

**PREMIER'S STATEMENT**

*Consideration*

Resumed from 15 February on the following question —

That the Premier's Statement be noted.

**MR E.S. RIPPER (Belmont — Leader of the Opposition)** [12.15 pm]: Western Australians do not need a speech from the Premier to understand that this state has a big future. Western Australians understand that there will be tremendous economic growth in this state by virtue of the resources that we all own, the expertise of our population and our location in the world. Every Western Australian deserves their fair share of this prosperity. Too many people are already missing out, and too many more people are going to lose out in the future. This government does not care enough and does not have enough capacity to take the lead on fairness and the legacy that every Western Australian should receive from this period of tremendous economic growth.

For this state to progress, big investments need to be made in our infrastructure. Just as importantly, the right choices need to be made on which infrastructure projects to invest in. For Western Australians as individuals to benefit, we need government leadership on the cost of living, local jobs and truly public services delivered by people directly employed in the public sector. I now go to the first of those requirements: the infrastructure program. I see a number of significant problems in this government's approach to infrastructure. The first problem I see is that the government is focusing on pet projects and pork-barrelling while it ignores the needs of basic core infrastructure that is fundamental to our economic growth and to providing benefits for ordinary Western Australians.

Let me go first to the question of the electricity network. I have raised this issue in debate after debate because I know from experience what can happen years down the track if there is underinvestment in the electricity network. There is underinvestment in our electricity network. The Economic Regulation Authority goes through a process to approve the tariffs for access to and use of Western Power's electricity network. Part of that process requires the Economic Regulation Authority to make a determination on what is the actual level of efficient investment in the network. In layman's terms, that is the level of investment that is justifiably required. There is a significant gap between what the ERA has determined as the level of investment required in the network for the period between 2009–10 and 2011–12 and what the government has provided. Leading up to the midyear review, that gap was \$646 million. In the midyear review, another \$123 million was provided. We still have a very significant gap in investment over those three years of more than half a billion dollars—\$523 million.

Those people who are interested in the development of the Mid West—the iron ore industry, which will require large amounts of energy for processing, and renewable energy—should pay particular attention. A big part of that gap is the government's failure to progress with the plan and the funding that it inherited for the Mid West transmission line all the way from Pinjar to Geraldton. I am very concerned about this issue. I warn the government that unless the government steps up to the mark on the level of investment required, there will be increasing problems with the electricity network, including more blackouts and increased fire risk. I am not saying that these events will occur tomorrow, next month or even next early year, but they will occur in due course if the government does not invest in the electricity network to match the level of economic growth that the state is expected to experience.

I want now to turn to another set of core infrastructure needs—roads and rail. Yesterday, during question time, the Minister for Transport waxed lyrical, or attempted to wax lyrical, about the government's commitment to road projects. It is also traditional National Party policy to focus on big investments in roads. It is a mark of the complacency of the National Party. It is a mark of how much it is relying on a single slogan, royalties for regions, that the National Party appears to have abandoned its traditional focus on the size of the investment program into roads.

The total investment in roads and rail for two four-year periods, including a four-year period when we were in charge and the four-year period that we are in the middle of with this government, is significantly different. From 2004–05 to 2007–08, Labor spent \$2.76 billion on road and rail projects in the state. Looking in the budget papers at what will be spent on road and rail by this government between 2010–11 and 2013–14, we can see it will spend just \$1.03 billion. That is a cut in capital investment on roads and rail of \$1.7 billion. Where is the Minister for Transport with his hairy-chested declarations in this state? Where is the National Party on its traditional focus of concern—transport investment? Where are they?

A member: Bali!

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** Bali is where the leader is. But where is the National Party in policy terms?

Where is the government on investment in transport links in the south west of the state needed to support south west economic growth? I went down to the south west. I was very, very impressed that six local government

authorities had agreed on a common plan to promote export growth from the south west. They called it the roads to export program. It involved the Coalfields highway and the Bunbury ring road. It involved improving the rail link between Brunswick and the Bunbury port. It involved the diversion of the Preston River. That program, by and large, has not been supported or even argued for by the state government. It has not been supported with a single dollar so far as I can see, and, in terms of government submissions to the federal government for funding, only a tiny proportion of the roads to export program has been argued for. The government is not putting up its own dollars and the government is not asking the federal government or arguing for the federal government to invest.

There is going to be phenomenal economic growth in the south west. We have big opportunities in the south west. Growth will be chopped off; jobs will be lost to the south west. To the extent that some of that growth goes ahead without those transport links, the constituents of the member for Collie–Preston, and other people living in the south west, will find increasing congestion and increasing social problems associated with growth under-supported by the investment in infrastructure that is the responsibility of the state government.

We should not see a focus on pet projects or on pork barrelling spreading the butter thinly across the state when key economic requirements for the core infrastructure program are not being met.

The third problem with the infrastructure program is that it is all talk and no action. It is all announcement and no construction. Yesterday, we had the sixth announcement about the waterfront—six announcements and not a single piece of construction. Construction is not due to start until next year. Large elements of the project that had been boasted about as key elements of the project are not funded. We hear about the project. What do we hear about it? We hear that it is going to have a very significant Indigenous cultural centre. If it is to live up to that claim, that Indigenous cultural centre will cost hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars. The government has not only not provided a single dollar for the Indigenous cultural centre, it is saying only that it will make an announcement about that project at an unspecified time in the future. Even the cable car, which has been boasted about, is not in the funding. That is six announcements. No construction started yet and key elements of the project not yet funded. I was invited yesterday by the media to talk about the details of the project and whether I agree with the details. I think that we have moved beyond that. Western Australians are sick and tired of debate about the detail of waterfront developments. They just want to see the government actually do something. They do not want to hear talk about it any more. They want to see construction start.

Equally, if we look at another project, the government has made nine announcements about the Perth Museum. Nine announcements! There is no prospect of the museum actually being built. It is just talking about it over and over again. The Perth police complex is still a hole in the ground. When it filled up with water we wanted to call it “Lake Johnson”, Mr Speaker! However, it is still a hole in the ground. How many announcements —

**Mr C.C. Porter:** Because it is deep?

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** It is actually a pretty shallow lake, I think, and a bit salty.

How many announcements do members think the government has made about the Perth police complex? Six! There have been six announcements about the Perth police complex and no effective construction. And the children’s hospital? Five announcements about the children’s hospital and it is still a long way into the future. No construction! What we have is a government that is very long on announcements and very short on action. The Emperor still has no clothes on these important projects. If the Emperor wants to demonstrate that he is indeed clothed, he has to get on and make sure that hospital is built.

In the meantime, the Emperor has been very busy with his colleagues opening Labor projects. And are we not proud of those Labor projects, Mr Speaker? Let me run through all the Labor projects that I can discover have been opened by this government: the Geraldton foreshore; the cattle saleyards in Manjimup; the Coral Bay water treatment plant; the Murray health centre; increased bed capacity at the Bunbury Regional Prison; the Mitchell Freeway extension; the comprehensive stroke service at Swan District Hospital; Bletchley Park Primary School; Kelmscott Train Station refurbishment; licensing centre in Willagee; Woodman Point boat launching ramp; Goldfields youth justice services; upgrade to Broome Regional Prison; police and courts complex in Harvey; emergency department at the Armadale–Kelmscott Memorial Hospital; Atwell College, stage 1; Fitzroy Valley District High School; Madeley Primary School; Perth–Bunbury Highway; women’s precinct section of the upgrade to the Broome Regional Prison; Kingston Primary School; Dalyellup College; Manea Senior College; Wyndham District Hospital refurbishment; Ashdale Secondary College, stage 1; Perth Modern School upgrade; Geraldton Southern Transport Corridor, Stage 2; Karratha Senior High School year 11 and year 12 facility; Lockridge Primary School; construction for Muchea saleyards; Somerley Primary School; Safety Bay Primary School; Bannister Creek Primary School; Craigie Heights Primary School; Hudson Park Primary School; Mt Barker K–12 campus; Rockingham hospital redevelopment; Mandurah entry road; Greenwood Primary School; Roseworth Primary School; the state theatre; Deanmore Primary School; Wattlegrove Primary School; Comet

Bay College, stage 2; Karratha Primary School replacement; Ellenbrook Secondary College, stage 2; Aubin Grove Primary School; Makybe Rise Primary School; and Tapping Primary School.

That is a very significant list of Labor projects.

**Mr M. McGowan:** Did you mention the state theatre?

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** I have mentioned the state theatre.

That is a very important list. It may not be a comprehensive list. But I am sure that the Premier and his colleagues have enjoyed cutting the ribbons on each one of those Labor projects. The point is this government will have more of those projects on which to cut the ribbons.

Next: the Fiona Stanley Hospital. I set aside the money in a legislatively protected account for the funding of that hospital. When this government came about, it found an account with all the money for that project—the money was set aside in a legislatively protected account.

The Harvey District Hospital redevelopment, the widening of the Marble Bar Road, the Bunbury port access road, the Mandurah community health centre, the deepening of the Fremantle port inner harbour, the Kalgoorlie courthouse, the redevelopment of the Joondalup Health Campus, the Carnarvon police and justice complex, the rectangular stadium, the Kalgoorlie Regional Hospital, Oakajee port and rail and the \$34 million Broome waste water treatment plant were in Labor's budget and forward estimates. It is a good thing I set aside the money for that.

*Point of Order*

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Mr Speaker, yesterday the Premier was heard in silence. He is not extending the same courtesies to the Leader of the Opposition. Yesterday he said some controversial things. I ask that he and the members on the government benches extend the same courtesy to the Leader of the Opposition that was extended to the Premier.

**The SPEAKER:** I think it is a very reasonable request and I would hope that members on both sides would allow the Leader of the Opposition to be heard in silence.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** There is a saying in politics that the opposition always gets to open your bridges. I am simply reflecting on the fact that so far what we have seen from this government's infrastructure program is a lot of announcements but no construction on its own projects and a lot of openings on our projects. Thankfully, some of our projects that we set aside money for are being proceeded with. There are serious unmet needs in the government's infrastructure program. There are huge opportunities for this state that the government refuses to take up. We have talked about two of those already. One of them is the Roads to Export program in the south west. I cannot understand why the government pays so little attention to the south west. I cannot understand why the government does not value the contribution that the south west makes to our economy. I cannot understand why the government will not support growth and jobs in the south west by investing in a program that all the local south west government authorities that are relevant have agreed on. Is it not a significant local achievement to get everyone signed up to a common infrastructure program in the interests of the entire region? Normally we would expect some tension between those local government authorities but they have signed up and we cannot get the government to invest in it. Amazingly, we could not get the government to argue for it when it put in submissions to the federal government.

I have spoken about the Mid West transmission line. If this is not proceeded with urgently, the member for Geraldton's region and the industries in that region are going to suffer. The iron ore industry will suffer. Magnetite needs a lot of energy for processing. The renewable energy industry will suffer. I think the member needs to be more active publicly in putting the pressure on his government to do something about this Mid West transmission line.

The other project that we have talked about in this house that I do not understand the Premier's reluctance on is an integrated electricity grid in the Pilbara. It will be a magnificent opportunity for the state if it is picked up. It might not require a huge amount of public investment. It does require leadership and commitment from the Premier, yet so far we have had only disdain and contempt for this very important project. Why should the Pilbara not be left with a decent, modern integrated electricity grid from this period of tremendous growth? Why should junior miners not have their capital requirements eased by having access to an electricity market instead of having to provide their own power stations on an ad hoc single basis? Why should third parties that can generate electricity with less carbon emissions not be given the opportunity to do that in the Pilbara? Why should we not have more gas-fired power stations in the Pilbara? Why should we not have more solar thermal power stations? Once we have an electricity market, why should we not then have electrification of the iron ore railway lines? Why should we not have electrification of the mines? If we had that sort of vision and that sort of

investment, we could have not only a major national development project in this state and a major regional development project but also the nation's biggest greenhouse gas abatement project. We could have something that would be a symbol to the nation and the world of how Western Australia grows sustainably and in an environmentally responsible manner. All it needs is government leadership and commitment; all it needs is government vision, and we have not had that from the Premier. What we have had from the Premier is irrational decisions. We have had the irrational decision to substitute public money for private money in the Oakajee port development. I cannot understand why government members are accepting the opportunity cost of \$680 million of public money being spent on that development when the private sector said it would do that. How many projects do members opposite have in their electorates that would benefit from \$5 million or \$10 million or \$20 million of government investment? Why do they not ask the Premier whether they can have some of that \$680 million for their electorates and their infrastructure needs and let the private sector do what it said it would do right from the start; that is, build the Oakajee port, have it run by the Geraldton Port Authority and have the common-user assets gifted to the state. There was nothing wrong with that arrangement but the Premier wanted to put his own stamp on it, just like he did in the 1990s in his failed first attempt at the Oakajee project. The net result is \$680 million that could be used on other projects that is not available.

Thinking about all these problems, I think we need a state infrastructure strategy. We need a plan and a vision for the infrastructure of this state over one or two decades. The government knows that a lot of the work has been done. It would not take a lot of additional effort for this government to build on what Labor did and produce such a plan. I know why the government does not want to do that. If it produces a plan, it is held accountable. If it produces a plan, it cannot pork-barrel without having to explain why. If it produces a plan, it cannot have a pet project without having to explain why. Is that not a good thing? Do we not need more rigour in our infrastructure investment program? Do we not need more accountability in our infrastructure investment program? Would it not be a good thing if there was a plan that did not bind us as politicians but against which we could be held accountable if we chose to deviate? If we had a good argument to deviate from the plan and that argument stood up to the public, so be it, but it would put the pressure on to stop the pork-barrelling and the focus on pet projects. It would put the focus on the core basic infrastructure—the grunt infrastructure that we need investment in to grow. The problem with the core basic infrastructure is that it is not necessarily very sexy and it does not necessarily get a headline to announce that a substation or a transmission line is being built. We get more headlines if we build something that is different. But we will suffer if we do not have that investment in the core infrastructure.

The other thing I want to draw attention to is the very important contribution that the federal government is making to the state's infrastructure program. A total of \$2 billion of federal money has been committed to the state's infrastructure program. That is a very significant commitment. We got nothing like that from John Howard's government. Basically, Tony Abbott would have taken away significant elements of that investment. Let me run through it: Great Eastern Highway upgrade, \$180 million committed by the commonwealth; the gateway project, \$480 million; the grain freight rail network, \$135 million; and Northbridge Link, which the Premier boasts about so much, \$236 million of federal money. A total of \$339 million went into the Oakajee port. I think the money should be spent elsewhere but the federal government went along with the Premier's priorities. It think it was a wrong decision on both counts. Also, \$195 million was allocated to support the Ord stage 2 project; \$255 million for the state rehabilitation centre as part of the Fiona Stanley Hospital project; and \$180 million for the Midland health campus. Those projects add up to \$2 billion of federal government commitment to our infrastructure program. Thank the Lord that we have a federal Labor government prepared to invest in Western Australian infrastructure. If Tony Abbott had won the last election, we would not have that support for this government's infrastructure program.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Do you still support the mining tax?

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** This is separate from that issue, Premier. This is money that has already been committed, apart from that, to this government's infrastructure program. There is an issue here for the Premier. I do not think the Premier sufficiently recognises the importance of that investment or gives sufficient credit to the importance of that investment. I do not think the Premier takes the appropriate action in federal political debate to ensure that that investment continues. He should be pulling Tony Abbott into line by saying, "Mr Abbott, you're not supporting Western Australian infrastructure with the approach that you are taking." What the Premier does—I support him on this—is point out to other states and to the commonwealth that we do not get our fair share of the GST. That is an argument that I advanced when we were in government. I got very little response from John Howard and Peter Costello, I might say, but we all, as Western Australian politicians, need to advance that argument. The argument is notable for the hide and hypocrisy of the Liberal Party. This was a Liberal deal. In 1999, Peter Costello and Richard Court signed up to the GST-sharing arrangement. This was our big opportunity to overturn horizontal fiscal equalisation and do something to protect Western Australia's future. The Liberal government of the time missed that opportunity. The now Premier was part of that cabinet budget committee. They were so enthusiastic about the GST that they were prepared to do whatever it took to assist Peter Costello

to get it in. They missed the opportunity to protect the future of this state's own revenue. We have a Liberal deal that Liberals are campaigning for Labor to change. That is what we have. John Howard would not change it, Tony Abbott will not change it, but the Premier is campaigning for the Labor Party to change it. I object to the Premier's positioning in which he tries to convince our public that only Liberals care about Western Australia's share of the GST. On this side of politics we care deeply about Western Australia and its rights. We care deeply about our share of the GST. We think it is unfair. We do not think it is a Liberal versus Labor issue; it is a Western Australian issue. We should be bipartisan on it and we should recognise that governments of all colours federally have not been responsive enough to Western Australia's concerns. We should recognise that the big opportunity that was missed was missed when the Premier was on the budget committee of the previous Liberal government. It went along with the GST and did not care enough about the future of the state

There is, however, a link to the infrastructure program in the argument that I have just put; that is, we may not get the resolution of the GST issue that we deserve and require. Although the federal Labor government is not to blame for the deal in 1999, because Labor was in opposition—state Labor is not to blame for it either because, in 1999, we were in opposition—it is the responsibility of the federal Labor government to do something about this issue. I preach to my federal Labor colleagues the deep resentment that Western Australians feel about the GST share and the need for the federal government to take responsibility and do something to redress the issue, even though that government is not to blame. The fact is, though, it is already doing something to redress the issue. That is what that \$2 billion in federal government investment in our infrastructure is about. There is a big consolation prize to the GST argument—if we cannot get a change to the GST share, we can nevertheless leverage, out of our justifiable argument, more and more federal investment into our infrastructure. It was not given to us by John Howard, it would not be given to us by Tony Abbott, but if we press hard enough an outcome of the GST argument will be that we will get even more investment from federal Labor into the infrastructure program. I urge the Premier to factor that into his strategy. I say to the Premier that we are prepared to work with him on a bipartisan basis to pursue this issue of our GST share. If the Premier wants me to come to Canberra with him to argue this issue, I am very prepared to argue it with Julia Gillard, Wayne Swan, and all the other people. I will join him in an approach for a better share of the GST. I want the Premier to also recognise that part of the strategy should be to leverage even more federal government investment into our infrastructure.

Let me now turn to the leadership that is required to make sure every Western Australian gets a fair share of our prosperity, that every Western Australian wins from the mining boom, and that we protect those Western Australians who are possibly threatened by that boom. The government first has to address the question of utility costs. There has been a 46 per cent increase in electricity prices in two years, a 30 per cent increase in water prices, a 30 per cent increase in gas prices, and all sorts of additional taxes such as the waste levy and the increase in the emergency services levy. The government has been reaching deep into people's pockets. It is hurting. It is hurting not just the pensioner, the unemployed person or the single parent, it is starting to hurt working families even when there are two incomes. Members opposite know that this is the case. If members go to a parents and citizens association meeting, a school fete or a sports club and talk to people about electricity prices, water prices and gas prices, they will hear ordinary working people say, "My bill was \$700." Others will say, "You think that's large—look at my bill!" People are hurting. The government has to recognise that. How can we be in such a rich state and yet have such fierce cost-of-living pressures delivered by the government onto working people in this state? How can we have that? In a rich state, we must be able to do better to protect families from these fierce increases in the cost of living. We are saying to the Premier: enough is enough. In the middle of winter there were pensioners frightened to turn on the heating because they were worried about their electricity bills. We are going through a very hot summer. Ordinary Western Australians who are working hard, contributing to our state, our economy and our society, are frightened to turn on the air conditioning because they are worried about what electricity bill might result. Then they hear the Premier say air conditioning is not really necessary. They do not agree with the Premier. The Premier has been talking about modest increases. That is not good enough. We want the Premier to freeze increases in utility prices in this budget. Enough is enough. The Premier has done too much already—now is the time to pause; now is the time to freeze. The Premier needs to do something straight away, even if we are to have only modest increases and he will not accept our argument for a freeze. Right now the Premier has a planning assumption in his budget for a 22.3 per cent increase in electricity and a planning assumption for an 8.4 per cent increase in water. The Premier needs to commit now and say today that he will remove that assumption. The Premier should not let people fear and wait until May. If we are to have only modest increases, the Premier should commit now to remove those planning assumptions by telling people the increases to expect. I say to the Premier: people are sick and tired, and they are hurting. People do not want any more increases beyond the 46 per cent increase in electricity charges they have already had. It is time for a pause; it is time for a freeze. The Premier will pay the political price if he thinks that is not an important issue.

The biggest dividend that people get from the operations of our government and our economy, as it works for our government, is the provision of quality public services. Every Western Australian deserves fair access to quality educational opportunities. Every Western Australian deserves fair access to quality health services. Western Australians want truly public services. They do not want key public hospital services and school services privatised. Western Australians want essential services to be delivered by directly employed public sector workers. People want workers to work to a standard, not to a profit. They want the work that occurs in our public hospitals and public schools to be accountable through the democratic processes. They do not want a minister sidestepping responsibility because there is a contract and a third party involved. Western Australians want people in schools and hospitals to work together as a team. They do not want duckshoving and buck-passing as matters are shuffled from one worker to another because of some contract, while the few directly employed workers left pick up all the slack and fill in all the gaps in the work that was not thought about when the contracts were drawn up. This privatisation agenda that the government has for Fiona Stanley Hospital and Midland hospital will become a political albatross for it. I assure the Premier that we are going to campaign very, very strongly on this issue. I commit that, insofar as the contracts allow, we will bring these services back in-house on our re-election. Just as we did in 2001, we will bring these services back in-house insofar as the contracts permit. We will not expand them. We will not allow extensions. We will negotiate with the companies to bring those services back in-house. I say to the government: Do not proceed with the Serco Australia contract. Do not do it. Do not lock this state's public hospital services away in private hands for 10 or 20 years. Give us the freedom to do what the public wants after 2013.

The third issue I want to talk about on which government leadership is absolutely required is the local work and local jobs from our mining and resources boom. The resources of this state belong legally and morally to the people of this state. That is in fact the constitutional position. The people of this state should see substantial benefits from the phenomenal economic growth that is occurring on the back of those resources. Not only should people see immediate benefits, but also those benefits should be sustainable into the future. We have to leverage this mining boom into investment in skills, investment in sustainable industries and investment in diversifying our economy so that we get a lasting benefit for everyone from this boom. If we lose the fabrication work now, we will lose the opportunity to develop those skills and, in the absence of those skills, we will lose even more work in the future. Now is the time to take action. Yesterday, during question time the Premier gave an interesting answer; he gave some analysis of the factors that he thought were behind the reduction in local content. Analysis is one thing. What is required is a government response, and that was absent from the Premier's answer yesterday. There was no indication that he would take the lead on this issue. There was no indication that he was taking the issue seriously enough to institute a vigorous, coordinated government response to ensure that local businesses and local workers get not only the work that they deserve from our mining boom now, but also the future that they deserve from the investment in skills and the sustainability of their businesses. Where is the government response? Where is the leadership on local content? The Western Australian fabrication sector has seen 20 million hours' worth of projects move offshore in the past two years. That is the equivalent of 2.2 million working days or 444 000 working weeks. A lot of work has gone overseas. I say to the Premier that Western Australians have historically supported big projects. Why have they historically supported big projects? They have supported them because they value the work that flows from those big projects into workshops and businesses across the state. If they see the work not coming, they will reduce the level of support that they are prepared to offer any government for the development of big projects. It is part of the social contract. We all support big projects, we all support foreign investment, and we all work hard to make sure that it occurs, but we do that for a reason. We do not do it just in and of itself; we do it for a reason. We do it for the benefits for our people. Strong leadership and accountability on local content is required. So far this government is missing in action. So far this government is not treating the issue with the degree of seriousness that is required.

I now turn to some specific elements of the Premier's Statement. I found the Premier's speech notable for a fair degree of spin. A lot of unrealistic, unjustifiable statements occurred during the Premier's speech, and I want to take the opportunity to go through a few of them. I will quote from the speech. The Premier said —

We have slowed government expenses growth, ...

Okay; let us look at the facts. Expense growth in 2008–09 was 13.5 per cent—a record level of expense growth in the first budget that the government was responsible for bringing to a conclusion.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Not the 2008–09 budget, from memory; I think you did.

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** The Premier should look at the expenditure decisions he took between September and December 2008 and he will see that he completely ruined the control of expenses during that period of exuberance as he and the National Party took control. He paid no attention to the control of expenses or to the sustainability of the budget in the first glory days, with the hubris and exuberance of being in government. Let us move to the next year. In 2009–10, expense growth was 10.9 per cent. That was another huge level of expense

growth; it was above levels that were delivered during the period of the previous Labor government. In 2010–11, the Premier had a conversion; he heard the word. He budgeted on 3.9 per cent expense growth. But according to the midyear review, that has already blown out to 6.6 per cent. I will bet that when the budget comes down in May, we will see that that 6.6 per cent will have grown. It is a complete furphy—I would use a stronger word, but it is not convention to use that word—for the Premier to say, “We have slowed government expenses growth”. He has not; he has increased it.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** You’ve got to allow for the stimulus package in those sets of figures.

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** In both sets of figures, on the up and the down, the Premier is going to claim lower expense growth as a result of the disappearance of the stimulus package, while not accepting it on the other side of the argument.

The second issue I want to raise is this comment from the Premier —

... when it comes to utility prices, Western Australians will not experience increases of the same magnitude this year.

I want the Premier to justify that statement with real action. As I said before, I want him to commit today to remove the planning assumptions that he knows he has in his budget for increases that are anything but modest. The Premier cannot say one thing in a press conference when the camera is on him and then have a completely different plan in his official papers. He has to harmonise his public comments with his official papers.

The third issue I want to raise is not that difficult. The Premier’s speech states —

The Liberal–National Government will not surrender power over royalties to the commonwealth. I am glad the Western Australian Labor Party now agrees ...

What a misrepresentation of our position! We have never said anything other than that the Western Australian government should have control of Western Australian royalties. We have not been backward on that issue, and the Premier slurs WA Labor if he implies that we will not stand up for this state. We will stand up for this state at every possible opportunity. We have always said that we should have control of our royalty rates.

The fourth thing I want to raise is another remarkable statement. I think the Premier has been misled by the Minister for Training and Workforce Development. I warn government backbench members: Watch out for the Minister for Training and Workforce Development. He is slippery, he is sly and he misrepresents and manipulates statistics. They should not trust the information they get from him, and they will see why when I read the statement and tell them the facts. I know where the statement has come from. It has come from the office of the Minister for Training and Workforce Development. It has been incorporated in the Premier’s Statement and the Premier has bought it. He needs to think again. The Premier said —

In 2010, there was a 47 per cent increase in the number of people starting an apprenticeship, compared with 2009.

I will not go into that particular figure, but I will give members something that will correct the record. In 2008, the total number of people in traineeships and apprenticeships was 37 929. At the equivalent time in 2010, the total number of people in traineeships and apprenticeships was 38 770. There was a small increase of only 841 in the total number of people in traineeships and apprenticeships over those two years. That is nothing like 47 per cent, is it? We can see how misleading the 47 per cent figure is. Wait until members hear the figures on apprenticeships. In 2008, there were 23 000 people taking up apprenticeships; in 2010, there were 19 380. Therefore, there has actually been a fall in the number of people taking up apprenticeships—a fall of 3 620. That is the sad state of training investment in this state as we are on the verge of a new mining boom. Imagine the circumstances with the shortages of labour. Imagine the impact on public services. Imagine the impact on public projects. Imagine the impact on small business. Imagine the impact on the delivery of non-government welfare services as the skills shortage hits because this government is not making the investment in training that is required to prepare this state to set us up to take maximum advantage of the mining boom. And then, the minister for training does not tell the truth about this issue. I am prepared to give the Premier the benefit of the doubt; I think he probably just took the advice from the Minister for Training and Workforce Development; he took the spin and did not properly check it. I say to the Premier that he needs to go back to that minister and to tell him that it is time to do more than give fancy, absurd new names to TAFE colleges—that is the extent of his agenda; it is time to get on with investments in apprenticeships and traineeships to ensure that this state is prepared for the boom. I am disgusted by the spin that the Minister for Training and Workforce Development has been putting on these figures.

The next issue I take up is this amazing statement made by the Premier; I cannot believe that it was made —

The vibrancy of Perth will be improved by holding more national and international events.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** What's wrong with that?

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** I will tell the Premier what is wrong with that. What about all the events that his government has lost? What about the Johnnie Walker Classic, the Red Bull Air Race, the National Polocrosse Championships and the National BMX Championships? The Premier has presided over a haemorrhaging of events out of this state, and then he has the hide, the gall, to say that the government will improve the vibrancy of Perth with new events. First of all, he could stop the haemorrhaging of the events that we are losing before he makes that sort of statement.

The sixth issue that I take up is fiscal discipline. The Premier said —

... it is important that the fiscal discipline that has characterised the Liberal–National Government continues.

Give me a break. Fiscal discipline and this government are complete strangers! I have already run through the expense growth figures. Let me go to what in my view is the ultimate budget bottom line, which is the question of debt. We can talk a lot about the budget, but in the end it all boils down to: how much are we borrowing from our children in order to fund what we are doing today? The answer is that this government inherited the lowest level of state debt on record—\$3.6 billion—and has already taken it to \$14 billion. Further, the government openly plans to take the level of debt to \$20 billion. Further again, it has made a lot of announcements that have not been properly reflected in its budget papers, so the situation is going to get even worse. When the government finally faces up to what it has to do with the electricity network, the situation is going to get even worse. There is a history in this state. Richard Court's government reduced state debt: state debt at the end of the term of Richard Court's government was lower than was the case at the beginning of its term. Labor reduced state debt: state debt was lower at the end of our term in government than it was at the beginning of our term. The Barnett government is not going to do that. The legacy of the Barnett government will not be to reduce debt; the legacy of the Barnett government will be a fierce increase in debt and no plan to repay it. Therefore, I just have to laugh when I read the Premier boasting of the fiscal discipline of his government. There is no fiscal discipline in this government; that is shown by the expense growth figures and by the debt figures. The real conundrum is: how can so many important projects and important services be so underfunded when the spending growth is so high and the debt is so high? You would have to be a genius at decision making to produce that particular outcome; namely, those awful bottom-line aggregate figures and the terrible impact on missing projects and poor services.

The seventh part of the Premier's Statement that I quote reads —

... the government has already delivered on its election commitment to have Western Australia's first Minister for Mental Health, ...

I think that the government has over delivered on this promise! It delivered us Western Australia's second minister for mental health as well. I do not think that we can say that this is a particularly successful approach.

As we go through this document, apart from the things that I have highlighted, we see a lot of familiar things—a lot of old friends are in this document. Thirty-six re-announcements or re-mentions from last year's Premier's Statement. Last year's Premier's Statement had 35 re-announcements or re-mentions from the previous year. Can members see the point I am making? The Premier is long on announcement, but short on action. Long on talk; short on action!

I now move to two more issues before I conclude. I think that there is a very important issue of accountability. I think that the Premier is letting down the people of Western Australia by not showing leadership on this important issue. It is a requirement under law that if a minister refuses to provide information to this Parliament on the basis of commercial confidentiality, the minister has to notify the Auditor General under section 82 of the Financial Management Act. The Auditor General then produces a report in due course that indicates whether or not that decision is reasonable. There is a flaw in the arrangement. If the minister does not make the notification under section 82 of the Financial Management Act, the Auditor General's inquiry and report is not triggered. The only way in which a minister can be held accountable for failing to comply with section 82 is in Parliament. I think that imposes a particular obligation on the Premier. The Premier should lead by example. Instead, he is setting a very poor example. The Premier has refused to provide this place with a copy of the Oakajee port development agreement. He has not made the notification that he is required to make under section 82 of the Financial Management Act, and, therefore, we have had no Auditor General's opinion of whether it is reasonable to withhold the information. We can only debate this in the house; there is no other sanction. I think it is a disgrace that the Premier has refused to abide by a legal obligation that his party supported when the relevant legislation went through the house.

The second issue upon which the Premier has refused to provide information is the cost–benefit analysis underlying the decision to build the West Pilbara desalination plant. That plant is amazingly costly; the water

from that plant will require an enormous subsidy from the rest of us. On the face of it, it looks like a surprising decision. I think that given that we are going to have to pay so much money to build the plant, and then so much money to subsidise it—\$40 million a year forever and ever into the future—I think the public is entitled to see the financial information on which the government based its decision to build that plant. It is not as though the Water Corporation is some sort of private entity. We all own the Water Corporation. We all ought to be able to see exactly why the government made that decision. Once again, the Premier has failed to submit a notice under section 82 to the Auditor General and to this house. I do not think that the Premier can thumb his nose at accountability like that. I do not think that he can thumb his nose at his legal obligations like that. I think he needs to get on top of this issue and submit himself to the judgement of the Auditor General. It is possible that the Auditor General will say that the government is right in that there are commercial dangers or other risks in releasing this information. If the government is so certain of its position, why would it not submit itself to the reasonable judgement of a very reasonable man, the state's Auditor General?

The second matter of accountability that I want to raise is the government's propensity to create new government departments. I am very concerned about this propensity to create new departments. We have so far seen the government create or announce that it will create 11 new government departments doing the work that six departments did previously. How can it be efficient to have net five new departments? How can it be efficient to create 11 new departments? Do you know what I think happens? The Premier, for his own internal reasons, creates separate portfolios. Apparently ministers in this government cannot jointly work with the department. We had a Department of Education and Training, but the Minister for Training and Workforce Development could not work with the Minister for Education. The solution? Cause enormous disruption and upheaval in the public service, separate the two departments—and the buildings even—and pay a lot of money for all of that. The two departments cannot even be in the same building lest Minister Collier run into the Minister for Education. Heaven forbid that they should meet in the lift! Imagine the tension; imagine how awkward that would be. Separate them by kilometres, and let the public pay the price.

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** How was Cervantes?

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** Cervantes was great, and I recommend the Pinnacles Edge Resort. Let me do my bit for regional tourism. If members want to go to Cervantes, there is a brand-new resort there and it is terrific.

Let us return to these new departments. We are going to have a new department of finance and a separate department of the Treasury. We have a new Department of Regional Development and Lands and a separate Department of Local Government. We have a Department of Training and Workforce Development and a separate Department of Education. We have a Department of Transport and a separate Department of Planning. We have a Department of Mines and Petroleum separate from industry and resources; we have a Department of State Development separate from industry and resources; and we have a Department of Commerce. All those changes cost. They cost in morale, they cost in performance, they cost in new fit-outs, they cost in new salaries and they cost in new senior executive positions. Why is the government doing that? All the advice to the state from business and public sector management experts over many years has been to reduce the number of departments to get better coordination and better efficiency. The Labor Party did that when it came to government, and now I am really disappointed that the government is unwinding all that work. When we come back into power, we will be left with a dog's breakfast of individual departments set up on no basis other than the ministerial convenience of members of the Liberal-National government. People are paying the price for that ministerial convenience.

Let me conclude my remarks before I go on to one other item of business. Western Australia really does have strong economic prospects, but there are big questions that need to be answered: Who will benefit? How fair will it all be? What type of community will emerge from this mining boom? What will be the legacy for Western Australia from this mining boom? Getting the best answers to all those sorts of questions requires a government that cares about this issue. Getting the best answers to those questions requires a government that cares about fairness and the boom, and cares about including everyone in the benefits of the state's prosperity. What it requires is a government that is prepared to show real leadership on these issues. Boom conditions do not have any regard to fairness. It is governments that have to take on the issue of fairness, and the issue of fairness becomes particularly important during periods of great change and great economic growth. We need a government that will take real leadership and demonstrate real capacity on the issue of fairness.

It cannot be done by one person alone. We need a government with a team of ministers capable of taking on this issue. If it is just a one-man band, the issues will not be tackled. I have to say that the Premier's Statement gives us no confidence that we have a government that will care about these issues; no confidence that this state has the leadership it needs to deal with these issues; and no confidence that we have the team of ministers required to really take on the issues of fairness from the boom, inclusion for all Western Australians and a decent community legacy for this state from this period of enormous economic growth.

I now move to another issue. In two successive years we have had the two worst fires in terms of property losses in the state's history. At the time, the Toodyay fire, in which 38 houses were lost, was the worst in the state's history in terms of property loss.

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** Dwellingup.

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** I would be interested in the member's comments on Dwellingup. Certainly, these are the worst fires in the last 50 or 60 years, if not in the entire state's history. This year we had an even worse fire in which 72 houses were destroyed. I think there are very significant issues. There are issues of planning. Under what conditions are we going to allow people to live in areas subject to fire risk? What level of risk are we going to allow for communities and individuals? Which preventive measures are we going to take, such as prescribed burning, house design and garden design? How good are we at coordinating our government agencies? Do our government agencies have all the right equipment? Is the communication accurate? My view is that there is enormous risk on the urban fringe of Perth. We need to think very carefully and seriously about how we best manage that risk. We have to move beyond fire agencies reviewing themselves. There is no profit in Caesar reviewing Caesar. We need a full, open, independent inquiry so that agencies are not reviewing themselves, and so that the issues that go beyond and between agencies can be properly considered. We need the inquiry to be open so that the evidence is taken publicly. We need a circumstance in which people, if they want to, can make a submission rather than a circumstance in which submissions are only by invitation. And we need protection for people providing information to the inquiry so that if they want to say something about an individual or an organisation that might in other circumstances be considered defamatory, they can nevertheless go ahead and say it. We need a full, open, public inquiry with all appropriate powers to deal with this very serious risk that has emerged.

I just want to go back to something I said the other day. It really makes an impact on you when you go out to an ordinary row of houses in an ordinary street in an ordinary suburb, and right in the middle, well away from bush, you see a house destroyed because of ember attack. This is not just about people living in rural lots in very pleasant circumstances; this is about our suburbs on the edge of the city and the danger that they face. I conclude my speech by moving this amendment.

*Amendment to Question*

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** I move —

That the following words be added after "noted" —

and that the house condemns the Liberal–National government for its failure to conduct an independent, full and open judicial inquiry into the recent fires at Roleystone and Kelmscott that resulted in the destruction of 72 houses, and requires the Minister for Emergency Services to provide a full explanation to the house on this matter

**MS M.M. QUIRK (Girrawheen)** [1.18 pm]: I support the amendment that the Leader of the Opposition has just moved. We have waited some days for an indication that the government would exercise some leadership and that there would be an independent, full and open judicial inquiry. That has not happened.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Do you mean judicial inquiry or royal commission?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** With all due respect, Premier, they are actually the same thing.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** What are you calling for?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** A royal commission.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** A royal commission! Okay, so you have changed already.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** No, it has not changed. I will go into that in some detail. But this is not a new thing. In 1961 there was a royal commission into the Dwellingup fires. That royal commission became a template for firefighting in Western Australia in the succeeding five decades. In fact, that royal commission was pivotal in recommending that prescribed burning be conducted, and that became the practice in the years following that royal commission. If, for example, the government thinks there is not some benefit in holding a royal commission, I think it need look no further than the Dwellingup royal commission. Subsequent to that, there have been coronial inquests in the Tenterden matter and in the Boorabbin matter. As I said yesterday, I am very pleased that no lives were lost in the Roleystone–Kelmscott fires and that a coronial inquest was not activated. There was, however, a major loss of property with some real questions having been asked about how the fires were combated, yet there will be no coronial inquest. The only way, therefore, to get an independent inquiry and one in which, as the Leader of the Opposition said, Caesar is not looking at Caesar is to call a royal commission. I will say a bit more in a minute about why we need a royal commission. There are some technical issues about the power to be given to an independent inquiry. If a judicial inquiry is established without the powers of a royal

commission, that will create problems. Effectively, the powers of a royal commission are needed in this inquiry for compelling witnesses and issuing search warrants.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Who are you going to search?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** For example, providing immunity for witnesses against defamation and against —

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Immunity? Searching people?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I am not really prepared to have the Premier heckle from the cheap seats. This is a serious matter and he would do well to listen to some of this.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Continue, member for Girrawheen.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** A royal commission would have the power to give witnesses immunity. That means immunity against prosecution for defamation and disciplinary actions. It is therefore only in that context that people would be really free to speak—the kinds of privileges that are extended to members of this place.

The government has said that a management incident review is the way to go, such as that which occurred for the Toodyay fire last year; that is, a review, as the minister said yesterday, that will specifically examine how FESA has done the job and how it needs to improve its practices. But the problem with that sort of review is it will very much choose where FESA gets its information from, it would not be canvassed in a public hearing and it would not be subject to the rigorous forensic examination that needs to occur in this case. There has been a multiplicity of reports on the Toodyay fire, which illustrates that unless we have one decent mechanism for getting all the information out, there will be just a slow drip-feed of information. People will not be satisfied, and the victims of the fires will not be able to move on and start to rebuild, but will be focused on why information is not forthcoming.

In the case of the Toodyay fire, a Western Power inquiry was not made public. There was an EnergySafety report, which was completed and publicly released; and there was a report provided to the insurers and lawyers, also some of which was released. A consultant firm called Verifact was employed to look at Western Power's exposure in the event that liability was found, and Noetic Solutions compiled the management incident review for FESA. Concurrent with that, the Department of Environment and Conservation also reviewed its roles and responsibilities in fire management. That included, for example, its relationship with FESA and with local government authorities. All of those inquiries were ongoing concurrently so much so that none of them brought the issues to a satisfactory conclusion. The victims now have to go to litigation and to enormous expense. They have undertaken an enormous effort to get justice in that case. It is disgraceful and is a case of re-victimising the victims.

A number of recommendations were made in that major incident review—in fact 13 of them. Time probably does not permit me to read all of them. I will therefore highlight a couple and seek, in accordance with standing order 86, to incorporate all of those recommendations into the *Hansard* record.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Can I have a look at it, please?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** They are the 13 recommendations on that page and the following page, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** Member, are you seeking a royal commission into the circumstances surrounding the fire or across the whole of the organisations, or both?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** The whole of the thing.

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** So, FESA administration, emergency services and that fire?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Yes.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** There is a huge risk on the urban fringe and we have to get on top of that.

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** Nobody knows that better than I, but I just want to clarify what you are asking for.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Girrawheen, are they recommendations 1 and 2 on page iv?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** No; they are recommendations 1 to 13 over both pages.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Yes; that is in order.

Leave granted.

The following material was incorporated —

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**Recommendation 1:** FESA implements measures that will ensure unity and clarity of command.

**Recommendation 2:** FESA and DEC take a whole of capability approach to joint operations, including developing joint doctrine that provides a common and articulated understanding of roles and responsibilities, resources and capabilities.

**Recommendation 3:** FESA, in partnership with other agencies and the community, develops Western Australia's urban interface fire fighting capability and capacity.

**Recommendation 4:** FESA promotes a whole-of-community approach, involving FESA, Local Governments and the community, in fire prevention functions, activities and planning.

**Recommendation 5:** FESA strengthens its planning process to ensure learnings are incorporated and communicated, levels of preparedness are linked to threat analyses and public awareness and education activities are sustained.

**Recommendation 6:** FESA establishes a process (and associated systems and policies) to mobilise staff to an incident, incorporating pre-formed multi-agency Incident Management Teams. The development of Incident Management Teams should align with the principles of seamless and integrated escalation of command and control arrangements, and be based on a whole of capability approach (people, organisations, systems, training, procedures etc.).

**Recommendation 7:** FESA maintains inter-agency relationships and arrangements, and develops formalised arrangements across the entire emergency management cycle for joint activities such as training, exercises and procedure development.

**Recommendation 8:** FESA identifies and documents its information requirements for end-to-end information exchange and then assess the adequacy of current systems to meet these information requirements.

**Recommendation 9:** FESA establishes a dedicated intelligence function in Incident Management Teams for major bushfires and ensure this function is appropriately supported with threat based tools and systems.

**Recommendation 10:** FESA implements an education and awareness campaign to promote the purpose and utility of community information systems.

**Recommendation 11:** FESA reviews its approach to safety and safety culture.

**Recommendation 12:** FESA reviews its air reconnaissance capability and determines if multiple multi-sensor air reconnaissance aircraft or unmanned aerial vehicles are required for managing concurrent and/or complex incidents.

**Recommendation 13:** FESA revises its standard operating procedures to provide guidance on the format and timing of post-incident community meetings.

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**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would really appreciate having the document back until I have finished speaking.

Those recommendations, therefore, include in recommendations 1 and 2 implementing measures that will ensure unity and clarity of command; that FESA and DEC take a whole of capability approach to joint operations; in recommendation 5 that FESA strengthens its planning process to ensure learnings are incorporated and communicated, levels of preparedness are linked to threat analyses and public awareness and education activities are sustained; in recommendation 6 that FESA establishes a process to mobilise staff to an incident; in recommendation 7 that FESA maintains interagency relationships and arrangements; in recommendation 9 that FESA establishes a dedicated intelligence function; in recommendation 11 that FESA reviews its approach to safety and safety culture; and so forth. We can see from this review that there are major recommendations. However, there is no follow-up to the review. I do not know how many of those recommendations FESA has implemented and I do not know the extent to which FESA is unable to comply with those recommendations.

The review of the Toodyay fire, as far as I am concerned, has gone into the ether. The government wants to do the same thing with these recent fires. It wants to set up a major incident review, and we will not know what has occurred. Questions clearly need answering, and that is why we are calling for an inquiry in the form of a royal commission. We need to know and examine the current arrangement for prescribed burning. Who has responsibility for it, what is the extent of prescribed burning, and what is the scheduling of prescribed burning programs? All of those questions need to be clarified. Secondly, there is the question of the adequacy of communications. There have been some discussions publicly on talkback radio and what have you. I have certainly been contacted about whether, for example, the state alert system was adequate. That system was announced by the minister in February 2009 as a trial. Again, he has not reported back to this place on whether it is no longer on trial or whether it is in fact fully operational. I have had discussions with firefighting authorities in Victoria and there is also some question about whether the system that has been adopted in Western Australia is the most effective way. Victoria has gone down another path. Victoria has said it has gone down that other path because it believes that the Western Australian system is prone to congestion. That is, therefore, another matter that needs discussing.

**Mr R.F. Johnson:** It is what? I couldn't hear what you said.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I said it is prone to congestion.

There is then the question of local government roles. Are they resourced sufficiently? I am talking about the example of bush fire brigades in the City of Armadale. About a decade ago a number of bush fire brigades were

abolished by the local government authority. Part of the reason for that was that the area had become much more urbanised. But, again, did that leave a gap or a hiatus?

In the major incident report on Toodyay, there was a submission to the effect that the state's capability to combat fires on the urban fringe was very much questioned. Again, what are we doing to address that? As the Leader of the Opposition said, there are some major issues about planning and whether we need to adopt some different protocols and rules for what are acceptable building practices in areas on the fringe. Do there need to be changes to building codes, such as air conditioner covers in fire-prone areas or other modifications? Again, we need to look at that. We need to look at whether there is a sufficient number of appliances, whether they are deployed in the right location and things such as the risk-to-resource modelling—is that up to date? Are we in a position to meet these challenges, which, I think is conceded on both sides of the house, will increase with the threat of climate change? What are we doing to plan for the future?

As I said earlier, the major incident report is not open; it is in-house. There are no protections for witnesses and it has limited terms of reference. That in itself is interesting. I read the press release sent out by the Fire and Emergency Services Authority at 4.25 last Friday afternoon, which states —

The terms of reference for the MIR include:

- examine the effectiveness of preparedness leading up to the bushfires
- assess the effectiveness of FESA's public information systems
- examine the effectiveness of the response to the bushfires including existing fire response procedures, multi-agency response and coordination, and resource deployment
- recommend future bushfire management strategies, including any required improvements to existing arrangements including public communications, community advice systems, infrastructure, training and overall resourcing
- examine any other matters relevant to the incident

Of course, I was struck by the phrase “the terms of reference for the MIR include”, so I spent two days trying to find out what possible other terms of reference there are. It appeared that that was in fact a comprehensive list; however, that in itself, to find out the terms of reference, was not easy. Therefore, in terms of it being an open inquiry and an open book, even a process and an exercise as simple as that was not easy. I have had confirmation via the minister's office that this is the complete list of terms of reference, but that is not what the press release says.

**Mr M.J. Cowper:** Is there some allegation, member, of criminality in why you call for a royal commission?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Member, that is a very good point. This amendment is not about wanting to attribute blame or point the finger; this is about making sure that in the future our fire-prone communities are as resilient as possible. It may well be—I will talk about this a bit in a minute—that there are some implications for management, for example, in FESA. However, that may not necessarily be criminal; it might have other impacts.

The minister was quoted in this morning's paper as saying that our proposal would cause delay. Interestingly, the earliest that the report of the major incident review that the minister has initiated through FESA will be tabled in this house will be 9 August. The review is not due to be completed until 30 June, so technically speaking the first the report will see the light of day in this place will probably be in August, so, again, that is a delay. That will be a time after which CEO Jo Harrison-Ward will have already had her contract renewed or consideration of the contract will be reviewed. I think it is unsatisfactory that someone who heads an agency that is in the spotlight will in fact have their employment determined before this review report comes down. The review report will also be post-budget, which means if there are recommendations about expenditures or whatever before next fire season, that too will be problematic.

Also, I think the way in which this review has been set up has led to lots of rumours and anecdotal stories, some of which may or may not be true. It would be really healthy to get this out in the open and for people to feel that they have had their say and the opportunity to do so. I have, for example, heard a story that volunteers from Albany drove to Perth and got here at 4.00 am to assist in the firefighting. They were not deployed for another 14 hours; they stood around for 14 hours. I have heard other stories about appliances left waiting for the FESA fuel truck to come around to refuel them, and after an hour or so the firefighters were given the message not to wait any longer and just go to local fire stations.

It is like drawing teeth —

**Mr R.F. Johnson:** Who'd you hear those from?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I am not in a position to say, minister; I need to protect my sources.

**Mr R.F. Johnson:** I wonder who it might be.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** No; in fact, it was not who the minister is implying, but I have limited time.

It really is like drawing teeth. The government has forced us into this position whereby we have to move this amendment today. It is, as I said yesterday, in stark contrast to Premier Bligh who I think acknowledged how important it was for people's healing and sense of justice that the inquiry be open. It is very interesting that yesterday two, if we like, cats were let out of the bag—one was by the CEO of FESA, Jo Harrison-Ward, and the other was by the minister—about the prospect that there may well be another inquiry contemplated by government.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** That was spoken about last week. Where were you? Last week I talked about that.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Another review may well be announced; I know the Premier is looking at another area, but that was last week!

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** The cat has been roaming around for about four days!

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I think the Premier actually talked about a discussion in cabinet. I do not know that there was any —

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** No, I talked about an inquiry.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** An inquiry?

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Yes.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Will it be independent, Premier?

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** The cat's been roaming around—you haven't even been awake!

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Will it be open?

**Mr R.F. Johnson:** You're too busy writing press releases!

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I was too busy talking to the victims, Premier.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members!

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** How long does it take, Premier? Premier Bligh can announce an inquiry within two or three days of the floods, she can approach a judge to head that inquiry and she can give us terms of reference.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** She had 35 deaths in Queensland; 35 people lost their lives.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I think that lives have been disrupted and livelihoods have been destroyed. In many cases people will face a bleak future, and we need to know. People in other areas who were fortunate enough not to have their houses burnt on this occasion may like some assurance from the government that everything that can be done will be done in the future. This behind-closed-doors review whereby there is no follow-up and no oversight that the recommendations will even be acted upon is unsatisfactory. It was unsatisfactory in Toodyay. That is what is really sad; the Premier has not even learnt the lessons from Toodyay. The Premier has not even learnt that no satisfactory outcomes came from that multitude of inquiries, and people are still asking questions.

**MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier)** [1.38 pm]: I just want to speak briefly, and the Minister for Emergency Services will have more to say—I suspect quite a bit more to say. The fires that took place on 6 February, a little over a week ago, in Roleystone and Kelmscott were clearly a major fire event. Can I again remind members, particularly the member opposite, that it was a situation in which wind gusts were up to 80 kilometres an hour. The fire spread something like a kilometre in 20 minutes. The fire was extremely rapid in quite rugged terrain with quite steep hills. It is a heavily forested area with lots of reserves and parks and a large number of trees around dwellings. The fire started, I think, during the early afternoon —

**Mr A.J. Simpson:** No, in the morning at 11.45 am.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The fire was out of control, homes were burning, and it continued to burn fiercely during the night with continued winds. As we know, 440 hectares were burnt out and 72 homes were lost. Fortunately, although not by chance, there was no loss of life. When I was asked about the fire, I used the word “brilliantly”; I said that things worked brilliantly. That quote has been taken out of context. I was referring to the fact that 72 homes were lost and up to another 40 were damaged, and yet there had been no loss of life. The use of the word “brilliantly” was to reflect my support on the day, with the Minister for Emergency Services, for the firefighters, both career and volunteer, who risked their own safety, and, in some cases, disregarded the loss of their own homes and made sure that everyone got out of that fire risk area. I do regard that as brilliant. I was nothing but impressed and amazed at the efforts of firefighters.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** Don't diminish our —

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I do not need to diminish your work; you do that by yourself.

That is why I used the word “brilliant”, and members on this side would agree with me. There were 72 homes lost, a fire that was out of control throughout that afternoon and right through the night, and they worked on in darkness, in smoke and in danger. It was brilliant that the people were taken out of that area. Yes, some were reluctant, but to their great credit they accepted the advice of firefighters and police, and they left. Had that not happened, there would certainly have been loss of life in that fire. That is without any doubt at all. I went out with the Minister for Emergency Services mid-morning, and at that stage the fire was still out of control in some areas. Obviously, there was not the chaos of the previous day or overnight. There were probably around 200 firefighters there at the time and something like 100 vehicles in the area. There were firefighters from all over the state who had simply come there to help out. Some were exhausted. I remember one group just sitting by the side of the road—it was probably the first time they had sat down for many, many hours, because the area that they were looking after was now under control—and they were having a bit of a laugh and chatting.

What did we hear over the radio, bearing in mind that the fire was still out of control? We heard calls from various people from around the state: we need an inquiry. I can tell members directly of the effect that had on those leading the firefighting effort—senior people and also the firefighters. Here they were, tired and exhausted and knowing that some of their mates had lost their own homes, but they were still out there fighting the fire. Yet we have public comment, “We need an inquiry.” That had an absolutely—not demoralising effect because they kept on with the job, but, I will tell you what: they were not impressed. While they were out there still fighting a fire, there were people in the comfort of their homes, in the media and on the radio saying, “We need an inquiry.” When I was asked that question, I said no, that at the moment our job as a government was to support the firefighters, the victims and the local community and we would think about an inquiry later. I said that we were not going to deal with that this week; we would help the recovery and make sure that we provided support. That was not good enough for the opposition. They wanted to be in there calling for an inquiry when people were still dealing with the fire and the tragedy of having lost their homes. That is the difference between the member for Girrawheen's side of politics and this side: we concentrate on what matters. I compliment the member for Armadale, who did the right thing, along with the member for Darling Range, in supporting their communities and the firefighters and dealing with the situation, not running to the media calling for inquiries.

This was an extremely serious fire. The other thing that the state government did immediately was to provide assistance. Immediately, we took the decision to provide \$3 000 cash assistance for any family that had lost its home—no questions asked! We also provided other assistance through government agencies and the like. Also on that morning, we declared it a natural disaster area, which immediately triggered both commonwealth and state assistance. We were doing what we could to deal with the fire. It would have been nice to have had the opposition come out and support the government at that moment, but members opposite did not. All the opposition was interested in was what politics it could get out of it. Members opposite did not stand up and say they supported the government and the firefighters; all they were looking for was the politics. The week went by, and toward the end of the week when the fire was under control and things were stabilised, then I said that we will learn what we can from this situation. The Fire and Emergency Services Authority will be conducting a major incident review—I will leave the minister to comment on that—as it always does and as it should. That review will be conducted into the operations of FESA. It was probably last Friday that I made the point that we would look at other issues—in particular, the amount of prescribed burning that had taken place in the area.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** You are making it up as you go along.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** If the member had been awake, she would have read the paper last Saturday!

Having done what we could as a government to support the firefighters, and to provide immediate financial assistance for those who had lost their homes, and all the other support services that could be marshalled from both government and private agencies, I said that apart from the FESA inquiry, which is a matter of course and will be done properly and independently by a person from one of the other states, we would look at what could be learnt from this, and in particular the amount of prescribed burning that had taken place and the sorts of planning, building regulations, codes and by-laws that have applied. We will also be looking at the responsibility —

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** Who is “we”?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Is the member finished? Can she be quiet for a moment? She said this was a serious debate; she is not treating it seriously.

We will look at prescribed burning; planning and the building regulations, codes and by-laws from any agency; the number of trees close to homes; and in particular the responsibility of property owners, both government and private property owners. I said that is what we will do. For the information of the house, we have worked on the

terms of reference for that inquiry. They will be considered by cabinet on Monday, and we intend to appoint an independent person to conduct an inquiry into those matters. It will be a relatively short-term inquiry. If hearings are held, they will be in public. Evidence will be taken in public and it will satisfy —

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** Will witnesses have immunity? It is a key issue.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** It is not a key issue to me, my friend. We are concerned about learning from that fire. We will have a very prominent and experienced person conducting this inquiry. We will take evidence in open hearings. There will be no secrecy. Public servants, government employees and local governments will all contribute information. We will all cooperate. We will deal with it properly. After cabinet looks at the terms of reference, which I expect cabinet will agree to—there may be some alternations —

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** We had to drag all of this out of you, Premier!

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The member has been so miserable to these people.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Girrawheen, I have given you some latitude because people interjected on you. I think you have had your chance.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** A prominent and experienced person will be appointed to head this inquiry. We anticipate it will probably take three or four months; it will be a relatively short-term exercise that will essentially be confined to the Perth hills. We are not about to open a wide-ranging royal commission, as the Labor Party would want, into firefighting in Western Australia. Members opposite are about bringing into question the firefighting services in this state and the men and women who work with them. That is what members opposite are about. They want a royal commission into firefighting across Western Australia. This government is not going to waste the taxpayers' resources or insult our firefighters and that community by doing that. We will have an inquiry into what matters in the context of the Roleystone fire with implications for the Perth hills. That is what we will deal with.

The fire was a little over a week ago. Hopefully, cabinet will have made that decision within two weeks of the fire. We will then announce the terms of reference and who will conduct that review into the specific matters so that we learn all that can be learnt from the Roleystone–Kelmescott fire and that can be applied to the Perth hills. There is no doubt that the Perth hills is a high-risk area. In recent years we saw the extremely serious fire in Canberra, where 500 homes were lost. We need to learn from this experience. That is what this government will do. We will not go out and imply failings on the part of firefighters. We will not question, as the Labor Party does, those men and women who gave of their time and effort.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** We did not do that.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The member for Girrawheen says they did not do that! They asked questions about a fire truck that had to be refuelled. They questioned a team that came up from Albany and was not deployed. It just may be that it was held back and rostered on when the other team finished. Members opposite raised question after question, and those sorts of comments have an effect on firefighters. That is absolutely reprehensible. This side of the Parliament, the Liberal–National government, supports our firefighters. We will act decisively, as we have done, and we will support our community. We will not stand on the side like members opposite and throw rocks and criticise and want to set up a royal commission. That is what members opposite want. The opposition does not actually want a result; it wants a long-running royal commission. That is what the opposition wants for the sake of holding a royal commission. I have not heard one positive suggestion from the opposition on this issue, just criticism and a desire to set up yet another royal commission. This government will not do that. We will work with the community, the firefighters, the Fire and Emergency Services Authority, the State Emergency Service and other agencies. We will learn quickly the lessons that can be learnt from this fire and we will apply them to the Perth hills. No doubt there will be implications for other areas of the state.

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armada)** [1.50 pm]: I support the proposed amendment to the Premier's Statement. I should start by saying that I again thank the Premier for his declaration that what occurred was a natural disaster and for awarding immediate relief to the victims. I stated that yesterday during the condolence motion, and I would like to repeat it today. The Premier was very moved when he visited the fire zone area, as was the Leader of the Opposition. The devastation was immense. As was stated, 72 homes were destroyed, which is the greatest number of homes destroyed in a bushfire in the metropolitan area in the state's history. This was a major disaster. The Premier recognised it as a major disaster, as evidenced by his actions in awarding immediate relief and declaring it a natural disaster.

I want to make it clear that by calling for this independent inquiry, the opposition is not apportioning blame. We definitely are not blaming the firefighters. If I recall correctly, I and members on my side of the house who spoke in support of the condolence motion congratulated the efforts of the firefighters, whether they were career firefighters or voluntary firefighters; their efforts were amazing. We are concerned about the sort of support they

are receiving. We are seeking a full inquiry. Of course we want an inquiry that is completely independent of the investigating agencies. We cannot have a proper inquiry that will have the confidence of the public and, more importantly, the confidence of the victims who lost their homes—72 homes were destroyed and some 30 homes were severely damaged—if it is not completely independent. Those people need answers. Many of them have come to me and, I imagine, other members, such as the member for Darling Range, with questions. They are very complimentary, as are members of the opposition and I, of the efforts of the firefighters, whether they are career firefighters or from the voluntary bushfire services. The Premier might want to turn the tables on us and say that we are criticising the firefighters, but I have not heard anyone on our side of the house criticise the firefighters either in the media or in this house. We are completely complimentary of their efforts, which were outstanding. What makes their efforts even more outstanding is that it would seem they are not receiving the proper support from the government through the provision of adequate resources. Maybe they are, but this inquiry would give us answers. We need to have an independent inquiry to ensure that the public of Western Australia can be confident that if we do experience another similar bushfire, we will have the appropriate resources to tackle it. The Premier mentioned that the terrain in the Perth hills is very rugged, and it is. It is very hard to fight a bushfire in that area, and that was especially the case on the day in question because the winds were blowing up to 70 kilometres or more an hour. The efforts of the firefighters were outstanding in that respect.

The Premier also said that it was reported in the media that he said that the bushfire was “brilliantly contained” or “brilliantly fought”, and that that comment was taken out of context. I have some sympathy for that. He may have been referring to the fact that there was no loss of life, which is true. In some respects, I do not know how that happened. If there had been a westerly breeze blowing up the hill towards Roleystone, we would not be talking about the loss of 72 homes; we would probably be talking about the loss of 100, 200 or even more homes. Unfortunately, we might even be talking about deaths. If the fire had moved as quickly up the hill as it moved down the hill, one wonders whether we could have got all the residents out in time. In some respects, we can thank our lucky stars that the wind was blowing easterly. I say that we can thank our lucky stars not for the victims who lost their homes, but in respect of the magnitude of the disaster. It was a disaster that 72 homes were destroyed. If the wind had been blowing uphill, many more homes would have been lost.

Today we heard the terms of reference of the inquiry that the government will set up. It will examine prescribed burning and whether there is a need for more prescribed burning. It will look also at the by-laws, planning issues and building regulations. The inquiry will probably be confined to the Perth hills region. Those measures are laudable, but that is not enough. As far as I am aware, the local council, the City of Armadale, has done an excellent job in the recovery phase and I have no criticism of it. However, some residents have raised concerns about the level of burning off. I presume that the Premier has listened to those concerns, which is part of the inquiry that the government is looking at.

The Minister for Emergency Services interjected on the member for Girrawheen. Firefighters have told me what I am about to say. I was told this not by the union but by both volunteer and career firefighters who were on the ground, and also by some of the victims who have friends who are firefighters. Is it true—I do not know, but I hope that an inquiry will find out—that the volunteer firefighting brigades such as the Roleystone and Bedforddale brigades are legally obligated to fight not only the bushfires, but also the structural fires because of the zoning of the bushland? By “structural fires”, I mean people’s homes. The firefighters certainly had a fight on their hands to do that on Sunday, 6 February. The problem for the volunteer fire brigades such as Roleystone is that they do not have the proper equipment to fight structural fires. They do not have proper fire tanks or breathing apparatus. How are they supposed to fight the structural fires if they do not have the proper breathing apparatus? That is why we need a proper inquiry.

Do not ask FESA to report on itself. Could it have been a failure? We are worried about not just the outcome, but we want to ensure that the public is confident that the outcome of the report is legitimate. That confidence will come only with an independent inquiry. That day was a dark day in our history. There were fires in Red Hill and other areas of Perth. Is it true that at the height of the Roleystone–Kelmscott fires, there were no other firefighting trucks available to attend to any other potential fires in the metropolitan area? If that is true, that is an absolute disaster waiting to happen.

**Mr R.F. Johnson:** Who said that was the case?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I said that I have spoken to career and voluntary firefighters. I may be the new boy on the block, but I am not that new, if the minister thinks I am going to tell him!

Is it also true that that evening when people called 000 seeking the assistance of firefighters, they were told that unless people were trapped, the firefighters would not be attending the scene because they were completely stretched? Some firefighters were working 30-hour shifts. Under the new collective bargaining agreement, the government is looking at taking away their 24-hour shifts.

There were also issues about the communications, which the member for Girrawheen has mentioned. I have already written to the federal Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy about this matter. People who live in the Perth hills know that there are black spots for mobile phones, television and radio broadcasting. If there are black spots, it is not the state government's fault, and I am not saying that it is. However, the government should hold an inquiry to find out these things. Even if we had a great communications system, if there are mobile phone, television and radio broadcasting black spots, some people might not know that there is a fire hazard. Further, in many cases in Western Australia, it has taken 20 minutes or more to get information from on the ground where the fire is to the public. When a member of the public rings to say that there is a fire, it should not take more than 20 minutes before the general public is informed. I believe that in Victoria—but I stand to be corrected—incident controllers are authorised and encouraged to speak directly to radio stations such as the ABC. Therefore, in Western Australia, people on the ground who see a fire should be able to report directly to the ABC and 6PR about the fire hazard. But FESA wants to control the communication of information. This should not be territorial; this should be about saving lives and saving property. I congratulated the Premier yesterday, and I congratulate him again today, for his efforts in affording assistance to the victims.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 443.]