifying the Ombudsman of reportable allegations or reportable convictions. This has obvious importance, significance and great merit. We support the measures that will be put in place that will, as I understand, impact about 4 000 government and non-government organisations, sending a very clear message that there will be severe repercussions if any such conduct takes place. It is clearly in everybody's business to ensure such abuse is reported and is followed by some severe repercussions.

With those words, again, I thank the advisers and the minister and her staff for their support in providing information to the opposition on the bill that has been presented. I will leave my comments there.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.55 pm]: I want to thank the advisers for their tolerance of my rambling questioning throughout the evening and the day on the Parliamentary Commissioner Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Bill 2021. I thank the Minister for Child Protection for her responses she has given and her tolerance as well.

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Child Protection) [3.56 pm] — in reply: I thought the member for Moore was going to thank me for my guidance last night through these debates; they end up being a bit robust at times. I want to thank other members who have contributed to the Parliamentary Commissioner Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Bill 2021. As we heard, there were some very, very good contributions last night. Without exception, members talked in particular about the debt we owe to those people involved in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, those who called the commission and those who oversaw the

commission, including the Western Australian commissioners, Helen Milroy and former senator Andrew Murray. Members spoke about those people who came forward and told their stories, which must have been difficult. I do not think any of us can imagine how difficult that would have been. It is to them that we are indebted, and as a country we are indebted because we have a framework now in which to try to improve not only institutions, but also our whole culture in our country to ensure that we are doing everything we can to make sure that it is child safe.

I also thank the Ombudsman and his very capable staff for not only their work in the last couple of days, but also their briefings and the preparation of this bill. We are not through yet; they will be put through their paces in the other place, I am sure—as we should be. Looking at a new scheme like this, it will be a step-change for many organisations, but one that I am confident will not only create an accountability for organisations for how they deal with complaints, but also start to properly embed a deeper understanding of the responsibility we all have towards child safety.

I also agree that many of these crimes are heinous. Abuse whether it is sexual or any other abuse on children is really, really difficult to understand, but we need to try to understand it because if we just regard it as evil and something that is over there and push it away, we will fail to uncover a deeper understanding about it and be able to respond effectively against it. Last night, I spoke about the need for us to better understand children with harmful sexual behaviours because the evidence, as I understand it, is that if those behaviours are not treated or addressed properly, those young people are more likely to become offenders as adults. We as a community are much better off understanding what is going on with some of that behaviour at an early stage. Again, I thank everyone for their participation in this bill.

I commend the bill to the house.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

STATE BUDGET — COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES

Motion

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house calls on the McGowan government to ensure that the upcoming state budget is focused on alleviating the cost-of-living pressures burdening WA families.

I want to start by painting a picture of what it is like in Western Australia at the moment. We are a state of significant wealth; that is undeniable. There has again been talk of a significant budget surplus being delivered in the upcoming state budget—eye-watering, in fact. As the Premier said in question time, other states look at us with some envy and wish they had our natural resources and the ability to deliver some of the projects and initiatives that we have delivered as a result of those natural resources. While other governments around the nation are talking about deficits and debt, our government is sitting on something between \$6 billion and \$8 billion in surplus.

That is quite extraordinary because in question time today the Premier painted a picture of strength, jobs and wealth, but if we peel back some of that rhetoric, we see that many families, businesses and small businesses are in real pain. When we have a surplus of that enormity, there is a responsibility; there has to be a dividend for Western Australians, many of whom are feeling the pinch. Billion-dollar surpluses are not there to be hoarded by the government as some sort of war chest for election spending or for when things go wrong and the Premier of a very poll driven government needs to curry favour. There are families and businesses that are in pain right now.

This is the last sitting week ahead of the state budget, before we return after a four-week recess, so today the opposition wants to take this opportunity to put the government on notice in relation to the issues that we think the Western Australian public expects to see addressed in the upcoming state budget. It is based around trying to understand what relief will be available, given that we know from the government's answers to questions over the last two weeks that there are many families suffering and that the Premier appears to be turning a deaf ear to improving that situation.

We cannot ignore the fact that we have experienced two years of pandemic and that there have been some unusual circumstances on a global scale, yet Western Australia has, I think, experienced relative normality in terms of income. In fact, there has been extraordinary income for the state government. The pandemic has really served to paper over or hide some of the government's true failures, which is why this state budget has to be a budget about resetting. If we believe what the Minister for Tourism said today, and what the Premier has said previously, about the government's intention to welcome people with open arms back into Western Australia and to make sure that our entire tourism industry—not just some sectors—thrives once again, we have to assume there is also a plan for trying to address some of the pinch points we are already seeing.

We do not have to look too far for the government's failures. Our health system is in crisis, not because of COVID, but because the government stripped back its operational budget and starved it of funds ahead of the pandemic

arriving here in Western Australia. Nurses and health workers are stretched to breaking point. They are working long, long hours, under extraordinary pressure. The warning signs were here before the pandemic, so this is a chance for the government to put in lasting, structural reform to actually address some of those pressures. If the government does not have a health system that is working, it is failing at the most basic level.

We have a housing crisis that means more and more Western Australians are finding themselves on the brink of homelessness, or having to choose between paying their rent, paying their electricity bill or being able to put food on their table. Some of the data we have seen shows that more and more people are going without. There are more and more people in the rental market who are finding themselves on the public housing waitlist, which has also significantly blown out under this government.

There is a crisis in the Department of Communities, which is impacting upon some of the most vulnerable children and families in our community. Our police force has had up to 500 officers being committed to Operation Tide at any one time. Many of them have been called upon to go above and beyond over the last two years. They are policing a hard border that no longer exists, while there are serious crime issues in the north of our state and in the Perth metropolitan area, including in Northbridge, Scarborough and other entertainment districts. These officers have been asked to do a significant amount as a result of the pandemic and our COVID response.

Our small business sector has had to deal with constantly changing rules, firstly, because of the pandemic, and then because of the government's response to the pandemic in terms of providing support. It has dribbled out various different packages of support and it probably takes businesses a long time to figure out what they are eligible for. Certainly, some businesses that are eligible for support have not seen any of that funding, and that all contributes to additional stress and worry.

As I mentioned, all is not well in our tourism sector. There are sections of the tourism sector that have done extraordinarily well, but I and many other members have met with representatives of the tourism industry who say that every time the Premier boasts about how wonderfully our tourism sector is doing, it feels like a knife in their heart. That is not an exaggeration; that has been repeated to me on a number of different occasions, whether I am in the Kimberley or the south west, talking to people from two of the premium tourism destinations in Western Australia.

The government has failed to address the basics of health and housing. Yes, there are shiny new projects that we see being rolled out, many of them paid for on the commonwealth dime—yes, our mining sector has remained strong; but, no, the government has not used its windfall surplus to ease the burden on ordinary, everyday Western Australians.

The Premier today spent some time outlining all the things the government has done in terms of economic management, so I asked him why we have seen significant increases—not just when the pandemic was in full flight but now, two years later—in the number of people accessing emergency service providers like Foodbank, Anglicare and others that provide emergency support. Despite all the Premier's claims, those numbers have increased, so something is clearly not right. This is not a government that listens to those on the front line, dealing with ever-increasing numbers of people in financial stress.

Just like the Minister for Housing's very well rehearsed response to questions about the housing crisis yesterday, the Premier's answer in question time today shows that he is starting to believe his own PR, and that is very dangerous. He has been in government for five years and has become so used to everyone telling him what a wonderful job he is doing that he is blind to the issues that he does not want to acknowledge. There are serious issues with many families who are living on or near the poverty line and who have been unable to succeed on this government's watch. How can we have a budget surplus of between \$6 billion and \$8 billion, and have more and more people living in poverty without a house, unable to pay their bills, unable to put food on the table and without assistance to do that?

When this government first came to office it increased electricity prices after it specifically told people that it would not. The shadow Minister for Energy, the Leader of the Liberal Party, will touch on this and other issues within that portfolio. The government also found time to address electoral reform and take regional representation out of the state Parliament permanently. It also found time to sell more than 1 300 public houses and not replace them. It found time to close down an entire industry, leaving the lives and the livelihoods of those dependent upon the native timber industry in great peril. It found time to criticise our St John Ambulance service and ambulance service providers, many of whom are ramped at state hospitals because there is bed-block in the state health system, which is under pressure because it has not been resourced appropriately.

The government has also kept public servant wages static for a significant portion of its tenure, which has essentially eroded wages in the public service in real terms. We heard the announcement at the end of last year, which goes to the question I asked the Premier in question time today about the impact the consumer price index and inflation will have between that announcement and when the budget comes down and whether the government will reassess its wages policy to ensure that the public service is not impacted by that and that it will at least match CPI. I heard a very clear no from the Premier. It will not change its wages policy. I think every union currently negotiating on that would be very interested to hear that.

A significant amount of money is coming into state coffers. For every dollar increase in the oil price above the budget forecast, the Western Australian government will receive an extra \$9 million in petroleum royalties and North West Shelf grants. We can assume that on the average oil price the government will collect at least \$27 million more than it expected when it did its projections in the last budget, but I think it will be far more.

Iron ore royalties will add at least \$2.5 billion to the budget's bottom line and, of course, the GST deal has been secured and delivered by our federal coalition government—the work on which was done well in advance of the McGowan government coming to power. Had we had access to that GST deal—which we deserve every dollar of—during our time in government, it would have made an enormous difference to the finances of the state. I think we can say that low wage growth for public servants over the first few years of this government has absolutely contributed to the eye-watering surplus that is sitting in this state's coffers.

Also over the last 12 months, Perth has posted its highest inflation rate in 20 three years—5.7 per cent in 2021—which is above the national average of 3.5 per cent. Perth was one of the cities hardest hit by inflation, second only to Darwin. It is Perth's biggest reading since 5.9 per cent was recorded for the June quarter back in 2021. We suspect we will not see that as we head towards the budget. There were some fairly extraordinary circumstances during that period of time. My question during question time today was attempting to get an understanding of whether there was any wriggle room or whether the government, if there was a significant increase, would reconsider and whether the wages negotiation could accommodate that. I acknowledge that the government abandoned that wages policy in December and is now working towards a new outcome, so I did not think it would be a difficult question for the Premier to answer. Given the significant increases in the cost of living, I would have thought that a government of this persuasion would consider it, especially with the dollars in the bank. But I heard no from the Premier. I heard no, there will be none.

For five years the wages policy has delivered only a \$1 000 pay increase for public servants. To put a human face on what that means—there would be any number of them across Western Australia—I will use the example of Julie-Marie Hay, an enrolled nurse and a single mum, whose comments on the cost of living were reported in an ABC interview of 22 March. She said —

“I haven't been able to continue to keep up with the cost of living regardless of working full-time,” ...

...

“I work weekends as well and it still doesn't cover everything I need,” ...

The article goes on to say —

Ms Hay has not seen her pay rise in real terms (that is, after inflation) for four years due to a historic public sector wage freeze in WA, and she's not alone.

“My expenses here in this house have actually gone up about \$300 a fortnight over the last 12 to 18 months,” she said.

“I haven't actually bought my children's school clothes this year at all. Somehow I have to afford to buy them an entire new winter wardrobe.

“My biggest worry really is just not being able to afford to continue paying rent, and not being able to afford to continue paying my bills.

“I'm terrified of what's going to happen.”

She is an enrolled nurse, who works in the public health system and who has been asked, I hazard a guess, to do far more than she is paid for, just as we know many of our nurses and frontline nurses have done over the last 24 months. The United Workers Union response to the Premier's December announcement that the government will be bringing forward a change to the wages policy was that the change would equate to less than \$40 a week before tax over two years for a vast majority of the members that it represents. Many of United Voice's members are essential workers. They receive a wage increase that has not kept pace with the duties and responsibilities that they are being asked to acquit and are getting a wage increase that, it would appear, unless there is a significant change in what is being predicted, will not keep pace with the rate of inflation. We are talking about police, nurses, teachers—all of them. I do not think anyone in this chamber would say that over the last two years they have not gone above and beyond over the last two years in responding to the pandemic. They also include child protection workers, prison workers and those who take on some of the most difficult roles in our public service.

Outside essential workers, I found a really interesting example in a submission from the Community and Public Sector Union—Civil Service Association of WA. It used the example of an employee from the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation who talked about the fact that jobs in the public sector are becoming less attractive because of the attraction of the private sector here in Western Australia. He said that they are always competing with the mining sector. There is expertise in our regulatory agencies and departments, but people are leaving because they do not feel valued and they do not feel that they have been looked after by their own government. His take on that was if the government has a mission to reduce red tape, as it has stated a number of times, when we do not pay and value public service workers and retain the required expertise, we put ambition at risk. I think that is a very

succinct way of saying that we must be able to pay those people who have the expertise because we need them in government departments so that when industry comes with a project that needs to be delivered, it will not have lost vast amounts of expertise out of those government departments—I am sure the mining portfolio is no different—because they do not feel valued and have found employment elsewhere. There is no shortage of employment in Western Australia. I am very interested in understanding just how the government will approach this, given that there has been a very miserly wages policy in this state for some time. I suspect that many in those unions have been holding their tongues waiting for the Labor Party and the Labor government to make sure that their workers and their members are looked after. With a budget with a \$6 billion to \$8 billion surplus, I suspect it will be difficult to resist.

The last thing I want to talk about before I sit down is what I mentioned in question time—that is, the significant increase in the number of people who are accessing services like Foodbank and emergency relief providers. We cannot ignore this metric when talking about the cost of living. The Premier can talk about all the things that he pointed to in question time, but the fact is that more people are turning up on the doorstep of organisations like Foodbank, Anglicare and St Vincent de Paul seeking help, whether it is for food, rent assistance or paying utility bills. Food charities in particular have witnessed a significant increase in the demand for food relief.

In its pre-budget submission, the Western Australian Council of Social Service notes that a relatively large number of clients are returning to emergency relief services who have not requested assistance for more than five years. These are people returning after five years, not having had to access that support. The food charities we have had contact with attribute it to being a result of households lowering their food budget because they have other non-negotiable expenses, and so they have to go to Foodbank and others to supplement what they need, and others are no doubt skipping meals. In Albany, the presentations to Foodbank have increased 42 per cent from last year. In February alone, the amount of food being distributed jumped by over 48 per cent compared with the same period last year. We cannot ignore that. We cannot ignore that more people are accessing these services. Data on the Emergency Relief and Food Access Service dashboard provided by the Financial Counselling Network shows the breakdown of clients seeking referrals to the organisations that provide emergency relief. During January this year, the service received 2 042 calls and assisted 745 clients, which was up from 732 in December. The dashboard breaks down the residential status of those accessing support. The biggest cohort is actually those in private rentals, not those living in public housing, of which we know there are many, and many more are on the waitlist. It goes right into those who are in the most unstable forms of accommodation—boarding houses, caravan parks and those who are homeless. Private renters accessing these services are feeling the pinch. When we consider the type of assistance that people are seeking, by far and away it is just to keep food on the table, closely followed by transport. If we then overlay a regional lens on top of that, we can certainly assume that it is more difficult outside the metropolitan area where there are limited public transport opportunities and people are more reliant on filling their car and being able to access affordable food and services.

My colleagues will go through each of the portfolios today and identify the challenges and what they expect to see in the upcoming budget. I was disappointed that when they asked in the last sitting of Parliament for relief with the Country Age Pension Fuel Card and the patient assisted travel scheme, there was a resounding, “We think you all get enough.” I think that was the response we got from one of the ministers. The response by the Minister for Health was that there would be no more relief for PATS patients. She was very clear in her reply. I went back and had a look at it and was quite shocked by the way she responded when I was standing in the chamber. She essentially said that regional Western Australians get more than enough and that there was no need to revisit that scheme even though —

Mr D.J. Kelly: Don’t misquote her.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Go and read *Hansard*, minister.

Mr D.J. Kelly: Well quote *Hansard*—don’t make it up.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Go and read it; do your homework. She said that regional Western Australians get more than enough. We need only watch the body language and review that particular question time. I can tell members that a number of my constituents called and were appalled at the way the minister responded to the question.

PATS is one avenue; there are a range of others. I know the member for Moore will touch on the Country Age Pension Fuel Card. This government has a number of levers that it can call on. There is a growing public housing list. There are more people accessing food and emergency services, more people unable to pay their power bills and more people struggling to put fuel in their car, yet this government is sitting on an enormous pile of cash. We expect to see from this McGowan Labor government a response to that—to not only deal with the immediate challenge, but provide some structural relief so that it sets up this state to transition out of the state of emergency and the pandemic for future generations. That is the task when a government has a budget surplus of such an eye-watering size.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.24 pm]: I, too, would like to talk to the excellent motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, which states —

That this house calls on the McGowan government to ensure that the upcoming state budget is focused on alleviating the cost-of-living pressures burdening WA families.

I think we have to understand that we have something of a perfect storm. We have had two years of the pandemic. We have had constraint in our supply chains. We have seen the cost of shipping go through the roof. We have seen the cost of transport rise in the last period by 20 per cent in one year. A 20 per cent increase in transport costs is throwing pressure upon every household. Of course, the situation has emerged recently with the price of fuel, which the federal government has taken some steps to alleviate through a 22¢ cut in the fuel excise. We are yet to see anything from this government to offer some relief for households in their day-to-day transport costs. Day-to-day transport costs are something that every household knows very well. The RAC has campaigned for some time to highlight the problem that exists with the steep and steady increases in vehicle registrations. It has put forward the view that if costs for vehicle registrations had kept pace simply with inflation over the past decade, every household would have saved \$900 in that time. That is the cost every household has had through vehicle registration fees rising in excess of the cost of inflation. It was four per cent in the most recent budget, which is twice the rate of inflation that was forecast in that budget for the rise of registration fees.

Registration fees apply to not only cars, but also heavy vehicles. I will give members an idea of what heavy vehicle drivers pay for their registration. A list published on the Department of Transport's website indicates that a heavy vehicle licence for a prime mover towing two or more trailers, basically a four-axle truck, is \$10 666. On top of that are other fees for trailers. It is \$4 680 for a large rigid truck with trailer. These costs are flowing through to the state coffers, but they are also flowing through to every household in the state, contributing to that 20 per cent increase in the cost of transport. That is certainly not the only contributor. We know that the cost of fuel has gone up. Even though the excise has been cut by 22¢, it has not had such a positive effect for commercial users, because they have had a cut to the rebate. There has been a slight positive effect, but not a great downward driver in cost for heavy transport. That then flows through to the price of goods in supermarkets.

As I said before, we have had a perfect storm. We have had the constraints caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Supply chains have been disrupted because of COVID outside the state. Within the state, we have seen constraint on the number of truck operators. It is virtually impossible to buy a new truck; waiting periods are very long. We have seen a problem with the supply of AdBlue and a range of other issues that have conspired to make it very difficult to keep down the cost in that industry. That then flows through to the prices everybody pays at the supermarket.

The government could seriously consider the proposal the RAC put forward to freeze registration fees this year to ensure there are no further imposts on household incomes from the price of their motoring. I go further and suggest that just as the federal government has done with its response to a pinch point being brought about by the Ukraine crisis and the cut to federal excise of 22¢ a litre to on-road fuel, we could perhaps seek some relief to transport through registration fees that heavy vehicles operate under as a way of ensuring that they can keep down their costs. That could then flow through to every household that relies on transport. We all know how much we rely on transport. We saw what happened when the east-west rail line was out for a few weeks and supermarket shelves became very bare, except for the essentials that we produce locally. If people were waiting for any processed food that came mainly from other places, it was very difficult and supplies of some medicines and other lines got very tight.

We know how essential transport is and we know that every dollar that is spent in transport flows through to the basket of goods that householders have to pay for at the end of the week when they do their weekly grocery shop, or they go and buy fuel that still comes in a truck. If we could give some relief to transport, that would be a good outcome.

I will refer to a report that again was prepared for the RAC by ACIL Allen Consulting called, *Benefits to Western Australian motorists from taxes, fees and charges*. The report is a couple of years old, so things might have changed in that time, but the historical figures certainly have not changed. They will still be in the budget. It outlines the total vehicle-related revenue in Western Australia generated from Western Australian motorists that goes to local government, the state government and the commonwealth government. I will look at the state government revenue in the year this government first came to power, its first year of budget in 2017–18. The state government revenue from Western Australian motorists was a little over \$1.4 billion. The state spend on roads, including its contribution to local government roads, was \$1.274 billion. I have extrapolated from those figures that the commonwealth government had contributed to that \$1.274 billion with \$736 million, which meant that \$880 million flowed into the state coffers in that year from Western Australian motorists. It was not returned to roads. It was not returned to road transport. Certainly, some of it could have been spent on the vast subsidy that is given to public transport in this state, but \$880 million from Western Australian motorists flowed into the state coffers.

The forecasts in this report were that from 2018–19 to the end of next year—again, some of these figures have probably changed, but based on the trend of spending that was evident then—a total of \$5.4 billion from Western Australian motorists was expected to flow into the state coffers. I suggest that there is plenty of scope for the Western Australian government to make some adjustments to the charges it puts on transport, both in the fees that it charges motorists for their registration and in the costs of transport for industry, which provides us with our food, takes our produce to market, brings in the imports through Fremantle port and other places and distributes them around the state to all the supermarkets and shops. Transport brings all the building products and everything

else into Western Australia that we need to make our economy work. If we could do something about curing the costs of that industry, costs that have blown out 20 per cent in a year, we would be able to help address some of the pressures on Western Australian household incomes. With a forecast of \$5 billion from Western Australian motorists in that period, there is pretty ample scope for some of those costs to be defrayed.

The member for Central Wheatbelt alluded to the Country Age Pension Fuel Card and there is another one—the Emergency Services Volunteer Fuel Card. I asked the Premier a question in this place about whether the Country Age Pension Fuel Card could be considered for an increase in the upcoming budget. His initial reaction was not very committal, but in a supplementary question I pointed out to him that as costs rise for motorists because oil and gas prices rise, so, too, do the revenues for the state because it recoups money from royalties and other taxes, which are rising well in excess of what the cost would be to provide a CPI increase for the fuel card. The money is there. It would cost nothing off the budget surplus. Extra money is coming in as a result of the Ukraine crisis and other price pressures, which are driving up state revenues from oil and gas. It would be only fair to share some of that with some of the people who are doing it very tough at the moment, caught as they are in the price squeeze. I know that the Leader of the Liberal Party will talk about some household costs, including energy costs and water costs, but transport is one cost that most households have to bear. Even if people in the country do not own a car, they are still able to use that card for taxis and other means, or they could have someone else drive them—even pensioners who have lost the ability to drive benefit from the Country Age Pension Fuel Card because their carers and others can use it. As long as it is being used for their transport, we are quite ambivalent about how they achieve that.

That is an ability, I believe, for country people, especially, to have some relief from the high price of fuel, which is happening in many country towns. That would be an excellent way of returning some of the state's increased revenues to some of the most deserving Western Australians—the aged people who have built this state and who have contributed taxes throughout their lives and now need a bit of a helping hand because they are caught in the perfect storm of events. They have had a horrendous couple of years. Many of them have been sheltering away, concerned about travelling, but they still need to travel to get to things like doctors and go shopping. For many of the people in towns I represent, they do not have a Coles. Actually, there is not a Coles or a Woolies in the entirety of my electorate. They go to the IGA. It is good that we have those as well, but some people want to go to larger shops and sometimes they have to go out of their smaller communities to buy some of the goods that they need. That is leading to a lot of pressure upon them.

The member for Central Wheatbelt also spoke about the reaction when an increase to the patient assisted travel scheme was raised. The contribution from the state to people who travel under PATS has never really addressed the actual cost. It has always been a help, but it does not cover anywhere near the cost of driving a car to an appointment. As we know, with costs rapidly escalating, now would be an excellent time for that to be addressed in the next budget as a helping hand, giving some extra help to those people who have to travel to get necessary medical services. This is not a nice-to-have; it is a must-have for these people. They have to get to the appropriate places to source medical services. Hospitals in many country towns now have much lower capacity than they once did. Operations that used to be done routinely in country hospitals are no longer done there. There are many circumstances in which people have to travel. Once we go north of Perth, there are very few major hospital services. Even in towns the size of Geraldton, Karratha and others, the standard of care really is not sufficient so that people do not have to travel in some circumstances to get the services they need. It is essential that people are able to do just that. We would like to see this measure taken up for those families who have to travel to gain their necessary medical services.

One of the other issues we were talking about was the cost of living in country areas. I raised this the other day in an MPI, but I had very limited time to talk about the rental situation in many country areas. I pointed out in that debate that of the 20 suburbs with the lowest vacancy rates for tenancies, 17 of them are in regional places. The member for Vasse has just come in; she has a couple of areas in her electorate where there are virtually no rentals available. York, in the central wheatbelt, has zero rentals. The member for Central Wheatbelt was talking about some of those pressures as well. In Geraldton even, a very large community in my area, there are suburbs where there are very low levels of vacancy. Jurien Bay has zero rentals available. Anybody who wants to provide an essential service in a town will find it very difficult to base themselves in a community that has zero rental properties available. The member for Warren–Blackwood probably would not know this, but many communities in her electorate are in that position, including Denmark, Bridgetown and Manjimup, which have severe shortages of rental accommodation available for people to come and take up employment.

Also, if a Government Regional Officers' Housing property is sold or is no longer available, for whatever reason, or a person is transitioning out of social housing because they have a job and they need to find a rental property in the private market, they will find they have a problem because there is none. They will have nowhere to go. We know that hundreds and hundreds of GROH properties are sitting empty around the state. We know that the Minister for Housing is big on promises and plans, but the only thing the government has managed to deliver in five years is to remove 1 300 houses from the social housing portfolio and it has built very few social houses. We know that given the price pressures and all the constraints we have, it will be very difficult for the government to

catch up now it has dropped the ball and allowed this situation to manifest. Once we get so far behind, even in the most perfect circumstances, it will take months, if not years, to catch up again, and these are far from perfect circumstances. We have a boom in construction not just in our state, but also right across the country, and in not just housing, but also services to mines and other developments.

The federal government has spent an enormous amount of money on infrastructure to keep the economies of all sorts of places in Australia going so that the effects of the pandemic do not lead to a negative economic downturn for the country. The federal government is spending money on matters that can lead to increased productivity in the future—better roads, better communications, better water storage and through all sorts of other avenues.

I congratulate the government on some of its recent investments to ensure that critical minerals that play a very vital part in this state's economy will go forward. Although that might not necessarily address directly what we are talking about here, it will lead to a situation in which we can ensure that while we are addressing the short-term problems we face, in the long term we will have a strong and healthy economy so that we can make good on the promise for economic development of the state. The government has plenty of opportunity, with a \$5.8 billion surplus last year, and goodness only knows what we can expect around the corner, with some of the increases in commodity prices that we have seen and some of the assumptions about a fall in commodity prices that have proven wrong.

We have consistently seen huge amounts of money flowing into state coffers. At the same time, households are desperate and are doing it tough. There is a need for the state government to play its part, just as the federal government has done, in trying to address those pressures in the budget next month. We expect to see some reconsideration of the decision on the patient assisted travel scheme after the dreadful reaction we got; a reduction, or at least a freeze, in car registration costs; and some effort to cut the costs for the transport industry, which would flow through to every sector in the state, whether it is construction, retail, farming or mining, because they are all dependent on transport. That is fundamental to the future of our state. The government now has an opportunity to ensure that we do not have constraints that will not only hold up the development of the state, but also lead to unnecessarily high prices for households in the coming year.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [4.44 pm]: I rise to strongly support this motion. We are all aware of the sudden inflation in costs around the world. For the last two years, we have witnessed the growing problems created by the impact of the COVID pandemic on supply chains around the globe. We have had labour shortages across all sectors in most nations, which has added to supply problems for consumer goods and input supplies used in manufacturing around the world. The inevitable outcome of supply shortages is rising prices as businesses and nations push up prices in competing for that shrinking supply. We are not immune from these global economic impacts. Throughout last year, we experienced prices of consumer goods rising significantly, while also seeing empty shelves and shops as the supply chain problems continued. As last year rolled along, we had further price effects from rapidly rising oil prices. That has had a particular impact on our economy that has flowed into a general energy crisis and also global price rises for gas, coal and even uranium. This has obviously helped on the income side for this nation and this government.

The high cost of primary energy and the COVID effects also pushed up other industrial commodity prices, which created conditions across the board for costs that push up inflation and hurt consumers everywhere. But something that is within the control of this state government are the consumers in the state of Western Australia. The effect of oil price increases has been dramatically exacerbated by the conflict from the evil invasion of Ukraine and all the consequences of sanctions against Russia. That has flowed into substantial higher costs for petrol prices and, as the member for Moore just pointed out, that has a direct inflationary effect on other consumer goods because, as the saying goes, Australia travels on the back of a truck. Those transport costs significantly come into it. No household has been immune from these inflationary effects, but as I have said a number of times in this place, it particularly affects those people on low fixed incomes and low incomes, especially people who are doing part-time work. Obviously, the government has some scope in relation to transport, as has been outlined, but we see a squeeze on the family budget in relation to the cost of energy and families making invidious choices around what else they can cut, because many cannot avoid paying for transport.

There has been an upside for our state; that is, the high prices for energy, iron ore and other commodities has led to a boom in income for the state government. We will find out in a few short weeks the surplus for this government, but there is a very high probability that the surplus will exceed the \$5.4 billion in the last budget. We know that will be completely due to that surge in commodity prices, but it means that the government has capacity to provide support and help when required. Many households have not benefited from the commodity price rise, either through direct employment or wages, which has put a strain on home budgets. In addition to those cost-of-living pressures, people who rent their home are also facing an enormous impact from significant rent increases, which my colleagues will go into in more detail. Again, we see families making a choice: do they keep a roof over their heads or buy food or critical materials for children within their family? Households need relief from those cost pressures now. They are experiencing that now.

I get the most dreadful stories from people coming through my office, particularly people who are on low incomes. As I said earlier in debate, they are particularly women who are single-income parents living in untenable situations

facing the prospect of losing accommodation. The federal budget has provided some relief in the form of significant cuts to the excise tax on petrol, but, again, as was pointed out, there is an opportunity for this government to provide some relief in those areas.

The reality is that throughout its term, this government has contributed significantly to cost-of-living pressures through decisions made in past budgets. That has raised the cost of living for Western Australians quite significantly. I remind the government of its first budget in 2017–18 when it set significant price rises for our utilities, water and electricity. Back then, it announced a 10.9 per cent electricity price rise and a six per cent water price rise, which were well above inflation at that time. Those price rises hurt family budgets, and now they do even more so, given that families are facing such cost pressures.

I want to take a slight detour here. I refer to the Minister for Energy today. I will not go into all the statements he has made in his non-answer to my questions; however, I will go into his claim that the Barnett government was responsible for all of the power price increases. It is important to get a little history on the record in *Hansard*. Back in 2005, what did we see from the Labor government—the Gallop and then the Carpenter Labor government? Western Power was split into four agencies. That was the government’s plan. Its guarantee for that plan was that we would not see price increases. In fact, we would see price reductions. That was the promise of that initiative by the Labor government. That goes back to a Labor government. Alan Carpenter was the energy minister when that plan was hatched. In April 2008, there was a press release from Alan Carpenter saying that the state government had rejected an Office of Energy recommendation that would have increased electricity prices 47 per cent in 2009 and 15 per cent the following year. That was a 69 per cent increase in charges that the Office of Energy was saying had to be applied. Why did that have to be applied? The government had been playing to popularity and had not taken responsible management. The Gallop government had not increased utility charges since 2001, so we saw a massive and growing deficit for the state government with the subsidy of electricity charges. That is what the Barnett government was presented with when it came into power—a massive increase in utility charges. The Carpenter government said it would increase those prices in a tranche. They remained unchanged for a further 15 months out to the election, and then there was to be a 10 per cent increase in 2009–10, with further annual increases to be phased in over a six to eight-year period. We were looking at 60 to 80 per cent increases over that time.

That government was thrown out on its ear—as it should have been—and the Barnett government came in and it had a choice of constant bleeding or to do those increases in shorter tranches and stop bleeding that money out of those agencies. That government was not flush with funds in those early stages. That was the reality of it. It was due to a policy of the Labor Party to split up that agency. It led to massive inefficiencies and price increases. There had been fixed charges since 2001 and then the Barnett government had to deal with it. I think it is important to get that to get that on the record.

If we look the representative household model, the typical household prior to the 2017 election, the then Leader of the Opposition, Hon Mark McGowan, made the following election promise —

“If we’re elected, there will be no new taxes or increases on taxes on West Australians. Full stop.”

That was the promise he made. The first budget saw that commitment broken with the household basket of public sector goods increasing by \$438. That was the single largest dollar increase ever applied by government to the representative household basket of public sector goods and services. Across the board, this saw household goods increase by 7.74 per cent in 2017–18, at a time when inflation was under one per cent. That was the status then. The total expenditure in the representative household budget on this basket of public goods in 2021 was \$6 382. Taking into account changes in the model, this represents an increase of \$895 a year under the Labor government, or almost 16 per cent compared with the 2016–17 levels—a period when inflation was mostly in the one to two per cent level. It has obviously spiked up very recently. Motor vehicle charges increased by 13 per cent from \$802 to \$913 over that time, and licence charges increased 19.4 per cent from \$334 to \$399 for the typical family. That is an 11.8 per cent increase.

I turn to utility charges, which hurt households most because most households have very limited scope to reduce their charges. Over the first term of the McGowan government total household utility charges increased by 11.7 per cent, with families in the representative household now paying once almost \$1 800—it is \$1 779—a year for electricity and \$1 760 for water. Despite some minimal increases because of the COVID impact and the government saying that it would reduce costs, families are still paying 14.5 per cent, or \$324, more for electricity and 8.9 per cent, or \$238, more for water.

We have also commenced calling on the government to offer immediate cost-of-living relief to struggling families by removing the existing overcharging occurring on water fees. The minister would well remember that in the Economic Regulation Authority’s analysis of water charges, it said that the wastewater fees were almost \$400 per household above the cost of recovery, which should be the figure that the government is using in relation to the provision of that critical service. In fact, in 2018 the Premier conceded that, and it is in a press article titled “Premier McGowan says high water bills in Perth are necessary for the state’s economic good”. So the Premier was saying, “Yes, I know I’m hurting households, but it’s necessary for the state’s good.”

The massive surpluses we have had over the last two budgets, which will be well over \$10 billion, offer the perfect opportunity for the government to stop overtaxing households, and that is the substantive point of our debate. Even if we look at public transport, we hear a lot about the capping of fares to two zones, but public transport has not escaped the cost-of-living increases from the McGowan government. Over the past five years, the standard two-zone fare has had increased 26 per cent or a total of \$124 since 2016–17. That is for a household that is predicated on six two-zone fares a week over the 48 working weeks of the year. So the recent statement about the cap on all transport fares at two zones brings no significant savings to the average household, which takes much shorter journeys. It might be a benefit to the people who live in Mandurah, and I am sure that that pleases the Premier, but it makes no difference to someone living in the two-zone area, which is the majority of people, who have had no saving. In fact, as I have said, under this government they have seen a 26 per cent increase in their cost of public transport.

One key metric of distress in electricity is disconnections. We now see a significant and disturbing trend. When after being warned that disconnection is imminent, households still do not have the capacity to pay their electricity bills and keep their power on, and they are increasing dramatically, we know it is time for the government to stop, listen and act. We know from the *Annual performance report—Energy retailers 2017/18* released by the Economic Regulation Authority that the rate of residential electricity disconnections in Western Australian more than doubled, reaching a six-year high in that year. There were 19 743 electricity customers disconnected for not paying a bill in the McGowan government's first year, and that was up from 16 000 disconnections in 2016–17. Over the same period, Synergy's disconnection rate increased by a massive 118 per cent, compared with an increase of 12.6 per cent in Horizon Power's disconnection rate. In the second year, we see no significant improvement. A total of 21 705 residential electricity customers were disconnected for not paying the bill in 2018–19—a 36 per cent increase on 2016–17 and a 15 per cent increase on the previous year.

In the government's second year, Synergy's disconnection rate increased by five per cent, while Horizon's has increased by 87 per cent since 2017–18. The Economic Regulation Authority has also stated that WA has a higher rate of disconnections than New South Wales, South Australia or Victoria. By the end of 2020–21, the average residential bill debt for Synergy's non-hardship customers reached its highest level in five years, while Synergy and Horizon customers on the hardship program had their highest average bill debt since reporting began in 2016–17.

COVID obviously provided a little circuit-breaker because of the freeze on electricity prices and the rebates to all householders, but as highlighted by an ABC article —

A report by the state's economic watchdog ... shows average debt levels owed by customers in financial hardship hit record highs in the year to June 30.

The increase came despite a \$600 handout by the government ...

Figures ... show average bill debt for hardship customers of state-owned utilities Synergy and Horizon Power leapt from \$772 in 2019–20 to \$1,195 last financial year.

The rise was even steeper among hardship customers of regional power provider Horizon, jumping from \$859 to \$1,547 over the same period.

One of the significant drivers of that has been the increase in electricity charges under this government. The first thing the government did in 2017–18 was to increase the daily supply charge for Western Australian households from 48.6¢ a day to 94.9¢—almost 95¢—a day. The hard thing about that is it is an unavoidable charge; no matter how much a household saves on electricity, they cannot save the connection charge. As members would know—I see members around this room whom I know care about people who are struggling—it is the poorest people who are facing most hardship who have the greatest difficulty in dealing with those fixed charges, but we saw a whopping increase in the charge under this government. As I have stated, that means that families are making tough choices: Do I pay the electricity bill or do I buy food? Do I get new shoes for my kids for the new school year or do I just make them squeeze into the old shoes or not wear shoes when they attend school? They are the choices people are making because of the massive utility charges that they face.

I could go on, but I have to get onto the exciting topic of water, and I thank the minister for welcoming me back into this portfolio that I care passionately about because water will deliver a massive economic opportunity to the state in the future. We have seen significant water charges under this government. In 2018–19, we saw a large increase in water bills for Western Australian families. Minister for Water Hon Dave Kelly put out a press release that said that the average household would see only a 5.5 per cent increase. Meanwhile, families that use more than 500 kilolitres would see a skyrocketing increase of 16 per cent on their water bills. As I pointed out, or at least alluded to, in question time today, that fee increase was all billed as water guzzlers in the western suburbs and the wealthy few living in the leafy suburbs using excessive amounts of water. I went into this in some detail sometime after that charge was introduced; overwhelmingly, the data showed it affected low-income households with big families. The average water consumption—I can be corrected on the latest figure—is about 130 kilolitres a person. A four-person household is automatically over the 500-kilolitre threshold if they use only the average amount of water.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have only a limited time.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Dr D.J. HONEY: Struggling families need relief from these cost-of-living charges. As I have said on a number of occasions, I am extremely supportive of targeted relief to help those most in need. Do not introduce regressive models that tax large families. Make sure to provide relief particularly to those people on low fixed incomes and low incomes who have no choice but to face these challenges.

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [5.05 pm]: I rise to support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. We need to remember that on the one hand is a view that we have been lucky and everyone has been able to sail on as normally as possible. However, the reality is that since the first quarter of 2020, many businesses, particularly those in the events, tourism and hospitality industries, have been buried in debt and are dealing with increased costs and challenges, including the COVID restrictions and mandates that have been imposed on them and that continue to stifle their trade. A growing number of small businesses are struggling to cope with the rising cost of doing business, particularly in places such as the Perth CBD, where we see businesses closing left, right and centre and vacant hotels. Workers are working from home instead of their offices and that is having an effect on the heart and soul of Western Australia, the Perth CBD.

Regional areas have been trying to compete with businesses in the metropolitan areas, which are not exposed to the same level of costs. Businesses in regional areas are exposed to increased freight, fuel and travel costs. For example, people in Carnarvon were paying up to \$2.30 a litre for petrol and in some places further north they were paying up to \$2.80—and more. The cost of doing business in regional areas can be far greater than it is in the city, with the increased costs of goods and rents. There is a lack of rentals. I think the member for Moore raised the housing situation; people are lucky to find a rental in many regional towns. There are plenty of job opportunities in regional Western Australia, but there is no workers' accommodation. Businesses are under pressure simply because if they can find an employee, there is nowhere to house them. I think the government's announcements on workers' accommodation in Exmouth and Kalbarri are a little premature. The government has announced its election commitment of designating workers' accommodation in Exmouth and Kalbarri, but, in reality, acquiring expressions of interest to get a builder to build the workers' accommodation is proving to be an expensive exercise simply because to make it work, it needs government investment. It needs government investment to put services on a property to build workers' accommodation.

That is what is lacking in Exmouth. I have heard reports that it will take \$3 million to \$5 million alone to make the site suitable to build workers' accommodation. It is not within reach of a developer to take on that financial burden when it has such high costs. I am sure the Minister for Lands, the Minister for Housing and the government are well aware of the trials and tribulations of building workers' accommodation in places such as Exmouth when we need to make sites fit for purpose. I hope the government is listening and can come to the party to provide much needed earthworks to make workers' accommodation in Exmouth a reality.

The government is now embarking on that in Kalbarri. It has been talking about workers' accommodation. This is something that is needed so that people can fulfil those roles, of which there are plenty in places like Kalbarri. The other one I want to mention is Coral Bay. The government was quick to issue a media statement about workers' accommodation in Coral Bay. Most people might hear that the government is building workers' accommodation there, but it is actually the RAC that is building that accommodation for employees. Yet again, we see businesses suffer and people having to move to other towns to service places like Coral Bay. That has an impact on emergency services—those who volunteer as ambos or with sea rescue and so forth—simply because people who own businesses are stretched to the limit. They are finding it hard to make ends meet given the overheads they must pay, but they are also under pressures simply because they do not have staff. They are working themselves to the bone, as one would say, because they do not have the staff to fulfil those roles.

Water costs have increased. We hear the government say that it has not increased this or that. The member for Cottesloe summed it up when he spoke about the predicament that the Barnett government was in when there was a freeze on utility costs. That has an impact, because at some point governments have to try to close that gap. That was the legacy of the Gallop and Carpenter governments that the Barnett government had to take on. The Gallop government was negligent. It was trying to win votes. To get through the break-up of power and so forth, it needed to put a sweetener over the people of Western Australia, and that was to freeze utility costs. That was going to have to be paid for later on. The Barnett government took on the burden of the decision that the Gallop government had made and which the Carpenter government continued. That is the reason the government has needed to increase utility costs. We hear a lot about water. I am glad that the Minister for Water is in the chamber, although he is asleep.

Mr D.J. Kelly: What are you talking about!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am glad he has just woken up; it must be the after-effects of COVID! The minister knows that a uniform tariff exists for water. Is that correct, Minister for Water?

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: He spruiks about how royalties for regions will make people in regional WA pay the same amount for water as people pay in Perth. When regional small businesses go over the amount that is allocated to them, many are slugged with unsustainable water costs, which in many cases are up to three and a half times those in the metro area. It is around \$2.50 versus \$9 a kilolitre.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: When we talk about water, most regional communities are on band 15—the highest cost when it comes to water.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The member for Kalgoorlie knows that. The member for Central Wheatbelt knows that. The member for Roe knows that. The member for Vasse knows that.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for North West Central, I am in the chair, but there is just one thing I want to ask, as you mentioned the member for Kalgoorlie. Are you taking interjections? I ask that, because you are goading —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Only quality ones, which I am not getting from the Minister for Water. I will continue.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Are you taking interjections?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No, I am not taking interjections, although you cannot stop the peanut gallery across the road!

Withdrawal of Remark

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent): Do you want to just withdraw that statement?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What for?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Because I am in the Speaker's chair.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is not unparliamentary.

Mr D.J. Kelly: Are you challenging the Acting Speaker's ruling?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I will withdraw because I am running out of time.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you.

Debate Resumed

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The peanut over there is the Minister for Water.

We all know that regional WA is being put on band 15. They pay nearly four times the amount for water that people pay in Perth. It is not a level playing field for those businesses. There is the infamous toilet tax that the Minister for Water will not get rid of. If hotels, motels or pubs have more than one toilet, they pay for the privilege of having that extra toilet. Furthermore, they pay for the privilege of having water to go to that toilet. Furthermore, they pay for the privilege to flush that water out of that toilet! These businesses are paying exorbitant overheads.

Dr D.J. Honey: With 50 per cent occupancy.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is at a time when, over the last two years, occupancy rates have been about 10 to 15 per cent in the CBD. The Premier talks about how wonderful tourism is in regional Western Australia, but most places are at a 50 to 80 per cent occupancy rate. Why? It is because they do not have the workforce to be able to have their hotel at 100 per cent occupancy. The overheads that regional businesses have to pay are far greater than the overheads that businesses pay in metropolitan Perth.

Then there are the COVID rules. The school holidays start next week and Exmouth will be full. I urge everyone to perhaps bring some food with them because of the effect that COVID is having on businesses there. The chef might have COVID or be a close contact, the person behind the bar or the barista might be a close contact and cannot go to work, or the cleaner or administration assistant might not be able to go to work. It is having an effect. We will find that most small businesses will not be able to cope with the tourists who will go to their regional towns, simply because the stresses and strains of the rules around COVID are impacting them. That will impact the ability of tourists to enjoy places like Exmouth, Kalbarri, Shark Bay, Carnarvon, Broome, Kununurra and down south. It is a challenging time for businesses to cope with any visitors or tourists, simply because of the stresses and strains of COVID and the close contact, mask-wearing and two-square-metre rules. All these rules are placing a huge impost on businesses in regional Western Australia. Whether people agree with them or not, they are having an effect, and our businesses need help.

We can look at further costs. Insurance keeps going up—that is, if a business can get insurance. Adventure tourism is suffering because they are either unable to get insurance or are paying huge amounts. This makes their businesses unsustainable. It is making adventure tourism businesses think twice about whether they should stay in business. I have one horseriding business in my electorate and the owner is at the point where he cannot afford to continue because of exorbitant, rising insurance costs—and that is if businesses can get insurance. It will be interesting to see

what happens over the next short period. Many caravan park owners cannot get insurance. When businesses find that the cost of insurance is prohibitive, or they are not able to get insurance at all, and face the prospect of closing after they have been trading successfully—it has nothing to do with their trade—we have a problem. As I said, caravan park owners are now starting to find out that their ability to get insurance is coming to an end.

The government is not tackling the massive problems that exist. We hear about how the economy has never been as good as it is under this Labor government. We all know that the iron ore industry and the resource sector are keeping this state afloat. We all know about the billions of dollars being put into the state's coffers. We all know about the GST revenue. This Labor government has failed to invest in our businesses and our tourism industry over the years it has been in power. What are the government's strategies to get workers to come to Western Australia? What is the government doing to build workers' accommodation? Is it reasonable for many people in businesses to have to work between 60 and 100 hours a week just to remain open? That is what they have to do because of the lack of workforce. We have not heard anything about what the government is doing to tackle the issue of worker shortages.

It will be interesting to see how tourism businesses in this state will cope when they have had a low season, particularly in the north of this state, and are now going into the high season and do not have workers available. The government's rules around COVID close contacts are also having a huge effect. That is in addition to the mental health issues and stress that our business owners are facing in these very difficult times. It is not all beer and skittles, as the Premier likes everyone to think, when it comes to tourism and businesses right across this state.

The liquor restrictions that have been placed on communities are also having an effect on small businesses. That is because of the lack of police in our regional areas. That is why we are seeing higher levels of crime than we have ever seen before in regional communities. The highest crime rates have occurred under this government. We hear a lot about the number of police, but we are not seeing them. That is because they are all being dedicated to the COVID response and Operation Tide. When crime rates go up, insurance costs also go up. Businesses and community members now have to pay more for insurance than ever before because of the amount of crime that is occurring in our regional towns.

The small businesses and tourism industries in Western Australia need vision and hope. They need some big ideas to be able to bring people and workers to Western Australia, and to promote Western Australia. We need to think big when it comes to trying to get events to Western Australia. We have heard a lot about the Wallabies match. That is great. But that is nothing new. We need to think of new ideas and ways in which we can hold events that span a week or two weeks. The Lord Mayor of Perth was pushing for the Commonwealth Games to be held in Perth. We need to think of big ticket events. Perhaps the government should try to chase the Formula One Grand Prix. We have a homegrown Formula One champion. Why not push to have a Formula One race in Perth? Let us get it off the Victorians. That is the type of thinking the government needs to act on to be able to grow tourism and put Western Australia back on the map.

When it comes to the state of emergency, all these issues that have been raised by other members are being masked by the state of emergency. Let us take the mask off on the state of emergency and deal with these issues that are having real impacts on real people, real businesses and tourism.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Let us get some parity when it comes to water. I hope that instead of hearing this drip, drip, drip from the Minister for Water, he will stand up and pour some cold water on some of these charges that are affecting people in regional Western Australia. Let us also get rid of that toilet tax. We all know that the minister likes to tax the toilet. Let us flush him away, because we know that he will not be a minister in 2025.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) [5.25 pm]: I rise to also contribute to this motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition —

That this house calls on the McGowan government to ensure that the upcoming state budget is focused on alleviating the cost-of-living pressures burdening WA families.

I want to place particular focus on one of my shadow portfolio responsibilities, that being the prevention of family and domestic violence, and also on how that portfolio relates to some of the issues that have been raised in my electorate.

We know that, nationally, one in four women have been subject to domestic violence, and that, tragically, every 11 days an Australian woman loses her life at the hands of a current or former partner. Family and domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women, and one in five women, and men, believe that domestic violence is a normal reaction to stress prompted by women, which is an ongoing concern. I appreciate and understand that we all share the importance of continuing to raise these concerns in our community and across the state. Clearly the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence shares the important need to do that. We know also that according to the WA Police Force annual report 2020–21, the number of FDV reports in this state was 19.3 per cent above the five-year average. We have also heard that people in regional areas are three times more likely to be exposed to family and domestic violence. The incidence of sexual assaults also increased in the period 2019–20.

I note that the government has a Path to Safety family and domestic violence strategy. The first two years of the plan are around the fact that, and I quote —

The COVID-19 Family and Domestic Violence Taskforce will plan and develop actions as part of the National Partnerships Agreement on COVID-19 Domestic and Family Violence Responses. The Taskforce will consider:

- The needs of women and children experiencing, or at risk of domestic violence.
- Ensuring the visibility and accountability of perpetrators.

We know, as has been outlined, that COVID has exacerbated some of these real concerns. One of the biggest issues facing victims of family and domestic violence has been access to housing, which has been at a crisis level in this state under the McGowan government. The overwhelming feedback is that our not-for-profit and state government agencies are also feeling choked by the level of pressure in this area. I spoke to a couple of police officers today who said that their main demand is largely in the family and domestic violence space at a local level. There is little to no long-term housing available. Private market availability is so limited and expensive that people are finding it increasingly difficult to get into crisis care.

The rapid rehousing pilot project was spruiked in the last budget. I asked the Minister for Housing at that time about the timing of the project, appreciating that it would not start until 2022–23. I look forward to seeing how that works on the ground, but it is clear that funding for agencies that support victims of family and domestic violence is not keeping up with demand, especially the funding models that were set up pre-COVID. Some refuges have been forced to trim services and this issue was exacerbated by the rental moratorium ending in March 2021. That meant that many people were forced to re-sign rental leases at significantly higher rates, knowing that they could not afford to do so, but they had little choice. That led to a situation in which many people felt under significant pressure. We are now seeing that translate into an increase in demand for food services, as many people are spending most of their income on rent. They are having to seek assistance for food, transport and utilities.

This is no longer what was once considered a pressure only amongst those who do not have full-time employment; these levels of pressure are being felt right across the board. There is an obvious and clear connection between housing unaffordability and unavailability, and victims of family and domestic violence fleeing their perpetrators. We are hearing that women feel they cannot leave their home because they do not have anywhere else to go. The rapid rehousing pilot program would be welcome, but how can it be implemented if there is not any available housing? That raises questions about all the other measures and investments that need to be put in place to ensure that such a project's objectives can be achieved as successfully as possible, supporting some of our most vulnerable children and families.

We understand that 3 300 new social houses are to be provided. That is a good start, but it is only a start. There has been talk that the expected budget surplus could include up to \$8 billion in iron ore revenue. There is therefore an obvious obligation on the government to ensure that there is capacity to provide the support needed by some of the most vulnerable in our community, victims of family and domestic violence. We are hearing that because of the lack of available housing, there are many people who are desperate, with nowhere to go, living in very challenging circumstances.

I will touch on South West Refuge Inc, which provides support in my region. COVID has created unprecedented demand, which has been impacted upon by housing affordability in my electorate. Other members have mentioned that the availability rate is at about zero, and that has been intensified by the challenges facing victims of family and domestic violence. For a range of different reasons, many caravan parks and tourist parks are no longer extending availability to women seeking refuge. This is also in response to tourism demand and some questionable perceptions of these individuals as tenants, which is of quite serious concern. This has reduced the availability of local accommodation for women and children escaping domestic violence. During the moratorium on rental accommodation in the COVID period of 2020–21, South West Refuge Inc moved from crisis accommodation for individuals of about three months to six to nine months, just because of people's inability to find suitable alternative accommodation. As a result of that, South West Refuge has had to turn away about 200 families in need. The current shortage in affordable and available housing has increased local homelessness for women and children escaping family and domestic violence.

Looking forward, we see some real challenges for South West Refuge. It is effectively running on the same contract it has had for the last seven years, and the Safe at Home program for nine years. It is understood that the state government wants to recontract its services for the next five years at the same level of funding, despite the increase in demand and the significant increases we are seeing in the cost of utilities. It is increasingly having to fundraise and seek donations to keep itself viable, and it is possibly looking at actually having to cut back on services. It is understood that it costs the refuge about \$80 000 a year, through its own fundraising efforts, to provide its current level of services.

It is also understood that the state government will take five years to decide on the best model for moving forward, with no guarantees at the end of that process about the path of investment. The refuge has now had seven contract

extensions, and after all this, it will have to continue for another five years with no additional funding. The Safe at Home program requires uplift in brokerage funding to meet the growing demand and clients' security needs. That is very welcome funding. The Safe at Home program employs more workers, but brokerage funding remains at 2010 funding levels.

Funding for the domestic violence mobile outreach program, a two-year pilot, commenced in December 2020 and will end in November 2022. This program has been an incredible success in the south west, providing women and children escaping family and domestic violence with valuable information, support and advocacy. But again the refuge has been advised, and it is concerned, that its funding will not continue beyond November 2022. As I stated, these are successful programs. Investment is needed in these important areas, but they are concerned about what the future holds and whether there will be a level of investment that can keep up with the incredible demand.

The South West Refuge is effectively in despair and is seriously considering its future options after July 2022. Unless there is some change, it will have to reduce the level of services it currently provides to remain sustainable. It cannot keep providing its services with the funding that it has been getting. It is very concerned about the impact that the closure of the service will have on the families that it supports, and I referred earlier to 200 families who were turned away during that 12-month period. I have had feedback from other refuges that are in a similar boat. They need to ensure that there is funding to support the demand for their services and that it takes into account the significant increase in costs as well.

South West Counselling in Busselton is a bit closer to home. The COVID-19 pandemic is having a serious impact on people seeking support from South West Counselling. The waitlist is ballooning. Clients already on low incomes are finding that they are unable to work due to COVID restrictions or whilst in isolation. If they are not paid during that time, they face challenges because they do not have the income to pay for increases in the cost of living, particularly in the housing market. An appeal was made to the Minister for Mental Health to increase funding to meet that demand. We were advised that the Mental Health Commission is the purchasing agency. The minister advised that his office and the Mental Health Commission would continue to engage with the mental health sector as it continued to grow and transform mental health service delivery across the state. The clients of South West Counselling need support now. It provides counselling and mental health support and preventive assistance to ensure that individuals and families do not face other challenges further down the track. These services are being significantly stretched right across the state, but this was just an insight into my local area.

We know that the government has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with a significant budget surplus to provide temporary relief. The government has a unique opportunity to provide investment in new areas of support. However, it is also vitally important that the government invest in assisting the vulnerable across the state. I have focused on victims of family and domestic violence, but the onus on the government is to ensure that those individuals, services and not-for-profits have the capacity to provide others with the support that they need so they do not feel that the only option they have is to be housed with a perpetrator. There is certainly an onus on the government to provide support to these agencies, which have continued to do an incredible job under extraordinary pressure, while there is a significant budget surplus thanks to the receipts of the mining industry.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [5.45 pm]: I rise to support the Leader of the Opposition's excellent motion condemning the McGowan government for its inaction on alleviating cost-of-living pressures on Western Australian families while sitting on a record surplus that has been built on commonwealth funds rather than on sound economic management.

I have looked back at some of the fantastic Labor Party documents from a few years ago. In the *WA Labor: Plan for jobs* there is no mention of people doing it hard. Here we go: there was "a fair go" for WA with Bill Shorten and Labor. There is certainly no mention of the vulnerable in that. Here we have *Getting things done*; there is no mention of the vulnerable in that. I must say that I agree with the Leader of the Opposition when she says —

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Roe, sorry; can I just interrupt you? Can you just tell me again which motion you are actually talking to?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry, Madam Acting Speaker?

Mr J.N. Carey: He doesn't know. Hello! Is anyone there?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am here.

Mr J.N. Carey interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister! Member for Roe, it is motion 13.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I would like to emphasise the way that the Premier answered the Leader of the Opposition's question today. Basically, he spoke about getting people back to work. When the Leader of the Opposition asked about Foodbank, he spoke about diversifying the economy. I think that demonstrates that the Premier has lost touch with the vulnerable of our community. When the Leader of the Opposition asked her question, the Premier could not focus on the fact that the question was about Foodbank. Some figures that are coming in are quite disturbing.

I would like to go through some of the reports of the Western Australian Council of Social Service over the last couple of years, certainly between 2019 and 2021. The overall cost of living for people in the metropolitan area rose by eight per cent and the income for a family of four rose on average by just five per cent. When we look at the breakdown for that same family of four, with the cost of food and beverages, it increased in the metro area by 5.36 per cent and in the regions by 5.1 per cent.

What our members have pointed out today is the struggle that many of our citizens in Western Australia have undertaken over the last couple of years. As the Leader of the Liberal Party pointed out, unfortunately, more recently there have been real increases in costs and now people are having to make choices about whether it is transport, food, rent or electricity. That is what I am worried about. The size of this vulnerable section of our community is increasing quite rapidly. Some of the figures today are that rents in the metro area have risen by 14 per cent and up to 16 per cent in the regions, on average. I will quote Garth Davis, an adviser on property investment in Australia. He said that our rents are becoming ridiculously high with “ridiculously high levels of unaffordability”. I quote —

“We have a housing crisis already,” he said. “Which will become a housing catastrophe as the borders reopen.”

I hope the Minister for Housing is taking this on board. Anecdotally, people are sending out pleas for assistance with housing in regional locations. We see it on social media. We have short-term clinical placements for nursing students, medical students and contract roles and the market is forcing people out of accommodation on many levels. In Esperance today, 10 rental properties are listed ranging from \$260 to \$480 a week. In Narrogin, we have five rental properties, only two with more than two bedrooms. In Katanning, there are 12 houses, with two three-by-one houses listed for \$650 a week. There are two in Gnowangerup; two in Williams; none in Tambellup, Broomehill, Kojonup or Pingrup; and one in Cranbrook. That tells us the shortages that we are facing in our regional towns.

The latest Shelter WA report on housing affordability says that four out of five Australians think that owning a house in their lifetime is unachievable. As we know, 9 000 people in Western Australia experience homelessness every night. People waiting for social housing are looking at a wait of 100 weeks. There are 18 600 households waiting for social housing, 3 178 people are on the priority waiting list and the unmet need for social and affordable housing is 39 200 homes.

The Minister for Housing knows these figures. He has been in government for five years and we know that the minister has his hands full, but 700 houses are vacant at the moment. I heard the minister’s comments yesterday in question time about the fact that at any one time, there are absentees and people are moving out or moving in, but, as I have said before, we need the element of local tradesmen. I have said it before that we need tradesmen. When a tap or an electrical appliance needs to be fixed, it has to be done by someone who is within half an hour or an hour away. Too many contracts are given out to tradesmen from towns —

Mr J.N. Carey interjected.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Too many contracts are given to tradesmen from towns —

Mr J.N. Carey interjected.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister has been in government for five years now. Too many contracts are given to people who are three or four hours away and that is why it takes them six months to turn up.

Mr J.N. Carey interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is what happens.

Mr J.N. Carey interjected.

Point of Order

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister’s comments are constant, insistent and are not welcome.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent): There is no point of order. Member for Roe, are you accepting interjections?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: No, I am not actually; thanks, Madam Acting Speaker.

Debate Resumed

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I just wanted to reiterate that. I have brought this up before and the minister needs to take it on board. It is an easy way to get that turnover of tenants and have fewer than 700 houses with no-one in them. That is a solution that the minister might want to look at.

If I can move on, there are plenty of other elements I want to speak about. I also want to talk about the COVID scenario. As we know, there was support through 2020 and 2021, but many businesses and families have not recovered financially and they are in a worse position than they were in 2020. I have spoken to some hospitality and tourism providers and some of the government grants are for when turnover has reduced by over 50 per cent.

The problem is that once that happens, generally the business goes under. Some of those grants need to be tailored. Unfortunately, some of our regional and metro businesses have already gone. We have heard the comments about the Hay Street Mall and the CBD and it is something this government needs to address.

I want to go on to the Foodbank of Western Australia. We heard the figures put by the Leader of the Opposition. In the *Foodbank hunger report 2021*, it was found that one in six Australian adults have not had enough to eat in the last year and 1.2 million children have gone hungry in that same period. For one in six Australians food insecurity means that they are forced to reduce their food intake. They are often forced to eat smaller meals to make the food last longer or skip meals altogether. At least once a week, more than half, or 57 per cent, go a whole day without eating. I think food security is very important. Some of the reasons for food insecurity include the unexpected expense of a large bill, rent, mortgages, hours of pay being reduced at work, losing a job, family breakdowns, domestic violence or becoming homeless. The food security issue came to light in the early stages of COVID when busloads of people came into the regions and went to the local IGA, maybe 150 kilometres out of Perth, and raided the shelves of those regional stores. To be honest, I thought that was one of the most disappointing things I have seen over the last five years. It gave us an appreciation, for people in the metro area especially, of where our food comes from and how important it is. The situation in Russia and Ukraine at the moment has only increased our awareness of that.

I want to round up some of the comments from our other speakers today because they brought up some good points right through the line. As I said, the figures from the Leader of the Opposition about demand for Foodbank increasing by 42 per cent in Albany and the quadrupling of the number of people in Bunbury who are accessing Foodbank are quite concerning. That is one of my biggest concerns. I urge any members when they get the opportunity to go to the Foodbank at the airport or anywhere else to see the good work that is being done. We are really noting a major increase there.

As the member for Moore pointed out, we have seen a real increase in transport costs and a massive increase in the income the government receives from vehicle registrations and licences. The state government has the opportunity to reduce some of those fees and to stand up and be counted. The member for Cottesloe pointed out the 11.7 per cent increase in the cost of a basket of goods. He made a good point about removing the overcharging on water and wastewater. He also spoke about WA having the highest rate of energy disconnections in Australia; and, of course, the promise that the Labor Party made at the 2017 election of no increases in rates and taxes if it were elected. Unfortunately, that one did not come through the ranks.

The member for North West Central is an excellent member who is in touch with his community around the Carnarvon, Kalbarri and Exmouth region. He pointed out the average cost of fuel in that area was \$2.30 a litre, if not higher. He raised the real concerns he has about the situation in Kalbarri, Exmouth and Coral Bay, where they cannot get a tradesman—and even if they could, there is no workers' accommodation. He also referred to his favourite subject—the toilet tax. I run across this in places like Esperance where accommodation providers, which cannot always have that high occupancy rate, still pay the high level of the toilet tax. The band 15 water rate and the toilet tax could be addressed in the forthcoming state budget. This government has been in office for five years and has received a massive increase in revenue from iron ore royalties and GST revenue.

The member for Vasse spoke well on the issues of domestic violence and crisis care for the vulnerable part of the population—our women and children. I point to the good work that DVassist does in our community; it is a very important organisation.

Finally, I will wrap up with the fact that on the radio this morning I heard Western Australian Council of Social Service representative Rachel Siewert reiterate once again that people on low incomes are juggling power and rent; people on JobSeeker or a pension are really struggling; and that the hardship utilities grant, good though it is, is not enough. She suggested the government could assist by helping low-income people with utility bills, as the Victorian government has done; also concessions for public transport and car licences. She also pointed out the massive impact on Anglicare, with people contacting them or coming in their door. The forthcoming budget is an opportunity for the government to help out our vulnerable citizens. I hope all our ministers and our Premier; Treasurer take a breath and look at what is happening in their own electorates and the households in their electorates.

MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean — Minister for Water) [6.04 pm]: I will make a few comments on the motion before the house. Labor governments always have an eye on those in our community who are vulnerable and who may be doing it tough—that is why we are here. To hear speeches from the other side about the Liberal and National Parties' concern for the underprivileged or people who are struggling does not sit well with their history. The Liberal–National government's history is that it did not look after people who may be struggling. At every turn, we saw that was not who they were interested in looking after. We have seen a demonstration of that during the pandemic. On this side of the house, with the leadership of the Premier, we have been fixated on making sure WA has good health and good economic outcome from this pandemic. That is what the government has been focused on. Members on the opposition side have basically been critical and on every issue and have looked at how they could drag down the government and its response to this pandemic, whether it be opening the border or supporting Clive Palmer. The member for North West Central showed his inner Donald Trump today, trying to get rid of masks without actually saying it. At every point, members opposite have tried not to be a constructive opposition. Quite frankly, the opposition's contribution today demonstrates that.

I will point out some of the issues raised in this debate. It is evident from the contribution of the Leader of the Liberal Party that he does not understand how water prices work. He raised this issue in question time today and again this afternoon. The increase in the top tier for water charges that the government implemented was really a price signal to people who use over 500 kilolitres a year to encourage them to save money by using less water. He said that impacted on big families. To justify that, he said that the average per person use is 130 kilolitres a year. If there are four people in a household, that immediately takes them over 500 kilolitres, and he said the government was slugging big families. He does not understand that 40 to 50 per cent of the average kilolitres used per person per year is used in the garden. If the number of people in a household doubles from one to two, the size of the garden does not double. If the number increases to three people, that does not triple the size of the garden.

The Water Corporation's research shows that one person inside the house, using the kitchen, laundry, bathroom and the like, uses about 55 kilolitres a year. If the number in the household increases, the water consumption figure per person goes down. If the household increases to six people, it uses about 180 kilolitres a year or 30 kilolitres per person. So, 180 kilolitres for washing, showering, cooking and the like is a long way from 500 kilolitres per person. The determinant of the size of the rest of the household bill basically depends on the size of the block and the size of the garden. It is absolute nonsense for the member for Cottesloe to say that because the average per person per year usage is 130 kilolitres, multiplying that by the number of people in the house will get the bill. The member should understand that. He was the shadow spokesperson for water in the previous term of this government, but basically he still does not get the numbers.

He again raised the Economic Regulation Authority report of a few years back, which recommended some changes in the way we charge for waste water. What is interesting about that report is that the ERA made a similar recommendation in a report in December 2012 when the Barnett government was still in office.

The previous Barnett government rejected the recommendations from that report out of hand. I remember quizzing Terry Redman about it in this place when he was the Minister for Water, and for good reason. What that report reiterated in 2012, in the last term of that government, was that it wanted to get rid of the gross rental value as a measure for how sewerage charges are worked out. Currently, the greater the value of a person's house, the more they pay in sewerage charges. The Economic Regulation Authority has constantly argued it should be a flat rate for everybody. That would mean that the sewerage charges for people living in lower value houses would increase, and the sewerage charges for people living in the more expensive houses—for example, in the member for Cottesloe's electorate—would be reduced. As a Labor government, we are not going to accept that recommendation. If the member for Cottesloe is honest, he would accept that when the previous government was faced with the same recommendation, it rejected it as well.

The ERA was also critical of how we subsidise water charges in the country. Are the members for Cottesloe and Roe seriously suggesting that we stop subsidising water charges in the country and charge people the real cost of water? We subsidise country customers to the tune of in excess of \$200 million each year. The ERA would like us to do away with that because it distorts the market. We are not going to accept that. We are never going to accept that, but members opposite come into this house and bang on about it. I wanted to make those points.

The member for North West Central came in and criticised the water charges for business customers in regional WA and said that some of them are on the highest level of water charges. That scale of water charges for businesses in regional WA was put in during the Barnett government, ironically when the member for North West Central was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Water. He comes in here and criticises the pricing structure put in place by the last Liberal–National government when he was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Water. He has come in here and criticised us for what we are doing for forestry when he knows that under the previous government when he was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Forestry, his plan to alleviate the shortage of softwood timber was to try to source the timber from New South Wales. Our plan is to plant it here in Western Australia. The member for North West Central is like a broken-down car. He drives down the street making a lot of noise, belching out a lot of black smoke, thinking that he is doing something impressive and before you know it, he has gone again. He came in here today, made a speech—a lot of assertions, a lot of hot air, a lot of wind—and now he has gone again. He comes in here and criticises the very things that he did when he was in government. The member for Roe has a bit of a smile on his face. He knows what the member for North West Central is like. We are so glad that he is on the opposite side of the house, because we know what a divisive, incompetent contributor he is.

The Leader of the Opposition gave a very long contribution. She talked about the surplus, the pandemic, the failures of the health system, housing and the chaos in the Department of Communities. She talked about policing, small business, tourism, electricity, electoral reform, the GST, public sector wages, petrol pricing—everything one could possibly imagine except water charges. She did not mention water charges once in her contribution because she knows that she was the Minister for Water in a previous government and she is fundamentally embarrassed by what she did as a minister to struggling households. In question time today, I said that by the time she left office, 2 500 households each year had their water supply reduced to a trickle because they were struggling to pay their bills. Members should think about that. That figure of 2 500 households equates to 10 households a day for each working day of every year. Under the previous government, we would come in here in the morning and by the time Parliament rose for the day, another 10 households that could not pay their water bill had their water cut off. I used

to raise that in the house every opportunity I got when I was the shadow minister. What response did I get from the then Minister for Water, now the Leader of the Opposition? Absolute stony silence! It was not as though it was a problem that could not be fixed. I asked the Water Corporation—in fact, I did not ask; I told it that it had to find a better way to deal with customers who were struggling to pay their bills. The Water Corporation was proactive. Its staff went out and talked to customers in hardship and found better ways to deal with it. They are now more proactive and when they see that someone is experiencing a very high bill, rather than wait for them to not be able to pay it, they contact them to find out what the circumstances are. They are very proactive about how they deal with it. As I said in question time today, the Financial Counsellors' Association, which is often very critical of governments, sent me a letter that states —

On behalf of the Financial Counsellors' Association of WA we write today to convey our thanks and appreciation for the recent changes to the Water Corporations financial hardship policies and processes. We understand that as the Minister for Water, staff at the Corporation were given a directive to look at the area of financial hardship and improve their current responses. Thank you for taking the lead on these matters.

I was pretty happy with that letter, I have to say. In the following year, 2019, the Financial Counselling Network said in a letter to me —

Dear Minister Kelly

...

We are writing on behalf of the Financial Counselling Network ... to acknowledge the measures the Water Corporation has taken to support customer experiencing financial hardship and payment difficulties.

...

We are pleased to note the positive feedback received from both FCs and HSC staff in relation to the Water Corporation's customer focused hardship policy and schemes to assist vulnerable customers.

Obviously, I am always pleased to get some positive feedback, but what I am really pleased about is the stories of the customers we dealt with who would otherwise have had their water cut off, but for whom we got a positive outcome. I talked to the staff at the Water Corporation who did this work of talking to customers and finding out what their issues were. I will always remember going to the Water Corporation one day and talking to the team leader who said to me that doing this work was the most rewarding thing he had ever done while working at the Water Corporation because they were actually helping people, not cutting off their water. I talked in question time about a free water allowance for customers on home dialysis. We have now extended that to customers who have a member in their household who suffers from incontinence. When someone in a family suffers from incontinence, that family can be doing five or six loads of washing a day and the water bill goes completely through the roof. The Medical Assist allowance, which provides free water for people on home dialysis, is now provided to several thousand customers who have a family member who suffers from incontinence. That is an example of the practical measures that we on this side of the house take because we are a Labor government that genuinely cares about people. The Liberal and National Party members only talk about these things when they are in opposition. When they were in government and we raised these issues, all we heard from the government side of the house were crickets. The Leader of the Opposition spoke about everything under the sun except water charges, because she knows about and should be ashamed of what she did when she was the minister—absolutely ashamed. Every year under the Barnett government, water charges were increased at a rate higher than the rate of inflation.

The only other thing that I will mention, because I know that other people want to contribute today, is something she mentioned that I cannot not mention: she quoted the struggles that an enrolled nurse, a member of the United Workers Union, is currently having. She talked about the concerns raised by the Community and Public Sector Union—Civil Service Association of WA. When members opposite were in government, they took every opportunity they could to attack unions and everything that they do.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr D.J. KELLY: All members opposite did when they were in government was attack unions and everything they do.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The member for Cottesloe has woken up. He loves to go on about “All you're doing is supporting your mates in the trade union movement.” If he really cared about the enrolled nurse who the Leader of the Opposition quoted and Civil Service Association members, he would be supporting the unions. We all know that in countries where workers, especially the low paid, are represented by a union, they get paid better. We can look around the world and see that the biggest determinant of what a cleaner gets paid, what a security guard gets paid, what an aged-care worker gets paid, what a childcare worker gets paid is whether they have a union to represent them.

We saw crocodile tears when the opposition leader today spoke about ordinary workers and quoted comments made by the unions. The level of hypocrisy from members opposite is just extraordinary. The only time they are interested in people doing it tough or low-paid workers or what the unions have to say is when they are in opposition and

they think they can score a political point. We on this side of the house know that despite the really good outcomes that we have had through this pandemic—a low hospitalisation rate, a high employment rate and the way jobs have bounced back—we know that people are still struggling. Members will see what our response to that will be when the budget is handed down in a few weeks. As a Labor government, we can rely on our track record of not a week or a month but of 100 years and we are very much focused on making sure that everyone in the community is looked after.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Energy) [6.22 pm]: I am very pleased to follow the Minister for Water. He has laid out a very clear rebuttal of the commentary from the other side, and I want to join that. I am going straightaway to one issue as a first step in this rebuttal, and that is this nonsense that the Barnett Liberal government had to increase the cost of living because of the freeze on electricity prices. Let us understand what happened there. After the 2005 election, the Labor Party reintroduced the disaggregation policy for Western Power. The Liberal Party supported that on one condition: that the Labor government at the time freeze electricity prices for 10 years. That was the condition of the Liberal Party supporting the legislation's passage. This argument that the need to increase tariffs by 25 per cent was caused by the disaggregation is just not true. It is just not correct.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It is another example of the member for Cottesloe simply not knowing what he is talking about. I want to make a suggestion to the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition shuffled some shadow ministries the other day. Do Western Australia a favour and take the energy portfolio off the member for Cottesloe and give it to Hon Dr Steve Thomas, because he has more sense. He may not have a PhD, but he knows about energy policy because he attacked the member for Cottesloe's energy policy. He said that it was terrible, and he was right. He said that it was the worst policy that the Liberal Party had ever put forward, and he is correct. I want to return to this issue. I will table a letter in a moment, but I will read it first. It states —

Dear Dr Honey

I refer to your comments of 11 March 2021, at a Liberal Party press conference.

You stated that you had met with the CEO's of all three GTE's and that they (myself included) supported the Liberal Party's Energy Policy in the State Election of 2021.

As required by the Caretaker Conventions, we take great care to ensure we as a corporation are impartial at all times. We remind our staff of this on numerous occasions.

I wish to put on record that at no stage of that meeting did I or Western Power staff express support for your—or any party's—policies.

While we did discuss individual components of the network that are relevant to your policy, based on publicly available (but dated) information, this in no way constitutes support of your policy.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I have not invited —

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Can I have that paper tabled, please.

[See paper [1078](#).]

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: This is typical of the member for Cottesloe. He comes in here and says things that are simply not true. On this day last week, the last sitting week, he said that there had been an outage affecting the Department of Housing customers in his electorate that was caused by a Western Power failure, and it was not true.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: He came in here and specifically said that in respect of a resolution about Western Power. He came in here and said that I had responded to a grievance about Roleystone in 2020, when that simply was not true. This is the way that this member operates.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: As I said in a debate with that member, he might have a PhD in chemistry but he knows nothing about physics. He also does not know much about honesty, and that is greatly disappointing. Let us get on with this.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife): For members' benefit, I think we have all seen from *Hansard* lately that the *Hansard* officers are under extra pressure from not being in the chamber and having to listen remotely to transcribe the remarks. It makes their life even more difficult when we have interjections like we have been, so if we can get on with the debate in an orderly manner.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Let us understand that the Liberal Party put up the cost of living for Western Australians by almost \$2 000, according to its own budget papers between the time it came to office and the time it was defeated. That \$2 000 is across the so-called household model that is reported in the budget. It is in appendix 9 of each year's budget. The Gallop Labor government never increased the household basket above inflation, and we have been proud not to do that. I just point out, during the first term of our government, during the COVID crisis, we gave every household a \$600 rebate on their electricity cost—a policy opposed by the member for Cottesloe; he said that should not have occurred. The rebate on a low-income earner's electricity bill was \$1 210. That was the rebate given by the Labor Party to low-income customers.

This is the problem with the member for Cottesloe. The member for Cottesloe does not understand the words that come out of his own mouth. He does not understand the electricity system. He does not understand the engineering involved. He does not listen to the people in the sector. He has no respect for anybody in the sector. He does not get it. Leader of the Opposition, please swap the member for Cottesloe with Hon Dr Steve Thomas. It is absolutely essential for the future of Western Australia that we have somebody who does not come up with these silly and stupid policies that risk the future of our state. As I said, the great thing that Hon Dr Steve Thomas said was that that policy was dumb, and he was right and he still continues to be right.

It is time for the member for Cottesloe to do some real work and pay attention to what is happening. I will go through some of the benefits of the way that we have been working with Synergy. The member for Cottesloe talked about the hardship utility grant scheme. When we came to power, HUGS was a subsidy for Synergy. What happened is that Synergy would simply take the money from HUGS and the bill would be paid for the customer. One would think that that might be a good thing, but, as we all know, financial counselling needs to be in place. If someone is not paying their electricity bill, it is not their only problem; they will probably have credit card debt and other bills that are unpaid. If we simply wipe off the electricity debt but do nothing about the person's life, they will continue to be in hardship and will continue to suffer. We reintroduced the referral to a financial counsellor for people who access HUGS. That is a very important benefit. We increased the amount available for HUGS and we made it easier for people to get it, but we made sure that they get it in the context of being given assistance. I congratulate the Minister for Community Services, under whose portfolio area HUGS falls, for the work she did to reform HUGS.

We reintroduced the household efficiency scheme that was abolished by the Barnett government. I note that when the old scheme was running, the member for Bassendean's wife was the chief executive of the organisation. I have always believed that it was probably for that fact and that fact alone that the previous government abolished the program. We reintroduced it. If someone can reduce their energy consumption, their bill will go down.

We have introduced the domestic violence fresh start policy, so that women who are escaping domestic violence, or men in rare circumstances, can walk away from the charges they have built up. We have a bespoke portal for financial counsellors. Like the Minister for Water has done, financial counsellors have written to me to congratulate Synergy on that work. They can now work with their clients and have total visibility over the whole of the Synergy system. We have introduced the Smart Energy for Social Housing pilot to help people in social housing have the opportunity to share in the benefits of renewable energy. We have introduced a consumer advocate position at Energy Policy WA. For the first time ever, there is somebody at Energy Policy WA who is solely responsible for looking at things from a consumer perspective. We have created a working group with community services organisations so that we can continue to examine ways to reform energy policy in Western Australia from an energy consumer's point of view. I have attended a couple of those meetings and they are really good. They bring together a range of peak organisations. We also have a grants program that supports research in that space. One of the problems is that Western Australia has not had the depth of capability in the not-for-profit sector that exists on the east coast, so we want to make sure that that is replicated so that there is a better understanding of energy policy needs.

We also had a disconnection moratorium during COVID. Of course, at the moment we are working with Synergy to make sure that disconnection is now only the last resort rather than the first resort. It is incredible to see the work being done as Synergy moves to a case-management process for hardship customers. Synergy has employed additional staff to work one-on-one and keep in touch with hardship customers. We have now had about 360 hardship customers graduate off that program. They are now able to manage their finances, so they do not need to get assistance. That is the sort of thing we need. If we help people solve problems in their life, they do not fall into hardship. It is a holistic approach. Rather than treating the symptoms, let us treat the causes and deal with them.

I am always amused by the idea that people on welfare are not being supported enough. I urge the commonwealth government to increase the unemployment benefit. One of the problems for people on welfare is that the unemployment benefit in Australia is exceptionally low. During COVID, it was doubled, and many people were able to afford things that they could not otherwise afford. If they got the proper level of income support from the commonwealth government, that would be a great thing; it would get them out of hardship and give them the resources they need. The Labor government in Western Australia is doing everything it can to create as many jobs as possible, but of course not everybody has a job. People have various challenges in their lives that mean that they rely on welfare. We would love the commonwealth government to increase the support for people on welfare, because that would be of much bigger assistance than anything the state government could do.

Another issue is that of homeless people. I would love to know how many homeless people get any government support at all. In fact, the overwhelming majority of homeless people whom I have dealt with over the last 12 or 13 years as a member of Parliament have got no government support at all. They do not get any government help. It is so difficult now to get any government support. Of course, these people are not counted as being unemployed because they are not applying for jobs, which is what they would need to do to be included in the unemployment list. They do not get welfare from the commonwealth government, so they end up relying on charities and other not-for-profits. That is terrible. The commonwealth government should step up and help those people, because that is absolutely essential for a properly functioning society.

It is interesting that water bills went up by \$288 during the four years from 2013–14 to 2016–17, compared with \$116.88 over five years under the Labor government. That was a 21.7 per cent increase while the Leader of the Opposition was water minister, compared with a 7.1 per cent increase under Labor. The average annual increase during those four years was 5.4 per cent, compared with 1.4 per cent over the five years of the Labor government. We know that many people do it tough in our community. As I say, we would love to have a better partnership from the federal government so that we could get more support, but we are not going to be lectured to by the Liberal Party, which increased fees and charges by \$2 100 per annum. Not once did it freeze prices. It increased power prices by 90 per cent, including by 25.6 per cent in 2009—in that one year alone—and 16.1 per cent in 2010. It increased water, sewerage and drainage charges by 66 per cent. Electricity disconnections increased by 82.6 per cent from 2011–12 to 2016–17. It increased car registration by \$183 each year. It imposed \$1.5 billion worth of land tax increases. We all remember that. In fact, as I have pointed out previously, there were three Ministers for Finance in the second term of the Barnett government, and the first bill for each of them as Minister for Finance increased taxes. Two of them had given inaugural speeches saying that tax increases were naughty, so it was quite ironic!

The forward estimates in the Barnett government's last budget included a price path for future electricity prices. It would have increased electricity prices by seven per cent per annum if it had been re-elected. Six per cent was the glide path for increasing water prices had that government been re-elected. We understand the cost of living challenges in Western Australia, as the Labor Party does elsewhere. We respond to them. We responded carefully and in a detailed way during COVID because we knew about that tragic situation. We introduced the electricity rebate, which the Liberal Party opposed. It said that we should not have done it. We have a strong record here. There is always more to be done, but we have a strong record. We are happy to run on our record. I will finish with this comment: members will notice that the Liberal and National Parties do not run on their record. They do not say, "Look at what the Barnett government did; we're going to continue that." We are happy to look at what the Gallop and Carpenter governments did, and, more importantly, what the McGowan government is doing, and to say, "That's our record, and we're happy to continue that."

MS C.M. COLLINS (Hillarys) [6.39 pm]: I, too, rise this evening to contribute to the motion around cost-of-living pressures. This state has avoided the worst health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic because of the good and effective management of this government. The actions of this government over the past two years to contain the spread of COVID-19 have also effectively limited the fallout from the shutting down of key industries and sections of our economy. In turn, we have low unemployment rates, and our economy is booming at a time when others are flailing. There is no doubt that these past two years have presented a number of challenges and pressures for many families in Western Australia. We hear on a daily basis about the rising costs of rent, food and fuel. Combined with the long-term impacts of COVID-19, that no doubt is a financial worry for many Australian households.

Going into the federal election, more and more polls are being done on what the key issues are. The cost of living is front and centre in the minds of many families. The opposition has suggested that somehow the McGowan government has done very little to alleviate cost-of-living pressures over this last term of government. I take this opportunity to remind opposition members of the swift action that this government took to provide families with a buffer from the impacts of the health crisis that we continue to be in. We have just heard from the Minister for Energy about some of the ways in which we have reduced the cost of energy over the past few years. Near the start of the pandemic back in March 2020, the government was able to step in quickly to protect those facing financial hardship from having their utilities disconnected. No interest was charged on deferred bill payments, and the energy assistance payment scheme was boosted to double the amount available to eligible households. I recall when I was running as a candidate in 2020 that the McGowan government decision to deliver a \$600 electricity bill credit to every household as part of the WA recovery plan was very popular. This was a huge relief and injected \$634 million back into the pockets of Western Australians. This was on top of the \$2 500 energy credit that was provided to small businesses and charities that did not have a high annual power use. I would like to recognise the energy minister, Bill Johnston, for the work he has undertaken in monitoring the cost of power so closely, and in delivering savings for families across Western Australia, particularly during a period of expansion of household renewable energy. We can compare this, as the minister did in his speech, with the previous Liberal–National government, under which electricity prices increased at an average of eight per cent per annum for eight years. The fact is that if you need help with your power bill here in Western Australia, under this government, we will help you. We are working directly with people to provide support. The same simply cannot be said for Liberal governments. The Barnett government had more caps on disconnection numbers, rather than helping customers to pay.

Another key area in which the McGowan government has clearly provided some relief to families is through our transport initiatives. We made an election commitment that promised to cap all suburban transport fares to a two-zone fare. Families in Hillarys are particularly excited about this, but families all across the Perth metropolitan area are excited too, because as of 1 January this year, people can travel by train, bus or ferry anywhere in Perth and have their fare capped at \$4.90. For Hillarys residents who use the Whitfords or Edgewater train stations, this will mean a saving of up to \$360 a year, but my colleague sitting next to me, the member for Dawesville, would probably be much more excited about this than I am because people in her electorate could save up to \$3 000 a year under this new system. Not only is this encouraging people to use public transport, but also it is putting money back in the pockets of hardworking commuters.

Another key issue is housing. We have heard tonight from the opposition that there is a crisis in housing. There is no doubt that many Western Australians are feeling pressure in the housing and rental markets. Western Australians should feel confident that there is an affordable housing safety net. The 2021–22 state budget sought to do more for our most vulnerable Western Australians by including a record \$875 million social housing investment. That will see 3 300 new houses built. This is part of a \$2.1 billion social housing initiative over the next four years, the largest social housing investment in this state's history. That is coming at a critical time. It will deliver real support for those families that have been hit hardest by the many economic impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Importantly, it will also enable a reliable and steady pipeline of work for our construction industry. I thank Minister Carey for his tireless work to boost social and affordable housing in Western Australia.

One issue that I can talk about firsthand from comments from my constituents in recent days and right up until now is the McGowan government's initiative to provide free rapid antigen tests across Western Australia. This is providing immediate relief for families that are experiencing the effects of COVID right now in our community. We are the only government in Australia that has put forward this initiative. Although there has been a delay with Australia Post and some families are still waiting on their 15 free test kits, every state member of Parliament has been issued with 1 000 RATs that they can distribute to their community. I know that this has been incredibly popular among people who have not received their test kits because they have been able to go to their schools and speak to their P&Cs about accessing those RATs in different ways if needed.

Meanwhile, the federal budget that has just been announced will see the end of the pandemic leave disaster payment in June. Although all workers regardless of income will be given a tax deduction for their RATs, the free RATs for concession card holders will end. That is despite those people being obviously the ones in greatest need of support. Thankfully, Western Australians have a McGowan Labor government that has put this initiative in place, given that the federal government simply has not stepped up in this area.

On the topic of the federal budget, I want to touch on how this federal Liberal government has ultimately failed to adequately address the real cost-of-living pressures. I will quote from a Western Australian Council of Social Service report that was issued on Thursday, 31 March this year. It is a reflection on the federal budget. It states —

The clear consensus is that this is not a budget that is planning for the future, but a short-term cash splash, that does nothing to address the underlying structural pressures of rising living costs and flat wages.

... It fails to systematically and structurally address the big challenges or help out those who need it most. The biggest issue for Australian households is the **rising price** of essential daily spending, at a time when **wages** continue to fall in real terms.

Every year, this federal Liberal government stands up at budget time and gleefully announces predicted wage rises over the next five years that never, ever eventuate. In 2017, it predicted that we would be enjoying a 3.5 per cent wage rise right now, yet here we are and wage rises have instead plummeted to 1.7 per cent this financial year. These wage rises never eventuate because the federal Liberal Party legislates and enforces a system that keeps wages stagnant. Mathias Cormann actually went public in 2019 and said on Sky News that the policy of low wages was a deliberate design feature of the Liberals' economic architecture. In June 2021, the McKell Institute released findings showing that the average Australian worker would be earning \$250 more a week if wages growth had continued at the rate achieved under the last federal Labor government.

Let me tell members how this federal Liberal government has created a situation across Australia that has become a cost-of-living disaster for many. Number one, it has attacked Australian workers' penalty rates. Number two, it has allowed many employers to rely on a temporary visa system, and of course this strategy has become even more disastrous in the age of COVID-19. Number three, it has ignored wage theft, despite enormous amounts of evidence that it was going on. Instead, in Western Australia we have a McGowan Labor government that did not ignore wage theft. The WA state government started an inquiry, did its research, and built a picture of how and where it was occurring.

Number four, every single year, the federal Liberal government has opposed minimum wage rises in the Fair Work Commission. Every single year, it has argued that the most vulnerable Australian workers should be making less, and now it has the gall to claim that this cost-of-living crisis has only just materialised out of nowhere.

Number five, it has enacted public sector wage freezes. Members in this chamber will be very aware of Premier Barnett's numerous cuts and efficiency dividends on the Western Australian public sector: staffing freezes, pay freezes, cutting valuable institutional experience, and dismantling the sector via short-term contracts.

I will leave my contribution there, but I will say that Australia Institute chief economist Richard Denniss recently said that the "Morrison government has an obsession with wage suppression." The federal Liberal government has accelerated cost-of-living challenges, and I have outlined just some of the ways that the McGowan Labor government has alleviated these pressures for Western Australian families. Thank you.

MS M.J. HAMMAT (Mirrabooka) [6.52 pm]: I, too, rise to speak against this motion. I am pleased to have the opportunity to put on the record some reflections on the cost of living and the performance of this state government compared with the track record of the Liberal and National Parties in government, in addressing this most serious of issues. It is a very serious issue. The cost of living is a very central issue for everyday working people in this state. The member for Hillarys outlined how that is coming through very strongly. It is something that is fundamental to the considerations of the Labor Party. At the heart of our decision-making, all the time, is how we can advance and protect the interests of everyday people in this state and around Australia.

It is really a bit rich for the opposition to bring this motion to this house as though it has any kind of track record of doing anything to alleviate cost-of-living pressures on Western Australian families. As I listened to opposition members' contributions this evening, I could not help thinking that their hearts were not really in it. Although they brought this resolution because they felt it was their duty to do so before budget week, so they will have something to say, I cannot help but think that, really, it is not something they spent any time thinking about before they came along this evening to make their contributions.

The member for Roe was not quite certain which motion he was speaking to, and went on to make a contribution about a range of other things. I thought the member for North West Central, though, really took the cake for his contribution tonight. We heard his standard speaking points on a whole range of issues, many of which do not relate to the cost of living at all. We heard a bit about crime; we also heard him give a plug to the Commonwealth Games, as though bringing the Commonwealth Games to Perth will, in anyone's wildest dreams, do anything to alleviate cost-of-living pressures for working families. If that was a serious contribution from the member for North West Central, he is either —

Several members interjected.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: That is right; it is clear he has not thought for one minute about his contribution tonight if he comes in here and says that that is something that this government should be doing under a resolution that is dealing with the very serious and substantial topic of cost-of-living pressures for Western Australian families. I think it is a bit rich for members opposite to come in here this evening and attempt to lecture the McGowan Labor government on issues that go to the heart of cost-of-living pressures affecting families.

We have heard contributions tonight from the Ministers for Water and Energy, who have given very detailed rebuttals on the issues of water and energy pricing. I congratulate and recognise both of those ministers for the work they are doing in their portfolios. They have done substantial work to not only keep increases and fees and charges at moderate levels, but also put in place deliberate strategies to ensure that the most vulnerable families in Western Australia who are struggling to pay those bills have the means and mechanisms to be able to overcome the problems that they are experiencing. That is what Labor governments do, because we care about the impact of cost-of-living pressures on families. We understand that families require essential services. We do not want to cut them off or jack up their prices because we have managed to achieve some kind of budget crisis, which is what we saw from the former Liberal–National government; we want to make sure that people can continue to access the services that they need. I congratulate the ministers for their excellent work in that area.

We also heard from the opposition tonight on the question of housing. Again, I acknowledge that is a serious matter. I think it deserves to be treated seriously, and that is exactly what this government is doing. The McGowan Labor government is investing \$2.1 billion into social housing over the next four years. This government will deliver 3 300 new homes for families. We know that everybody wants a place to call home, and the McGowan Labor government is working to deliver that for families in Western Australia. Just yesterday, I had the opportunity with the Minister for Housing to attend three new social housing homes that will soon be made available for families in my area, and I know that the minister was going on to another location shortly after that to inspect some more new housing. This minister is getting on with the job of delivering affordable housing for Western Australians and I commend him for the work he is doing.

We have already had some discussion in this house this week on the question of housing more broadly, to ensure that we not only provide social housing, but also ensure that housing is affordable for Western Australians. This minister has a plan to make that happen by ensuring that people are able to access affordable housing and to move out of the rental system and into their own homes using initiatives like Keystart, and by ensuring that we have land available for people to build on. The minister is working hard to deliver these strategies so that we can make a difference to the housing situation for people in this state. I also commend the minister for adopting new approaches

towards delivering social housing, unlocking opportunities and speeding up delivery by looking at things like the modular build program and using timber frame buildings as a way of progressing social housing builds. As I said, this minister is energetic and enthusiastic and is clearly doing everything he can to deliver additional housing stock.

I do not have much time left available to me, and there is so much subject matter, but I could not let time run out and conclude my comments without talking about the enrolled nurse that the Leader of the Opposition spent so much time reflecting on in her contribution. One thing that is really important to me and that I think is a great protection against cost-of-living pressures is making sure that the people of Western Australia have access to secure and well-paid jobs. That is what this government is doing. One of the strategies that we are using is to ensure that TAFE is affordable and accessible for people to get the training that will then lead to them getting that permanent well-paid job.

We heard about the enrolled nurse. I want to talk a bit about TAFE fees, because it is easy to forget that when the Liberal–National government was in power, it increased TAFE fees. How much did it increase TAFE fees by? I am glad you asked! In 2013 it cost \$1 878 to get a diploma in nursing. I refer to the cost of that degree in the former Liberal–National government’s last year of power in 2016.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

House adjourned at 7.00 pm
