

TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE — MANDURAH AND DAWESVILLE

Grievance

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [9.06 am]: My grievance this morning is to the Minister for Planning and relates to current practices for the installation of monopoles and telecommunications facilities throughout Western Australia and their effect and potential effect on communities. This morning I will highlight two examples specific to the Mandurah area—one in my electorate and one in the electorate of the member for Dawesville—that have caused major concern for residents affected by those placements. I also want to highlight a previous decision regarding the installation of a tower in Meadow Springs over 18 months ago, which relates to the concerns I want to raise with the minister this morning. I am presenting this grievance on behalf of people such as Mr Vince Nesci and his wife Josephine; 300 residents from the Belswan Retirement Estate in Lakes Road, Greenfields; and Dr Alsop and his wife, who also live in Lakes Road. In relation to the Dawesville-based issue at 7 White Hill Road, Bouvard, I present this grievance on behalf of Darran and Linda Starbuck, Peter and Nathalie Pires, Bryce and Miriam Hardingham, David and Jacque Burns, Gary and Janeen Robbins and others in that area.

“State Planning Policy 5.2” relates to the placement and approval process for telecommunications infrastructure. National guidelines and industry codes also relate to this issue. Quite frankly, these policies and processes are failing people in Western Australia. They are failing residents who have major concerns with proposals to place a telecommunications facility, tower or an addition to a tower in their locality. To be quite frank, the process is a farce. The examples I will highlight in the brief time I have will demonstrate that farce. The lack of teeth in our planning guidelines and policy is a farce, the protocols and code that the so-called telcos are supposed to adhere to are a farce, and the lack of any teeth in ensuring that people in communities have a genuine say and are actually heard is a farce.

The first example, which I will refer to briefly, is that of Lakes Road. Earlier this month I wrote to the Minister for Planning about the Lakes Road example. The minister may have located that correspondence. Late last year, Telstra made an application to put a 25-metre monopole on its property at Lakes Road, which is property Lot 4087 Lakes Road or 66 Lakes Road, Greenfields. The council advertised because this matter was set to trigger a council response, but, unfortunately, it did not do so to all residents who would be affected. If not for the efforts of Mr Nesci and a few other people, many people in the area would not have known about the proposal. The matter finally went to council later this year, and the City of Mandurah opposed Telstra’s application on the back of wide community support.

Mr J.H.D. Day: On the basis of what concerns?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: On a range of matters, including amenity and health issues, and the fact that other locations that we believe are appropriate were not considered appropriately; in fact, we believe they were not considered at all.

Telstra appealed the council’s decision in the State Administrative Tribunal. SAT decided late this year to throw out council and community opposition and granted the approval, despite the fact that I and members of the public highlighted more appropriate sites in a commercial context just some 400 metres down the road at the Lakes Road and Pinjarra Road intersection. Those sites were not appropriately nor effectively reviewed. We believe that Telstra simply went with its site because it was cheaper.

I turn to the Bouvard example. Bouvard is another example of the placement of monopoles in an area in which residents believe will be detrimental to the amenity of the area. I know this is supported by the member for Dawesville, because he wrote to council earlier this year to highlight the fact that another site would be more appropriate.

Dr K.D. Hames: The Water Corporation site.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Again, that site was highlighted as a better option because it would have less impact on residents. It seems that the national broadband network proponent is pushing ahead with its proposal, which will affect the residents that I have mentioned and those living around them.

The fact of the matter is that the telcos are riding roughshod over residents. They know that industry code C564:2011 for mobile phone base station deployment is simply a piece of paper and do not comply with it. They know that council will oppose them and they will ride roughshod over council. That has happened with the Lakes Road proposal in Mandurah, and I expect it will happen with the Dawesville proposal in Bouvard. On Tuesday night the council supported the residents by opposing the proposal in Bouvard. But track history suggests that the matter will be appealed in the State Administrative Tribunal and that SAT will approve it.

Two things need to happen. First, the minister must review, quickly and transparently, the state planning policy that I mentioned. Second, I have written to the member for Geraldton, who is chair of the Economics and

Industry Standing Committee, about the urgent need for an inquiry into this matter. Finally, we know that standards in some European countries have been increased to effect this because of health concerns. This will affect people throughout Western Australia into the future.

MR J.H.D. DAY (Kalamunda — Minister for Planning) [9.14 am]: I acknowledge the interest and responsibility of the member for Mandurah in taking up the concerns of his constituents. I appreciate the fact that he gave me notice of this grievance yesterday and that he wrote me an email on 7 November in which he expressed concern that SAT had effectively based its determination only on visual amenity issues, not the health concerns raised by residents, and that other more appropriate sites were not considered by Telstra in detail. I cannot comment on behalf of Telstra specifically, of course. It has a responsibility to adequately consult and to consider all relevant options. I suspect, based on my experience with this issue—it was not with Telstra, but with Optus—that a range of other issues need to be taken into account that may not be immediately apparent to those who believe that another location will be better. Nevertheless, I am sure Telstra will be able to explain its processes.

Mr D.A. Templeman: That is the problem; it's not. Telcos are not being transparent at all. They do not want to meet with the residents who will be affected. They do not want to meet with them to explain the process, which is the case for Lakes Road and Bouvard. I am sorry to interrupt.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: That is fine. Telecommunications companies have a responsibility to provide adequate information and appropriate consultation. However, I am sure they have also had experience Australia-wide and probably internationally of having their consulting process hijacked as a result of a scare campaign by some people who make comments on the basis of emotion, rather than science. Certainly I have seen that in my electorate.

I understand that the City of Mandurah refused the application and that Telstra appealed to SAT, which it is entitled to do. I have full confidence in the role played by SAT and the way in which it undertakes its responsibility. I point out that section 9 of the State Administrative Tribunal Act 2004 states that one of the main objectives of the tribunal in dealing with matters in this jurisdiction is to achieve the resolution of questions, complaints or disputes and to make or review decisions fairly and according to the substantial merits of a case. I emphasise “according to the substantial merits of a case”.

Dr K.D. Hames: SAT can only consider what is before it, which is the location of the site. It does not have planning responsibility to determine whether other sites are more appropriate.

Mr D.A. Templeman: That is the key with both the Lakes Road and Bouvard sites. Alternative sites have not been looked at properly.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: As I said, it is up to Telstra to explain that, but I am happy to seek further information about the specific examples. I make the observation that a lot of the concerns expressed about this issue are based on perceived health concerns due to electromagnetic emissions. It is not the responsibility of Western Australia's planning system or local governments to determine the details of the standards required for electromagnetic emissions. I also make the observation that it is easy for local government authorities or their planning committees to make recommendations or decisions that are in accordance with the expressed wishes of a local group without necessarily taking into account the longer-term needs of the wider community. That happens around the state—and, I am sure, around the country—on a not too infrequent basis. Some local governments—they are not all like this, but it does happen—make decisions on a much more local basis knowing that the final decision will be made by another authority, such as SAT, at the state level. I also make the observation that telecommunications companies are installing a lot more mobile telecommunications towers because of the exponential increase in the usage in the community of mobile phones, smart phones and mobile internet devices, such as those that members have in the chamber, which are now very prevalent.

The more devices are in use, the more bandwidth is needed, and, in short, the more telecommunications capacity is needed. Therefore, there is a demand from the community for adequate mobile communications; complaints are made when effective communications are unavailable. A concern expressed—without overstating the issue—after the recent Gracetown shark tragedy that mobile telecommunications were not readily and appropriately available. That is also a problem in the Perth hills with emergency services and general mobile phone coverage. People complain about that, but there is opposition from a number of vocal local residents to facilities being improved.

The standards that apply to electromagnetic communications are actually the responsibility of the Australian Communications and Media Authority, which determines the general standards that need to be adhered to. It essentially relies on the scientific standards established by the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency. I recommend that members of the public, and Parliament, consult both their websites—namely, www.acma.gov.au and www.arpansa.gov.au—for a lot more information on these issues.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Minister, with time running out, will you do a review of the planning guidelines?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I will have a look at the issue.

Mr D.A. Templeman: That's what needs to happen.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: But the approach I intend adopting is to ensure that there is a response based on science, not on emotion. I seek to table the documents from ARPANSA and ACMA for the information of members.

[The papers were tabled for the information of members.]