



# Parliamentary Debates

(HANSARD)

FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION  
2021

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Wednesday, 27 October 2021

# Legislative Council

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THE PRESIDENT (Hon Alanna Clohesy) took the chair at 1.00 pm, read prayers and acknowledged country.

## PAPERS TABLED

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

### BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION (EXEMPTIONS) AMENDMENT ORDER 2021 — DISALLOWANCE

#### *Notice of Motion*

Notice of motion given by **Hon Dr Brad Pettitt**.

#### EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR

##### *Motion*

**HON LORNA HARPER (East Metropolitan)** [1.05 pm]: I move —

That this house —

- (a) acknowledges that the early childhood sector provides vital education and care for children in the early years; and
- (b) recognises the sector's workforce in ensuring high-quality safety, education and care of children.

I rise today to speak about a subject that is close to my heart. Early childhood education and care is often referred to outside the sector as child care. Generally, people do not say it in front of me too often, because it has been early childhood education and care for a very, very long time. However, it is not really understood. People see it as wiping bottoms, wiping noses and making sure that the children come out alive at the end of the day, but it is so much more than that. As my honourable colleague Hon Donna Faragher has stated many times in this house, the first three years of a child's life are when they learn the most. Their brains develop so quickly and they learn so much that we need to ensure that what they are learning is appropriate. People do not drop off their children at an early childhood centre to sit and watch television or play with playdough or puzzles all day. They are there to learn, and they learn with a curriculum. The educators in these centres observe the children and program for them. They observe each individual child to find out where that child is at, how they can extend that child's learning and what they can do to help the child grow. They ensure that not only does an individual child have those resources, but also the whole group has them.

I would like to go back to my days of working in early childhood. It has changed, but not that significantly from when I worked there. I would like members to imagine that they are in a room a quarter of the size of this room, and in their care are 20 children, all aged about three years old. Anybody with children will know that being in a room with even one three-year-old is challenging. Imagine having 20 of them! Within that 20, just imagine the different ages, stages, abilities, skills and needs of those children. Imagine, members, having to program and make sure that equipment and resources are out for these children, to help challenge them. Imagine what it would be like to do this from early in the morning until late in the day. Imagine that you have set up your room for the multiple intelligences and abilities of the children. Imagine that it has been raining and, as it has done this winter, it has rained continuously and the ground is sodden, so the children unfortunately have not been able to get outside as much as possible. You have set up some activities inside so that the children can move their big muscles and burn off some of that energy, and you can assist them with their gross motor skills. You have set up quiet areas for children who want to just chill out and be quiet. You have set up areas to challenge children. Stuff is going on. You get sand play in one corner, water play in another, and painting. Playdough is on the table. You get puzzles. You get areas where the children will come and say, "This is what I'd like to do today", so you say, "Fine. Let's go. We'll set that up. Let's follow the needs of these children." Let us not also forget that these days, you also have the room pet to be cared for—there will be an animal somewhere within the centre. Then you also put in the gardens and make sure that, one, you are not going to poison the children with what you are planting, and, two, the children actually get to grow things.

To be more realistic, also imagine that you have a child in your room who has not yet been diagnosed but has non-verbal autism. You have a child with speech and hearing difficulties. You have children with English as their second or third language. Then there is a child with emotional issues. They may have suffered some trauma. They may have come through to you from the department for child protection. They may be living with their grandparents. They may have come from all sorts of things. Then you have a child who is very intelligent. I will be honest. This is one of the most difficult things. If any members are blessed with a very intelligent child, you will know that that is a blessing that will be with you for life, because unless you keep that very intelligent child challenged, occupied and engaged, they will come up with the most creative, destructive and manipulative little things that they can do. A lot of future leaders are very intelligent children, and they will lead their group to absolute chaos.

Imagine you are in that room with those 20 children, and there is you and one other adult—that is it. There are two of you, and 20 children aged three and four. Most parents or most families would run screaming. There is no television here, by the way. There are no iPads. You cannot just sit and put the children down quietly for five minutes to get a break and have a cuppa. Oh—there are no cuppas here, either. I have no idea where the belief that early childhood educators sit and drink coffee and eat Tim Tams came from. I have never done it—one, you would never have a hot drink anywhere near a child, and, two, if you ate chocolate, you would be mugged by 20 children!

So you have done all that, you and your other adult. You have spent years training. You have qualifications. You have spent years to get your diploma of early childhood education, or you have spent time to get your certificate III. Thankfully, that can now happen again, because the McGowan Labor government has reduced TAFE fees and people can actually afford to go and study these subjects. You have done all this. You are working hard. You are putting your heart and soul and everything you have into looking after these children, yet you are getting paid \$23.47 an hour. Why? Why would you do it? Why would you do all of that? Not only do you have the life and the health and the safety of these children in your care, you have their education. You are helping shape our future generation. You are looking after people's most precious, precious children. I have unfortunately been in places where I have seen children who have come from the department for child protection. I have had to report families to child protection because of things I have seen. It horrified me. The things I have seen still sit with me today.

I have dealt with children who have special needs. I would like to talk to members about one young man. His name is Lachlan. He is not a young man anymore; he is all grown up. I was a director of an early childhood centre. When I took over the centre, Lachlan was in the babies' room, because Lachlan had a global developmental delay. He had reached the age of two, but he could not quite sit up. He also needed some assistance feeding. The educators were still putting him in a high chair, and I went, "No. Lachlan needs to grow. We need to challenge Lachlan. We need to work with his parents. We need to do what we can." So we got assistance from a service that came in, and they brought in equipment that we could use so that Lachlan could sit at the table, supported, with the other children. Within a few months, Lachlan had moved up to the toddlers' room. He was not walking, but he could move himself around. He was not verbally communicating, but he could communicate. Before long, Lachlan had moved up to the kindy room, where the children accepted Lachlan for who he was. Lachlan was funny. He was also very frustrated, because although physically Lachlan was not able to move around, and verbally he was not able to express himself, he was a very intelligent young man. One of the proudest things I ever saw, and one that made everyone in the room cry, was the day Lachlan let go of his walking frame and took three steps across the room. The children cheered. I cheered. I cried. I was the tough one who did not cry at too many things, but I sat and bawled like a baby because we were so proud of that young man. That young man did not do it on his own—we wish he had. He did it with the help of the early childhood educators who were directly looking after them and were working with his family and the other services around Lachlan to ensure that he was getting the best start in life that we could possibly provide. Again, we do that not because we are paid, but because we want to; we love it.

I have also been part of the Big Steps campaign. For people who are not in the know, the Big Steps campaign began—I am going to show my age here—way back in about 2007 or 2008 when I was a member of what was then called the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union and went on to become United Voice and then United Workers Union. I was a big stepper from way back then. I used to have a lovely little keyring that said, "Big Steps, LHMU", until it got broken, and I was really sad, because it was so old.

Big Steps has succeeded in a way. It has succeeded in raising the professional expectations of early childhood educators. For years, the sector has been trying to tell people, "Stop calling us childcare centres. Stop calling us childcare workers. We are early childhood educators." That has been pretty successful. Unfortunately, what has not been successful is what early childhood educators get paid. The expectations on them do not meet what they get paid. I have been doing a bit of research on some other industries. I will say that one of the reasons early childhood workers generally do not get paid a reasonable living wage is because over 90 per cent of early childhood employees are women. Let us have a wee look at some other industries. I want to say that I am not trying to diminish other industries, because, yes, they have qualifications; they have had to work and do training. If I had a certificate III in bricklaying, I would get paid \$26.33 an hour on the award, plus I would get penalties and overtime. There are no penalties and overtime in early childhood, by the way; there just is not. If I had a certificate III in some form of construction, I would get over \$26 an hour. But I can look after your children for \$23 an hour, and that is acceptable? No, it is not. If I worked as a cleaner, with no qualifications, but I have been doing it for a wee while, the minimum award wage for a cleaner is just over \$23 an hour. That is similar to the wage for somebody with years of experience and qualifications in early childhood. Please tell me why that is acceptable, and why that can continue. Yes, wages are a federal issue. But it was Tony Abbott and the Liberal government that stopped the funding that was going directly to the wages of early childhood educators. If that funding had gone through, our early childcare workers would not be leaving the sector in droves. Why would they do that job if they could go to Coles or Woolworths or another supermarket or shop and work for similar money, with no responsibilities, and also get penalty rates? Why would they do it? Why is it that people in this predominantly female industry are getting paid such a pittance?

I would say that one reason is profiteering. Are parents aware that a lot of early childhood centres are owned by large investment companies. I will say it: there are some very good centres that are run and privately owned, but, generally,

the chains—not all of them—are run by an investment company, which could be offshore. Its goal is to make a profit from our children. I have worked in a not-for-profit centre and a for-profit centre. When I ran a for-profit centre, I was told that my costing for wages had to be between 40 and 45 per cent of revenue. Imagine paying \$125 a day and 40 to 45 per cent of that goes to the wages. Where is the rest going? Not all of it covers outgoings or the buildings et cetera. But in the majority of not-for-profit centres over 80 per cent of their earnings go directly to the wages. They employ more staff. They employ more qualified staff. They employ actual certificate III-qualified staff. They do not employ people who are working towards a certificate III and then the minute they get it, kick them off so they can get another junior in to pay junior wages. They do not have one policy for the whole chain of centres and every centre is the same, because each early childhood centre should stand alone in the community because each community is different. Centres could be within 200 metres of each other, but the needs of the children attending that service can be completely different. But, of course, there is the profiteering, which is something else the federal government can do something about. But no, it cannot hear the issue.

Over the years, we have heard the federal government talk about quality and how much more money we have to pay the parents. Newsflash: the money is not going to help the parents; the money is filling companies' profits. When will the profiting from our children stop? At the same time, they are profiting from our children, they are paying disgracefully low wages. Why do members suppose that people are leaving the sector in droves? Why do members suppose that it is very difficult to get an early childhood teacher to work in a service? It is because they do not earn the same there as they would if they worked in a school. I will be honest; if I had a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education, I would go and work in a school where I would earn significantly more than if I worked in an early childhood centre. Who would blame them? Again, these are our precious young children. They are our future. Every dollar we invest in these children comes back to us tenfold in the future.

Imagine what society is going to be if we as a society cannot instil in children that they are worth more—that they know that the people educating them are truly valued and not stressed to the max, working extra hours without being paid or paying for their own professional development such as first-aid certificates, anaphylaxis and asthma training because the for-profit centre they are working for does not want to do it. How can staff do professional development when the centre that they work for does not want them to? Where is the career path? So many people out there are burnt out and disillusioned and I do not blame them. Twenty-three dollars an hour is a disgrace. The fact that our early childhood educators are not recognised nationally for the work that they do is a disgrace. The fact that companies are making profit out of our children is an absolute disgrace. But there are things that we can do. We can educate parents that that shiny, brand new centre up the road might look beautiful, but the people who make the centre are the staff. If a centre has consistent staffing, with qualified, experienced, knowledgeable and caring staff who know what they are doing—they do not have to be micromanaged, they know what they are doing, they are on the ball—then we are halfway there.

I used to run a centre in the South Perth area—I will not name the centre—and we had people bring their children from Mt Lawley and Waikiki. It was nowhere near their homes, but they knew the service we were offering. Another not-for-profit centre that I know has people travelling from Clarkson to Mirrabooka to go to that centre. People will travel to a centre. Our not-for-profits are struggling. A lot of them were not eligible for JobKeeper and a lot of them have closed.

I visited a centre the other day in Bassendean called Wind in the Willows Child Care Centre. It is a beautiful centre; absolutely fantastic. If members ever get the opportunity to visit, I highly recommend it. I also did practice there a long, long time ago, so I am a wee bit biased. They over-ratio, which means that the centre does not just meet minimum standards; it goes above and beyond. That is what we want for our children. The centre pays well above, and I am talking \$6 to \$7 an hour, what the award is, and it does not think it is enough, but it is what it can do in this current climate.

What I am saying today is that we need to recognise this sector's workforce so we can continue to ensure high-quality safety education for our children. I would encourage anybody who is not part of the Big Steps campaign to get on board. We need to ensure that we tell the federal government as well. Our children are the most important people we have. They are our future and we need to look after them and we need to look after the people who are looking after them.

**HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan)** [1.26 pm]: I rise to make a few comments on the motion moved by Hon Lorna Harper. I indicate that we are supportive of the motion. I will certainly talk about the preschool period. I know that we do not want to refer to it as “child care” and I like to refer to it as early learning as well, but I will also reflect a little bit on those first couple of years of schooling, and I am sure Hon Lorna Harper will be agreeable to me doing that. I appreciate that this motion has been moved during Children's Week, so it is a very good opportunity to acknowledge the very significant role that the early childhood sector plays in the education and care of our children. As I have often said in speeches in this place, and Hon Lorna Harper reflected on that, the early years of a child's life are marked by rapid transformations in their physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. It is a highly sensitive period. During this very critical period, particularly in those first five years, and Hon Lorna Harper reflected on this, that the brain grows at its most rapid rate. It is where the foundations for future learning, behaviour and overall health are established.

In other words, the experiences that a child has, particularly during those first five years, helps shape their capacity to learn, to gain those vital social skills that they need and to learn how to respond to the daily issues and stresses that will inevitably come their way. Given that information and knowledge, it is important to recognise that in addition to a child's "first teachers", their parents, primary carers and other immediate family members, the positive role that early childhood educators make, and others working in this sector, and what they do in helping to support children in those formative years, should be acknowledged and respected.

I want to reflect on some comments made by Maggie Dent, often known as the "queen of common sense", with regard to a post that she put up on 12 May 2018. In that post, she talked about the importance of early years education. What she said reflects somewhat on what Hon Lorna Harper has reflected on. She says —

There is a pervasive, incorrect perception that those who work with young children, especially under five, are a form of "babysitter".

This perception seems to rest on the notion that taking care of young children is not as challenging, important or worthwhile as taking care of primary or secondary aged children.

Underneath this is the idea that not much is happening with little kids. How wrong these perceptions are!

Maggie then goes on to talk in and around the importance of brain development, which I and Hon Lorna Harper have already reflected upon, and the fact that in those first years of life the rapid growth and development that happens on all levels for every child is incredibly important; and that, in fact, 90 per cent of brain growth occurs in those first five years. She talks then about the importance of meaningful interactions that matter in a child's life. She says —

One thing that may just look like child's play to those who do not understand brain development is the need for babies and toddlers to be engaged often in a "serve and return" interaction with grown-ups.

Modelling is an extremely powerful way for children to learn and they do this through their facial expressions, babbling and copying the words grown-ups use, and through copying gestures and body movements.

For this to occur in a healthy way they need to interact with grown-ups as often as possible in a meaningful way.

She goes on to say —

Exceptional early years educators are trained to do this. This is an important part of intentional teaching in the early childhood sector—often seen as just 'playing with children'. The purpose is incredibly important, and the benefits are life-long.

She then talks about the crucial role of "big people", and says —

Much has been written about the importance of attachment in the early years of life.

Primary attachments are the 'big people' of central importance to a child's life—typically parents and key caregivers.

It is helpful for parents of babies and toddlers to have a circle of caring adults who can share the raising of children.

This allows for support, guidance and respite, which helps every parent, especially tired mummies, —

Some of us have been there!

— cope with this intensive time of life.

For children who are in long-day child care, the early years' educators who form a loving, caring connection with children are technically a source of primary attachment, often called secondary attachment figures.

This is important —

Safe, predictable and caring relationships are important for everyone however especially important for young children. The safer a child feels wherever they are being cared for, the more energy the child will have to become adventuresome, braver and happier.

She goes on to say —

The National Quality Framework (NQF) that guides the early childhood education sector has a strong emphasis on ensuring every child feels they belong and that they are cared for in their early childhood settings.

This is a high priority. This is not left to chance. In some early childhood settings there can be up to 15 different cultures and exceptional early years educators need to ensure all children and families feel valued, accepted and respected. The NQF is a framework that embraces the whole child—not just the brain on a seat—and this holistic approach is something experienced, exceptional early years educators are incredibly passionate about.

They know how to assess and identify gaps or vulnerabilities in every child and what to do to help. For this they deserve more understanding of the important work they do and, frankly, more respect.

I agree with those comments. We know that a high quality early learning setting does have a positive influence on children's overall development and, in many ways, on school readiness as well. They are much more than a drop-off location for working parents, and it is important that we recognise that. Equally, and perhaps I will take a slightly broader view because we are talking about early childhood, I think that in recognising the early childhood sector with a motion such as this, I also want to recognise that schools have a critical role in the early years. I particularly recognise those staff and teachers working in kindergartens and pre-primary, and those first few years of primary school. Community kindergartens are also another example. I have spoken a few times on community kindergartens in this place. They provide an alternative for parents and caregivers who wish to send their children to a place that is not on a school site and often has a very strong emphasis on the importance of play-based learning. I would really like to see the Minister for Education taking a lead in promoting the value of play-based learning. It is something that early childhood educators are increasingly and consistently calling for. It would serve the minister well to take on board the views and perspectives of those early childhood educators who work with children every day and recognise the value and importance of learning through play. I will leave that there for the minister, who I appreciate is out on urgent parliamentary business.

If we are to recognise, value and respect early childhood educators, we also need to respect that they have views and perspectives about the early years for children and the impact and value of such things as learning through play, in addition to other education practices. I have to say that I always very much enjoy my many conversations with early childhood educators, irrespective of whether they are in an early learning centre, kindergarten or in those first couple of years of school, because their passion and commitment to ensuring that children are set on a positive path for future learning is front of mind for them. They have a very strong commitment to the wellbeing and healthy development of the very young children who are in their care. I would also say that it is important for all governments, state and federal, to recognise that greater investment in the early years has long-term benefits. All governments have a role to play in that sense. The more that we fund, support and engage in those early years of life, inevitably, will have a positive long-term impact. It will inevitably support and help those children as they move into those primary years of schooling, into secondary schooling and then ultimately beyond the school gate. I argue that very strongly, and that was reflected in Maggie Dent's comments that I referred to. Early childhood educators, irrespective of which space they are in, are also often very attuned to identifying potential developmental delays and other vulnerabilities of the children who are in their care. More often than not, they are able to recognise where, if required, some additional support is needed and they recognise that early access to allied health supports and other professional services is important.

I talk a lot in terms of early intervention and early access to these supports, but the biggest responders I get to that are from teachers and educators in that early childhood space because they get it—they absolutely get it! I argue that investment across all governments, state and federal, is something that I would support and I am sure that others in this house would support as well.

I know that other members want to speak, so I will speak briefly in the time available. I heard what Hon Lorna Harper reflected upon in terms of staff and the challenges there. It is also in part reflective of the fact that we are now seeing some significant shortages in staff, particularly at early learning centres in our state. In my role as the shadow Minister for Community Services, I am consistently told of the challenges arising from these shortages. There are centres reducing places on offer to families because they are not able to meet the child-educator ratio, and consequently that is having an impact on families accessing these services. Just while I am on my feet, this is not specific to the early years per se and it is not a matter of just these centres, but access to staff for before and after-school care is an issue as well. Central to that is the need to attract, train, upskill and, importantly—I take the points made by Hon Lorna Harper—retain these high-quality staff. I recognise that the government has made some announcements about that. Hon Lorna Harper reflected on announcements made fairly recently by the Minister for Education and Training about TAFE courses. There were also announcements in the recent state budget about providing some funding to deal with regional shortages and places. That is something I am continuing to monitor. I think we need to adapt and be flexible, but in so doing recognising we need to address those shortages. We can be flexible and adaptive, but in all of that we need to absolutely ensure that safety and quality is maintained, because we are entrusting these centres with our children. It is absolutely paramount that safety and care of children is not diminished in any way. I know others wish to speak. Given that the tenor of the motion was to reflect on and acknowledge early childhood educators, we are happy to support it. It is a good motion, particularly in the context of Children's Week.

*Visitors — Emmanuel Christian Community School*

**The PRESIDENT:** Before I give the call, I would like to welcome to the Legislative Council Emmanuel Christian Community School. Welcome to the Legislative Council. I hope you enjoy the debate and our members here show you what good parliamentary practice is.

*Debate Resumed*

**HON SANDRA CARR (Agricultural)** [1.43 pm]: I rise to support this incredibly important motion moved by Hon Lorna Harper. The motion is important for a range of reasons, not least of all that early childhood education certainly saved me on a number of occasions. I remember placing my son in early childhood education and it being quite a sanity saver for me at the time! He was a very lively child, and, as they say, it takes a community to

raise a child, and it certainly did in the case of my son! I would also like to acknowledge the comments made by Hon Donna Faragher. I certainly agree that early childhood educators are particularly important. I can attest to that, having been a high school teacher and having done some relief work during my career at a variety of schools, one of them being the context of pre-primary. I have never had so much respect for the work that educators do after having to deal with pre-primary students. They are incredibly challenging, and it requires incredible skill and expertise to deliver education to that group of students. They are really challenging. Give me high school students any day! I love the young people, but they are so incredibly challenging, and I have so much respect for the work people do in that context.

Investment in our early childhood education and care sector is everybody's business. It is such an important service that we provide to our community. The provision of high-quality childhood education delivers most innumerable results for our community, and it is incredibly important that we deliver best practice education to those young people and that it is appropriately remunerated. As we have heard, the research tells us that quality early childhood education and care leads to better health and education outcomes down the track for young people, and it also leads to better employment outcomes. Those things are difficult to imagine when talking about tiny, little children, but the long-term benefits and lifelong rewards that early childhood education brings for our community is incredibly significant. It has been clearly established that the first five years of life, as we have heard a couple of times now, are critical building blocks for the lifelong learning, wellbeing and health of our young people. There has been research around for a long time now. A Nobel Prize winner in economics, James Heckman, has clearly demonstrated that over a number of years now. I think he won the Nobel Prize about 10 years ago. He indicated that high-quality early childhood learning experiences are crucial to a child's development, in particular those experiencing disadvantage in some way, as they are more vulnerable to developing language and cognition problems as they enter school. Those first five years are critical. They are critical in terms of social and emotional wellbeing, academic success and lifelong learning opportunities. These are all things we want for healthy, thriving communities and healthy thriving economic outcomes for our communities.

I also concur with comments made about the importance of play-based learning and developmentally appropriate learning. That research is irrefutable. It helps children have a strong sense of identity, it helps them to be connected and contribute to their world, it helps them develop a strong sense of their wellbeing, it develops confidence, it involves learners and it helps them to become effective communicators. We must not underestimate the importance of play. I saw that in the Geraldton Grammar School, where some of the very early education, even in years 1 and 2, was highly focused on this element of play, and the outcomes it delivers are excellent for those young people.

The early childhood sector is critical in supporting WA's economic recovery, particularly post-COVID, following the pandemic and beyond. These are the young people of our future, and they will deliver to our economic success in the future. That is why the McGowan government has made a \$5.1 million commitment to improving access to childcare in the regions. An amount of \$4.1 million is going to support the viability of regional childcare, working with regional providers, giving advice, support and resources, and supporting the cluster model of governance. I will talk a little bit more to that in a moment. It also will provide a \$1 million capped grant program being developed in consultation with regional local governments to support them in attracting and retaining childcare workers. This is such an important commitment, because it is about the delivery of—as we have already heard on a couple of occasions—early education that is crucial for our young people.

Earlier this year when I moved a motion noting the importance of the valuable contribution of the regional economic development grants, my colleague Hon Peter Foster spoke of a RED grant to develop a childcare centre in Denham. I said that it required more space to match the capacity of local staff and to operate a family day care model that is overseen by Ngala. That centre has allowed for people to engage in the workplace, and it provides other economic benefits, but even more importantly, it sets up the community for the future by providing those invaluable early childhood education experiences for the younger people in the community who can then go on to be healthy capable lifelong learners who are socially and economically intelligent. More recently, I had the opportunity, again with Hon Peter Foster, to visit Kalbarri Childcare, which he had presented with a Lotterywest cheque to the tune of about \$12 500. This money was to go towards a nature-based outdoor play area to provide opportunities for the young people at the centre to engage in learning through play and contact with the environment. It was really heartening to hear those at the centre communicate to us the rewards that that play area would provide for the students. They also told us about some of the issues they are facing in securing workers for the childcare centre, particularly as it is a regionally based centre. Kalbarri was hit by cyclone Seroja, as we know, and the town has a significant undersupply in the workforce. The childcare centre has experienced that. People who are caring for children at home would like to fill those roles but cannot do so because of the need for more staff in the childcare sector in Kalbarri.

Many of these models of child care in the regions are heavily dependent on the capacity of individual operators and volunteers and the ability of shires to recruit staff with relevant qualifications. We cannot underestimate the importance of ensuring affordable, accessible and flexible training options for childcare workers living and working in regional communities. It is an essential component of ensuring the continuity of childcare service delivery in regional communities, and it is something that I will be taking a keen interest in as a member for the Agricultural Region.

Having said that, I would like to acknowledge a couple of developments in regional childcare services. In particular, I would like to mention Regional Early Education and Development Inc. A little while ago, the wheatbelt early

childhood education and care sustainability project was funded by the WA government and Lotterywest to find a way to ensure that early childhood education and care services could continue to be provided throughout the wheatbelt region for the benefit of families, communities and the wheatbelt economy and that those services would be sustainable and deliver high-quality education programs for children in those critical early years. Consequently, it developed a cluster model of governance to manage and deliver high-quality early learning experiences in child care, to identify opportunities to strengthen the quality of early learning centres in the regions and to promote the equitable delivery of services. REED was established in March 2018 as a single governance and management model, with the goal of achieving sustainability throughout the region. It now has around 20 approved services in the wheatbelt, including a mix of long day care, home day care, occasional day care and after-school care in places such as Brookton, Bruce Rock, Corrigin, Cunderdin, Dalwallinu, Darkan, Dowerin, Hyden, Merredin, Mukinbudin, Narembeen, Narrogin, Pingelly, Quairading, Wickiepin, Wundowie and Yilgarn, or Southern Cross. It is also potentially looking at developing and managing services in Northampton, Three Springs and Perenjori.

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend REED for its commitment to ongoing professional development, an area that Hon Lorna Harper mentioned was problematic in the for-profit sector. In January this year, REED held an educators conference with the theme of “Ready Set Grow—Safety Wise Children”. Its focus on professional development and developing teamwork in what would otherwise be a whole range of isolated communities is a significant contributor to the success, and the ongoing success, of the early childhood education sector in the wheatbelt, and I would like to commend it for that. It is looking forward to planning its next conference in 2022.

I would also like to mention the Ngala Family Day Care Service, which provides home or venue-based child care in regional areas of WA, including the midwest, Gascoyne and Pilbara. It currently has 15 educators in Geraldton, as well as home or venue-based educators in Morawa and Denham and throughout the Pilbara. All the Ngala educators in these locations are currently operating to capacity. There is a huge and growing demand for, and recognition of the value of, these early childhood education experiences. We have to have available supports that are compatible with the needs of the community.

The McGowan government’s Lower Fees, Local Skills initiative reduced TAFE fees for early childhood education and care courses by 50 per cent from 2020, and there has been a recent announcement that the reduced fees will continue until 2025. This will go a long way to servicing that need and ensuring that we have the number and range of skilled people to fill the places in those centres. Since its rollout on 1 January 2020, there have been 2 380 enrolments in the certificate III in early childhood education and care and 1 280 enrolments in the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care.

As was also mentioned by Hon Lorna Harper, it is crucial that our childcare workers are appropriately remunerated for the invaluable work they offer. We cannot continue to undervalue the level of expertise of these people who provide care to our children and the incredible importance of what they deliver to our young people in those crucial first five years of brain development. We have to stop undervaluing that contribution. We have to provide appropriate remuneration to attract quality people so that they want to stay in those jobs because they are being appropriately remunerated for the incredible skill and expertise that they offer. They are educators.

The passion and the heart that we saw in the delivery by Hon Lorna Harper is representative of the passion and the heart of the people who work in our early education sector. We have to value their work and the passion and the heart that they show in delivering for our young people. It is a dereliction of our duty if we do not.

**HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan)** [1.56 pm]: I stand to support the motion. I thank Hon Lorna Harper for bringing the motion to the chamber. It is a vital motion for all involved in the early childhood sector—the workers, the parents, the children and the community as a whole. I would like to speak more specifically about the early childhood component of the education sector and use some initiatives that were introduced during my time as Minister for Education to identify ways in which we can assist both parents and children in their progress through both their early childhood years and their later education.

For generations—for most of the previous 100 years—up until the early 2000s, our education system was fundamentally led by the nose by universities. Everything was geared towards university entrance, yet fewer than two-thirds of our students aspire to go to university. There is a problem with that on two fronts. Firstly, we have to be careful that we do not ignore that significant cohort of students who do not want to go to university and that we do not in any way make them feel diminished as a result of that. Secondly, early intervention is absolutely vital, and we should not focus too much on the child’s exit from education and not enough on the entrance. This is where I particularly pick up on this motion: at last, the education sector and the government of both sides of politics are focusing much more on early intervention. There is still a long way to go, but at last we are starting to recognise the fact that if we sow the seeds correctly in the early years of a child’s life, it will make it much easier at the exit level. It is too hard. It is like putting a bandaid on the broken arm of a child who has a lot of social and academic issues when they are 17, 18 or 19 years of age and are transitioning to work, when, if we had put a lot more resourcing and strength into, and placed a lot more emphasis on, the early years of that child’s development, they would not have a lot of those problems. As I said, at last we are in a situation in which our education sector and government decision-making is focused much more inherently upon the early childhood years.



When I came to this place, I had had 23 years in the classroom teaching, largely, senior secondary level, so my experience at the early childhood level was quite minimal. Having said that, I was always mindful of the significant role of the early childhood sector. That became quite apparent very early in my tenure, just after we took government, even though I was not Minister for Education for the first three years of that term; I was Minister for Training and Workforce Development. I was insistent that we did as much as we possibly could for the early childhood sector. One of the things that I came across at a very early stage was from the kindergarten sector; that is, although play-based learning was an essential composition of everything that happened at kindergartens, people wanted something a little more prescriptive for learning at kindergarten. Therefore, in 2014, for the first time in Western Australia, we introduced a curriculum for kindergartens. It was not overtly prescriptive, but it provided direction for kindergarten teachers. It was not the gospel according to Pete; the government did not introduce it because I decided I wanted it. I did it because the sector told me it wanted that and people in the sector embraced it enthusiastically. The guidelines were quite general, but they provided some direction for kindergarten teachers and that was something that they had been calling out for for a number of years. I will read to the chamber the guidelines, which state —

The guidelines focus on promoting five areas of learning and development:

- Identity—children have a strong sense of identity
- Connecting and contributing—children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Wellbeing—children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Learning and thinking—children are confident and involved learners
- Communicating—children are effective communicators.

They are the guidelines and the curriculum syllabus was constructed around those guidelines to provide an open avenue for every single child, mindful that we live in an extremely complex society. In this contemporary world, in a lot of instances, children come to their first ports of learning—childcare centres, kindergarten, pre-primary and then primary school—with a multitude of complex issues. It is vital that our educators and our childcare workers are as empowered as they possibly can be. Knowledge is power and that is why the curriculum went a long way to assisting them in that direction.

In addition, one of the first things I did was negotiate with the federal government for an additional four hours for universal access. Hon Sue Ellery alluded to this in the estimates hearings last week. It is a vexed issue with the federal government—it does not matter what colour it is—because successive Western Australian governments have had an issue securing funding for universal access to kindergarten. I was lucky in 2012, just after I became Minister for Education and was chairing the national education ministerial committee, because at that stage Peter Garrett was the federal Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth. He was very good; I got on very well with him and he was very accommodating. We were able to secure an additional four hours of kindergarten, so our kindergarten hours in Western Australia went from 11 hours to 15 hours. We have been able to secure that funding since that time, and it was very well received. By 2015, 99.4 per cent of Western Australian children were accessing the 15 hours of kindergarten. Developing those early seeds of learning was absolutely vital. As I said, it was a great precedent set way back in 2012, and we have been able to retain it, although as Hon Sue Ellery mentioned the other day, she is still having the same old barneys that I had after that time with successive ministers.

In addition, in 2014 we introduced compulsory pre-primary. Again, it came from the sector. Although most young children went to pre-primary—that is, children who turned five years old pre-30 June—a number of children were still not accessing pre-primary. As an educator, I had my own views, but the unambiguous, unanimous view was that it needed to be compulsory, that early intervention for those students at pre-primary was vital. It had no pushback at all. We introduced it and it has been retained by the current government, which is really good.

We are now providing as much as we possibly can from an education perspective, but, at the same time, we are mindful that child care, as we all know, goes well beyond the educative role. The pastoral and caring role is absolutely vital. As I said, when we are dealing with a society with a multitude of complex issues, it is absolutely imperative there are well-resourced and well-qualified workers in the area and that we support them as much as we can.

Towards the end of that first term, just after I had become education minister, our government developed and opened the first child and parent centres. Those centres are magnificent. The whole point of child and parent centres was to provide additional support mechanisms for not just the children, but also their parents and families. For members who are not familiar with the child and parent centres, there is a centre in one primary school, or a district high school in a lot of regions, that services up to 10 other primary schools. They provide early intervention, literacy and numeracy skills, speech therapy, psychological support, parenting workshops and dental and medical support where possible. They are largely centred in lower socio-economic areas to support families in those areas with their children. They are fantastic. I spent an enormous amount of time as minister going across the length and breadth of the state to those child and parent centres. I opened the very first one in South Hedland, and it was wonderful.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** I was there.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** In South Hedland? I cannot remember the primary school; it is in one of the primary schools.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** It is a great facility.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Sorry; you were with me; you went to it, that is right.

Several members interjected.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** If members ever want to feel good, go to one of those child and parent centres; the kids are fantastic and the parents are very appreciative.

I wanted more child and parent centres. When you are a minister, as Hon Stephen Dawson will know, you want everything every day, but every single time, virtually without exception, Treasury says no. However, we struck gold in 2015, but it was by default because, again, as we found out, the federal government had centres called child and family centres. The federal government funded them for two years. It was a bit of a thought bubble because it copied our child and parent centres. It said that it would open up child and family centres in Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing, Kununurra, Roebourne and Swan in the metropolitan area—four in the regions and the metropolitan one in Swan—but the federal government stopped funding them after two years. It was my mob, so I was not very happy; I was filthy. It stopped funding them, so I said to the director general of Education, “Have you got a bit of spare change in the bottom drawer?” Fortunately, she did at that stage. We did quite well out of Treasury that year, so we were able to add those five child and family centres to the child and parent centres, so now we have 21 child and parent centres throughout Western Australia servicing literally tens of thousands of children and families each year. Those centres are wonderful; they are really good at providing vital support for families and early intervention.

One thing that was true to my heart was Aboriginal children. I have said over and over again, I am a proud Kalgoorlie boy and I grew up with the Wongi people. I love Aboriginal people. I think it is appalling that, in the twenty-first century, so many Aboriginal children are leaving school without remotely near adequate literacy and numeracy skills. I was very conscious of the fact that unless we did something with early intervention, that situation would continue. We did something with funding, which I will get onto in a moment if I have some time, but the one thing I really wanted to do was to get right down to the grassroots with early intervention. Again, I spoke to the director general and we did some heavy lifting with Treasury. As a direct result, we were able to open 38 Aboriginal kindergartens under the KindiLink program. They are magnificent. For three days a week, Aboriginal families—mum, dad or their elders—can come with their children to these kindergartens and get support with early intervention literacy and numeracy, speech therapy and parent support, amongst a host of other support mechanisms for Aboriginal people. Again, early intervention is absolutely vital for a child’s development. The KindiLink program has been retained by the government throughout Western Australia, and I thank it for that. I would have been very disappointed if it had got rid of KindiLink. Ideally, we could probably do with some more.

I will give members some idea of where they are, because they are throughout the length and breadth of the state. I will not go through the whole 38, Acting President, but examples are the KindiLink programs at Broome Primary School, Cable Beach Primary School, Halls Creek District High School, Roebourne District High School, Beachlands Primary School, Boulder Primary School, East Kalgoorlie Primary School, Bentley Primary School, Brookman Primary School, Hilton Primary School, Tranby Primary School, Avonvale Primary School, Katanning Primary School, Amaroo Primary School and Spencer Park Primary School. That gives some idea of the KindiLink program, which is spread throughout the length and breadth of the state. I would like to think that we could do a little better and spread the love even further by having more KindiLinks throughout the state so that Aboriginal people do not miss out on those early seeds of support for both children and parents that will, at the exit level, make life for those Aboriginal children a whole lot sweeter.

I will finish on the issue of funding for early intervention. Again, it came down to a complete change and restructure. When I became minister, it became evident that the funding for education was flawed, in that there was no real method to the madness. Two, three or four schools would often get the same sort of money, yet they would have completely divergent cohorts of students and student numbers. A lot of it was done through sweetheart deals et cetera. We did an enormous amount of research into the areas of need, location, demand, Aboriginal people, migrants et cetera, and we came up with the student-centred funding model, which was introduced into our schools in 2015. Again, it has been widely embraced. The number of students in kindergarten to year 3, years 4 to 6, years 7 to 10, and years 11 and 12 is determined. A weighting is given for each of those areas, and on top of that, the money will follow the child. There is also additional money for Aboriginal students, students for whom English is a second language, students who live in the regions, students with a disability, and socio-economic level. It was eminently sensible, because each child is special. Each child is unique. We had to get to a situation that recognised that we have individual, unique children in our education system and we need to fund them accordingly. After the first 12 months of that system in 2015, we got some feedback. It had been very well received. I read a report on the SCFM a couple of months ago—it was done in 2018—and it was very complimentary of the system. However, I remember at the time that the areas that schools needed more money was in the early years—kindergarten through to year 3—and for students with a disability, so in March 2016 we invested another \$46 million, and a lot of that went to the early intervention years.

Of course, we have to look at where the most significant and challenging areas are. Evidently, years 11 and 12—the graduating years—are more expensive to educate students because they will have five or six separate, discrete qualified teachers. That is evident. But the early intervention years are exactly the same, as Hon Lorna Harper said. Teachers in this area are specialist, qualified individuals who, quite frankly, deserve more recognition and more money, as Hon Lorna Harper said. I agree with that. If we do not get it right at the early intervention level and sow the seeds correctly there, we will suffer at the exit level. That is why the SCFM included more funding for the early intervention years. Again, it was very well received. We have to be mindful of the fact that people never stop learning or getting educated. A child's education begins at birth. As soon as a parent provides their child to the education system, it has to do all it possibly can to support that child, particularly if that child comes from one of those more challenging areas. History shows that the likelihood of children succeeding post-compulsory education is more remote for those who are not from affluent or well-resourced backgrounds. That is why funding needed to be increased. I am in awe of the early childhood sector. I used to love going around to the schools and particularly to the younger years—the kindergartens and pre-primaries. The kids themselves are magnificent. They are completely non-judgemental; they love everyone. The teachers, education assistants and support staff are magnificent. They deserve a medal. They go well beyond the realms of normal responsibility. I tip my hat to them. I once again thank Hon Lorna Harper for bringing this motion to the chamber. It has my enthusiastic support.

**HON JACKIE JARVIS (South West)** [2.16 pm]: I am the last person standing! I have already had to draw significant lines through my notes, because a lot has already been said during the debate on this fantastic motion put forward by Hon Lorna Harper. I want to thank previous speakers. I know that a number of them have experience as qualified educators or parents, and certainly the ministerial experience of opposition members is also valued. My experience of early childhood education is as a parent. I can assure members that as a mother of three, I understand firsthand the importance of access to high-quality early childhood education. When my eldest child was first born almost 24 years ago, we called it child care or day care; that is what it was known as. I am incredibly pleased that by the time my youngest daughter was born just over 17 years ago, we had made the transition to referring to it as early childhood education, in recognition that the carers in this industry are not simply babysitters, but also, indeed, educators. Access to early childhood education services was valuable and vital for a privileged middle-class parent like me. It not only offered my children high-quality education at a young age, but also allowed me to participate in the workforce. Working parents are an important economic driver, particularly in regional areas. The more people we can get into the workforce, the better, particularly in the current time of significant skills and labour shortages.

But I was also reminded today of another group of people who value early childhood education. Like many members, earlier today I attended the launch of the Parliamentary Friends of Grandparents Raising their Grandchildren group, and I was reminded that quality early childhood education is more than just a service to working parents. Minister McGurk noted that many children in the care of grandparents have experienced significant trauma and disadvantage, which led them to being in the care of their grandparents. I am not yet a grandparent, but I am told by my friends who are grandparents that the best thing about being a grandparent is that you get all the joy of grandchildren, but you also get the ability to hand them back. Of course, grandcarers do not have that ability, so access to early childhood education can provide them with respite and a range of services.

We were also reminded today that grandcarer families are often economically vulnerable. Of course they are not the only cohort of families in our community who are economically vulnerable or vulnerable in other senses of the word. Early childhood education provides a range of benefits to vulnerable families, and all families. It offers early detection and intervention to address developmental issues. It offers early literacy lessons, cognitive skills and social skills. We know that it improves the education outcomes when a child progresses on to primary school and into high school and tertiary education. We know that early childhood education makes a huge difference to vulnerable families. We also know that there is a valuable economic pay-off for society. Of course early childhood education allows more parents and carers to participate in the paid workforce. It also offers an economic pay-off in other ways. It leads to greater success at school. It reduces the cost of future remedial education services. It leads to better outcomes for all those involved. Families who engage in early childhood education have a reduced need to access community services support. Children in early childhood education have better health outcomes and better cognitive skill development. It improves the attentiveness of children, persistence, and teamwork skills, all valuable skills that can be carried into adulthood. I am not the only speaker who has talked about the amazing economic and societal pay-offs from early childhood education. They are well documented. However, there is still more work to be done so that we will better understand the role of our early childhood educators.

I have with me some media releases that I want to refer to. We know that early childhood education improves outcomes for children on a number of fronts. There is more work to be done to understand the link with the improvement that can be gained from childhood mental health. I am pleased to have in front of me a media release from Hon Stephen Dawson, Minister for Mental Health, about an announcement that was made on 13 October about a \$398 000 grant awarded to Telethon Kids Institute and University of Western Australia researcher Dr Amy Finlay-Jones. This funding grant is to allow Dr Finlay-Jones to undertake research to improve childhood mental health services within the Western Australian healthcare system over the next three years. I am particularly pleased that the key partners

contributing to the design and implementation of this research include a range of early childhood, parenting, community and government services. This will be a fantastic opportunity for us to better understand how our early childhood educators can play that important role in improving childhood mental health.

I am also incredibly pleased about the announcement of \$103 million for the expansion of childcare training. That is a joint training agreement between the state and federal governments. As part of the government's Lower Fees, Local Skills program, childcare workers will be given a massive discount to engage in future upskilling to be fully qualified. What is also great is that early childhood education qualifications are now being delivered at regional TAFEs, including Albany, Bunbury, Busselton, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Margaret River, Katanning, Harvey, Manjimup, Narrogin, Esperance, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Northam, Mandurah, Broome, Halls Creek, Karratha, Kununurra, Roebourne, Newman, Tom Price, and Wyndham. What a fantastic outcome, and what a great way to upskill in an area that desperately needs more qualified workers.

I want to quickly speak about some of the investment in early childhood programs being delivered by the Department of Education. The state government has introduced Educare, which is looking to locate childcare services on public school sites. I can tell members that when I first heard about this initiative, I thought: I wish that had been there when I was doing the double drop off with my children. At one stage, I had a newborn baby, a child in half-day kindy and another child at full-time school. I spent a lot of time doing the double drop off and the double pick up. The Educare initiative will deliver childcare services from public school sites. It recognises new state school site planning that will put aside additional land to support this requirement. That will make it easier for the Department of Education to make plans for the establishment of new primary schools that include consideration of additional early childhood facilities. That is a fantastic initiative.

I also want to quickly speak about the targeted program KindiLink. That is located at 65 public school sites. KindiLink holds six hours a week of play-and-learn sessions for Aboriginal children not yet old enough to be enrolled in kindergarten. The children attend with a parent or caregiver. We know that any form of early childhood education brings improvement. KindiLink enhances children's learning, confidence, skills and capacity. It involves parents as children's first educators. I want to applaud the Department of Education for the suite of programs, services and initiatives that is being delivered across the range of government portfolios in recognition of early childhood education.

I certainly commend Hon Lorna Harper and join with her in acknowledging that the workforce in this sector is valued for ensuring high quality education, safety and care of our children. I thank Hon Lorna Harper for bringing this motion to the house today.

**HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Mental Health) [2.25 pm]:** It is my pleasure to rise this afternoon on behalf of the government to indicate our support for this wonderful motion. I want to acknowledge and congratulate Hon Lorna Harper for bringing this motion before us. As we have seen from the debate thus far, there seems to be unanimous support for the motion. We can tell from that that it is a very pertinent motion. I want to acknowledge Hon Lorna Harper's years of experience in the early childhood sector and thank her for sharing her knowledge and wisdom with us in this debate this afternoon.

I want to touch briefly, while I think of it, on the comments of Hon Jackie Jarvis about the Telethon Kids Institute. I take this opportunity to acknowledge Professor Andrew Whitehouse, who has just been inducted into the Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences. That makes him the youngest ever fellow elected to that prestigious academy. That is for his work with children and babies—babies in particular—in autism assessment and intervention. I have had the pleasure of dealing with Andrew a number of times over the years, and I take this opportunity to thank him for his work and congratulate him on his new position.

While I am acknowledging the good work of people, I also want to take the opportunity to thank the workers in the early childhood sector. As we have heard from Hon Lorna Harper, these people do an exceptional job. As a parent of a seven-year-old child who has attended day care previously, I acknowledge the great work that these workers do day in and day out. I have to say that this state has a proud history of providing childcare services and supporting early childhood education and the regulation of child care. Since the mid-1990s, we have had a strong early childhood education system in this state, with universal free kindergarten and then compulsory pre-primary since 2013. Those workers have made an enormous contribution to our state, particularly in the last 18 months during the COVID-19 pandemic. While frontline workers have been doing an incredible job in keeping our communities safe and healthy, and connected, early childhood educators have been making sure that our children are looked after and supported during this particular time. I want to place that on the record and thank those workers for the great job that they do.

If we cast our minds back to the first half of 2020, we will recall that the early childhood sector across the nation was facing a crisis, with many parents withdrawing their children from services, and with centres on the brink of closing and having to let go of staff. Thankfully, and fortunately, our state and commonwealth governments were able to support those centres to stay open. This allowed parents, particularly those who were performing essential roles during the COVID-19 pandemic, to bring their children back to childcare centres across the state. The childcare workers bravely faced this crisis and never lost sight of what matters the most—that is, the care and education of our children.

Of course child care is all the more important to the community now with the tight labour market in certain sections of the Western Australian economy. The Pilbara, where I live, has seen an influx of fly-in fly-out workers from around the country and from the metropolitan area, and it has been a challenge to ensure that appropriate childcare services are available. There is, and continues to be, a need to upskill existing workers to meet the sector's mandatory accreditation requirements for a qualified workforce. This, too, was alluded to earlier on, and I am very pleased that the McGowan government has responded to that need by recently announcing low-fee places for existing worker traineeships and key childcare qualifications—those being the diploma of early childhood education and care traineeship or a certificate III in early childhood education and care.

The diploma in early childhood education and care will be reduced by up to \$7 200 a year, which really does make this an affordable career. It is very important that we ensure that our workers in this sector get appropriate training and this reduction really helps. The motion this afternoon is not a political one, but this reduction is a significant difference to the fees that were charged by the previous government, which made it harder for people to join the sector. Maintaining a strong childcare sector is vital for not only Western Australia, but also our families. It is also vital for the state's ongoing economic recovery. Since coming to government, we have made a strong investment in the childcare sector under the very good Minister for Community Services, Hon Simone McGurk, but also the Minister for Education and Training has had a role in this space.

In 2018, in relation to the early years initiative, a 10-year partnership was struck with the state government, the Mindaroo Foundation and Telethon Kids Institute to ensure that every child in WA has the opportunity to thrive. It was a significant investment over the 10 years. I think it is about a \$50 million investment from those organisations into the sector. The central great southern shires of Katanning, Broomehill, Tambellup, Kojonup and Gnowangerup were the first communities to join the initiative, and it is now also being implemented in Armadale west.

As we heard earlier, in her contribution Hon Sandra Carr mentioned the regional childcare election commitment, which is a \$5.1 million investment going towards a range of initiatives for improving access to childcare in the regions. As we who represent the regions know, it is as equally important to ensure that regional residents can access quality childcare and education services and early childhood education services for their families as it is in the metropolitan area. There is an additional investment of \$4.8 million to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations over four years. Priority sectors include early childhood care and development but also housing, health and disability services. There is a \$1.4 million investment in the health and wellbeing of young children living in the cities of Kwinana and Cockburn. This is renewed funding with Woodside Energy for the Connecting Community for Kids collective impact initiative, to improve early childhood development outcomes.

As part of the WA recovery plan after COVID-19, there was an investment of \$5.5 billion to modernise Western Australian public schools. An amount of \$17 million of that was to be put towards state-of-the-art early childhood facilities for many public schools across the state.

I just want to remind ourselves of a recent bill that we had through the Parliament, the Children and Community Services Amendment Bill, which passed in this place earlier this month. The legislation extends mandatory reporting requirements to ministers of religion, out-of-home careworkers, registered psychologists, school counsellors, youth justice workers and early childhood workers. This, too, will ensure that the safety of children is at the heart of mandatory reporting reforms, which will better protect children by increasing the number of people who are legally required to report child abuse in the state.

As I said, the state has a proud history in the early childhood space. I acknowledge the work of Hon Peter Collier. It was my pleasure to attend the opening of the Child and Parent Centre in South Hedland a number of years ago. I think it happened early in my piece as a member of Parliament, and I certainly know that that centre, and indeed centres like it around the state, have been very beneficial to local communities. These facilities are on a school site and they bring in specialists such as doctors, nurses or other non-government organisation services. It is essentially a one-stop shop that encourages families to come in and engage with their kids in that safe space and environment. It also allows other services to come in to make sure that families do not have to go out to multiple places. They can actually get the services and the children can get the support that they need in one site and on school campuses. For many of the families whom I know who have engaged with the Child and Parent Centre in Hedland, they have not had long histories in dealing with schools or some of these services. Many are Aboriginal families whose parents have not themselves been regular attenders at school. These services show the families that the centre is a safe place and the school is a safe place and a good place to be. Schools can help with the parents' health and the health of their children and, hopefully, encourage the children to attend school regularly.

I will probably finish there. I do not need to make too long of a contribution today. I do think this is a very important debate. As I said, as a parent of a seven-year-old child who has needed to access the services before, I know how beneficial they are. I again want to acknowledge the great workers in this space because, as a number of people have said, we do not pay them very much and that is one of the great shames. We expect these workers to not only look after, but also teach and educate our kids. Therefore, on behalf of the state government, can I again acknowledge those workers and thank Hon Lorna Harper for the motion.

**HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary)** [2.36 pm]: I would also like to say a few words about this wonderful motion brought forward today by Hon Lorna Harper. It states —

That this house —

- (a) acknowledges that the early childhood sector provides vital education and care for children in the early years; and
- (b) recognises the sector's workforce in ensuring high-quality safety, education and care of children.

I support the motion for a couple of reasons. We have all noticed the passion that Hon Lorna Harper brings to this house, especially on matters involving the early childhood sector, and her strident support for the workers in that sector, and I know that is much appreciated right across the union movement and across the sector. As has been mentioned earlier, we certainly value and appreciate workers in the early childhood education sector, but, yes, perhaps it is true that we do not give them the financial reward that they deserve. As has been mentioned, it is quite a challenging occupation, and for those of us who have, from time to time, with younger children, hosted a kid's birthday party or something and had them running off in all different directions and trying to keep control of a group of excited kids, we deeply appreciate the work that they do.

I will take a moment to talk about the importance of child care in the regions. When we came to government—like Hon Stephen Dawson, I do not want to make this a political matter because it is not—I was quite surprised at the lack of interest that had been shown by previous governments in the early childhood education space in the wheatbelt, because it is such an imperative. Lots of small communities do not have the economy of scale in their child care to make them financially sustainable. Right across the wheatbelt, groups of mums, generally, would form a committee, do the voluntary management of the compliance and everything and the shire would generally get involved with a facility and off it would go. As the requirements and the compliance of these facilities has quite rightfully increased, that has made it more onerous on the volunteers and local governments that choose to be involved and provide that service in their communities. Therefore, it is becoming a more challenging space, especially in small communities where we may have only five or six kids using a facility. That will never stack up financially. However, fortunately, the McGowan government has recognised this and has made some significant investments into that space, and come up with a better model, which I will articulate a little bit more soon.

In the Agricultural Region, we have a great demand for workers and labour at the moment. Since COVID, it has been challenging with the reduction in numbers of backpackers who would often help out at busy times with seeding and harvesting in the wheatbelt or fruit picking in the horticultural industry. This skilled workforce or latent labour would be available in the wheatbelt, if only we could provide child care that was of a decent quality and reliable. We are finding that women have become more involved in agricultural practices. It is not beyond a woman to drive agricultural machinery—it never has been, but traditionally men have worked the farm. Over time wives, daughters, mothers and grandmothers have become more involved in the operations of the family farm and they have shared that load more evenly across the family to help make the business more viable. As I mentioned earlier, this is possible only if suitable, adequate, safe and cost-effective child care is available in each community, and therein lies the challenge.

I was fortunate enough to be the chair of the school board when my children attended Sacred Heart Catholic School in Goomalling. During that time, the board could see the importance of engaging children at a younger age in our school. We were the first Catholic school in Western Australia to set up a three-year-old pilot program. We had 12 places available and we did not know whether they would be taken up, but they filled straightaway and we had a waiting list. Funding from the Building the Education Revolution, a once-in-a-generation opportunity provided by the federal government at that time, was used to provide a purpose-built facility at the school to engage children as young as three years of age. We did it for a few reasons. One was to give Catholic families an opportunity to send their children to a Catholic school, but we also used it to get more parent engagement at the school. The first students to attend that program have now finished primary school, but when they began pre-primary we had quite a manifest on their skills and capabilities and what those students needed to work on. Unfortunately, not all students start school as equally prepared as each other. The three-year-old pilot program enabled us to identify any issues, whether they were behavioural or literacy or numeracy issues, and to focus and start work on them to help those students hit the ground running at the start of primary school. The program also helped to encourage great parent engagement with some mums who perhaps hung around for the first few days of their child's schooling. We found a great voluntary resource in those parents who then remained engaged with the school right the way through their child's educational experience. That program was a very positive outcome for that school, albeit in only one community. I note that Catholic Education Western Australia has now rolled out three-year-old programs more widely across its school network, as has the public school system.

We have long looked for sustainable childcare models in the wheatbelt. To her great credit, Hon Simone McGurk, Minister for Community Services—amongst other things—has, in conjunction with Helen Creed, come up with the Regional Early Education and Development model. Those who work in the sector would certainly know of the work of Helen Creed. REED has been a resounding success across the wheatbelt. It has brought together all those

small, somewhat volunteer-dependent childcare facilities into one organisation that has been better able to provide higher-structured management of those centres. It has been a resounding success. REED is based in Narrogin and has mobile locations in Wickiepin and Pingelly. Other locations are in Brookton, Bruce Rock, Corrigan, Cunderdin, Dalwallinu, Darkan, Dowerin, Hyden, Merredin, Mukinbudin, Nannup, Narembeen, Narrogin, Quairading, Wundowie and Southern Cross in the Shire of Yilgarn. A lot of those communities are, as members can probably tell, reasonably small communities. Most of those communities do not have enough demand for early childhood education services to warrant a financially sustainable model, but under REED it has become possible. Members will be most impressed at the quality of the membership of the board of REED, who are all committed to finding a long-term sustainable solution to child care, especially in the wheatbelt but also right across the state. I thank every one of them for giving up their time. Many board members are not from the wheatbelt but they understand that it is an area of great need and they want to help. To the minister, Helen Creed and the board of REED, I want to express our heartfelt thanks for the great work that they have done in that space. There is more work to be done and we will work with REED into the future. Over time, more early childhood education centres will come under the REED model. I am disappointed that some communities, for reasons best known to themselves, choose to play politics with the REED model. I hope that in the fullness of time people can look past that and accept that REED is a good idea, no matter which government brought it in, and engage with that organisation because united we stand in this space, especially across the wheatbelt.

This government has made some significant election commitments to early childhood education in the regions. We know how important it is. Our government cares about young mums and understands the various reasons they need to access these services in the wheatbelt, whether it be to help on the farm, have some time out or a day off to do the things without the kids or work in other occupations—it is all important. Everybody has their reasons for needing the service and no-one should be judged for utilising it. Child care is a very strong economic imperative in the regions. People who work in child care are so valuable to our communities. I want to thank every single early childhood education worker right across the wheatbelt and the state. I have met many and they are all wonderful, caring and beautiful people who want to turn small people into good big people. They do it very well, especially in our regional communities. I have been to the opening of many of these centres and met many of the coordinators and staff and they are something special—they really are. I want to thank them all and express our gratitude to them for playing such an important role in our communities.

Other speakers have covered many of the points that I intended to raise. I thank all the speakers but note that it is a very important issue for all government members, especially regional members. Hon Lorna Harper has really had a great start to her time in this place and good on her for bringing forward really well thought through and important motions that reflect what is going on in the world of people whom we represent. I wholeheartedly support the motion and I encourage others to do the same.

**HON SAMANTHA ROWE (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary)** [2.47 pm]: Can I just confirm how long I have? Does my time stop at five minutes to allow —

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Sally Talbot)**: I will interrupt the debate five minutes before the end to invite the mover of the motion to respond.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE**: Thank you, Acting President.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT**: I would really like to hear the parliamentary secretary's contribution.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE**: Thank you. I rise to absolutely 100 per cent support the motion moved by my colleague Hon Lorna Harper. I want to thank her because it is important that we acknowledge the early childhood sector and the role that it plays in educating and caring for the children in our community. We must also recognise the sector's workforce that ensures the delivery of high-quality and safe education and care for children. Unfortunately, I was in and out of the chamber during the debate, but I heard Hon Lorna Harper's contribution and I was really interested to hear about her vast experience in the early childhood sector. I certainly hope we can continue to support this very important work that these educators do for us across the state, because they really start children on their learning journeys, and they do that in a number of ways—through educating, support and making sure children have the opportunity to thrive, play and learn. There are so many reasons why that is important. Hon Donna Faragher also may have touched on some of these things in her contribution. We know through so much research that those early years are important for social development, emotional development and to ensure that children are able to become resilient and function, work and cooperate in a team and a group. All of these things are important to make sure our future leaders can grow up to lead fulfilling lives.

There are several different ways that early childhood educators can support our young people. Hon Donna Faragher may have raised play-based learning in her contribution. It is definitely very important to get the balance right in supporting young people through a play-based learning environment. That is very different to what we might call free play, which children must have. During recess or maybe when they get home straight after school, kids should definitely be free just to play. That is very different from play-based learning. We have to have that balance right.

It is something that early childhood educators do really well and that they have long been doing. It supports young children even through little things. They might just be playing with building blocks, but it is about stepping in and knowing when to get involved to push that child so it becomes a learning experience. That takes quite a lot of skill. In my previous role as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Training I had the opportunity to visit a number of schools across the state and look at the way they incorporated play-based learning. Some of our schools are doing an incredible job in supporting children to learn in an engaged way. I think that is really key, because not everyone learns the same way. Some children need to experience learning through a more creative environment. I will give an example—I think I still have time—of a school I visited where maths was being taught. I felt I could really relate to this, because I was never good at maths at school. I really was not engaged in maths and science as a young student. I went into this classroom and I have never seen more excited children doing maths, because it was essentially turned into a game. They were engaged in a fun environment. They wanted to participate. It was a brilliant example of how we can incorporate play-based learning so that children are engaged through the learning process.

I wanted to share some of those thoughts. They are some of the things I had the opportunity to hear during this debate. Some of our regional members have already touched on the election commitments we have made in this space, particularly in the regions. I think it is really important that the government does what it can to encourage people to take up study at TAFE in these courses, because we need to make sure we have qualified educators to go out into the regions. We need to find, attract and retain early education workers in the regions, we need to make sure they do the courses. I think it is great that we have been able to make courses more affordable by reducing TAFE fees. I am sure my colleague Hon Sandra Carr would have raised the \$5.1 million in her contribution. It is a fantastic investment to make sure we attract these workers to the regions. We are also working with local governments in those regions, because they are best placed to find, attract and retain these workers, because they know what they need.

Another area I would not mind touching on, time permitting, is the new swimming pool regulations for family day care and making these environments safer for the children and our workers. In November 2020, our government wanted to strengthen regulations for family day care operators to improve child safety at residences with swimming pools, spas or water features. Those changes were announced by Minister Simone McGurk to address recommendations handed down at the completion of the 2018 coronial inquest into the tragic death of Lachlan Mitchell, who drowned at a family day care service in 2015. Under the sector's updated regulations, swimming pools and spas will be gradually phased out from family day care services. Existing family day care services with pools, spas and water features will also be made safer by new compliance requirements, including monthly inspections of these residences and additional safety devices on site. Of course, there will be a transition period to ensure that family day care providers and educators have the time to meet the new compliance requirements, including any applicants in the process to commence or transfer. That is a really sensible move. We want to make sure that the environments our children are in are absolutely as safe as they possibly can be.

Again, I thank Hon Lorna Harper for bringing this motion to the house to once again acknowledge this very important sector that some would say probably does one of the most important jobs one could do—looking after, educating and caring for our children.

**HON LORNA HARPER (East Metropolitan)** [2.58 pm] — in reply: I would like to thank my honourable colleagues, Hon Donna Faragher, Hon Sandra Carr, Hon Jackie Jarvis, Hon Stephen Dawson, Hon Darren West and Hon Samantha Rowe. I would also like to say that if I had a dollar for every time I heard the term “child care”, I would be a millionaire and also for every time early childhood educators were screaming at their screens, “It’s early childhood education”, “It’s early childhood educators.” It is going to take more than me standing here today to stop the term “child care” being out there, and that is fine. I was a bit scunnered, which is a good Scottish word, that Hon Peter Collier agreed with me—you heard it here first, people! We have that in *Hansard*; it is there!

**Hon Peter Collier:** I what?

**Hon LORNA HARPER:** The member agreed with me. I was like, “Here we go!” He agreed that early childhood sector workers should be paid more. I thank him; they should. Everyone knows that education is the key to unlocking a child’s potential, which means that every educator has an enormous responsibility yet, I will say again, early childhood educators are some of the lowest paid professionals in this country. It is not a coincidence that over 97 per cent of them are women. Early childhood educators are exhausted and undervalued and are leaving the sector. I refer to a recent report by the United Workers Union’s Big Steps report titled *Exhausted, undervalued and leaving: The crisis in early education*, and I quote —

Early educators work every day in a system which is complicated, expensive and puts profits above the wellbeing of children, educators, and families. At the centre of this failing system is an escalating and unsustainable workforce crisis.

Educators themselves are under severe stress due to the low pay. The article states: “Understaffing is at chronic levels and recruitment is a mess”. Educators are sick of the unpaid overtime and excessive workloads. It is time the federal government listened to the Big Steps campaign run by the early childhood educators who are members of the United Workers Union and provided targeted funding that improves pay and conditions directly to the educators and bypasses the profit-making. This will benefit our families, our children and our community as a whole. Yes,



wages are not a state issue. As many members have touched on, they are a federal issue. However, if we do not do this, what will happen to our community moving forward? What will happen to people in Hon Darren West's area, where women apparently are more than capable of going out and driving tractors? I thank the member very much for that. Women in here all smiled at each other and went, "Yeah, okay."

**Hon Darren West:** I have seen it with my own eyes!

**Hon LORNA HARPER:** Oh, wow—okay. If we do not get children school-ready, what will happen to our education system?

I thank everybody who supported this motion. What members call passion is inbuilt in me; I cannot help it. When I talk this loudly and with such expression, it comes from reading stories and having children engaged in what I am saying for more than three seconds, and getting them to sit in a group. I have to say, they do better than a lot of politicians. Thank you again.

Question put and passed.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS — CONSIDERATION

### *Committee*

The Chair of Committees (Hon Martin Aldridge) in the chair.

#### *Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission — First report — Annual report 2020–21 — Motion*

Resumed from 15 September on the following motion moved by Hon Dr Steve Thomas —

That the report be noted.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** When we last considered this matter, on 15 September this year, we were interrupted pursuant to the newly amended standing orders. When we last resumed in the chamber we were then obliged to consider a different report by the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission. This intervening period has been most convenient for reasons that will become obvious. I draw to members' attention that the report before us lists a number of reports that were tabled by the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission. The report I particularly want to draw to members' attention is the second of the three reports that are listed at page 2, titled *Annual report 2019–2020*. It was the sixteenth report of the committee and was tabled in both houses on 12 November last year. When members have an opportunity to look at that report, they will see at pages 9 and 10 the following comments by the committee under the heading "Ongoing matters before the Committee as at 30 June 2020" —

This annual report is the final one for this Committee in the 40th Parliament. For the sake of posterity, the Committee outlines in this section several pertinent and ongoing issues which were currently before it as at 30 June 2020.

...

Report No. 33 of the Joint Standing Committee in the 39th Parliament was tabled on 17 November 2016. Titled *The ability of the Corruption and Crime Commission to charge and prosecute*, it contained 48 findings and two recommendations.

I should add that this particular matter has been of interest to me since then because when the report that is referred to was tabled in November 2016, I was the chair of the oversight committee. However, this report, the sixteenth report, tabled in November last year, goes on to say at page 9 —

Due to the prorogation of the 39th Parliament and the dissolution of the Legislative Assembly on 30 January 2017, the previous Attorney General did not have the opportunity to respond to the recommendations of the 39th Joint Standing Committee.

Given the importance of the recommendations made by the 39th Joint Standing Committee, this Committee resolved to bring them to attention of the current government by tabling them in the 40th Parliament. The Committee did this by tabling its Report No. 2 on 14 September 2017.

Relevant here is Recommendation 2 of this report, the intent of which was to have the Attorney General undertake a review of, and table a report on, the efficiency and effectiveness of the commencement and conduct of prosecutions arising from CCC investigations.

The Committee was advised by the Attorney General in September 2019 that the Department of Justice was assisting him in carrying out the review, which involved consulting key officeholders. However, he also advised that it was taking some time to complete. As at end June 2020, this recommendation remained outstanding.

The Committee has received evidence that the current arrangements between the CCC, State Solicitor's Office and the Department of Public Prosecutions to charge and prosecute based on CCC investigations were not working as well as they could be. Thus, the Committee considers this issue to be of continuing importance.

What then transpired after the tabling of this sixteenth report, and those comments made by the committee in November 2020 that this matter continues to be of some importance, was a question I asked in this chamber in May. On 27 May 2021, I asked the hardworking parliamentary secretary representing the Attorney General the following question —

I refer to the answer to question without notice 973, answered on 5 September 2019 in the fortieth Parliament, in which the Attorney General informed the house of his commitment to table a review into the efficiency and effectiveness of the commencement and conduct of prosecutions arising from Corruption and Crime Commission investigations by 20 September 2019.

- (1) On what date was the review report completed?
- (2) On what date was the report tabled?

The answer was —

- (1) It was completed in May 2020.
- (2) Not applicable.

In May this year, I asked the Attorney General's Office, through the parliamentary secretary, when the review report had been completed and he said that it had been completed in May 2020. A year later it had been completed for more than a year but had not been provided to Parliament. This was a point of some consternation by me in this chamber when we last met and considered this matter. I asked how long it would take for the government to provide this review, which had been long outstanding and not provided to the Parliament. Remember, I asked the question a full year later and there was a stunning revelation that the Attorney General had been sitting on it for a year. I acknowledge in true fashion the hardworking Parliamentary Secretary to the Attorney General.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Actually, who was sitting in the chamber who took the issue away last time on 15 December to raise it with the parliamentary secretary, who was away from the chamber that day on urgent parliamentary business, to get the honourable member a response? It was a team effort on this side.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** There you go, Mr Chair! This is outstanding stuff from the Deputy Leader, the hardworking Minister for Mental Health. I very much appreciate his timely interjection and for drawing it to my attention. I thank him and the hardworking parliamentary secretary for the response provided to me on 5 October by the parliamentary secretary, drawing to my attention that the long-overdue review had been tabled in this place, tabled paper 411, on 3 August 2021. I thank those two honourable members for the work they did in facilitating this matter.

The point is that it took the Attorney General more than a year to table a report. This is an important report that had been called upon, not in the fortieth Parliament but in the thirty-ninth Parliament, when the matter was raised, but it has taken until the forty-first Parliament for the Attorney General to finally bring the matter to a conclusion and table the report after he had sat on the report for more than a year. He had had it since May 2020 but tabled it in August 2021.

**Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD:** This is a fairly brief report, but there seems to be some desire by the chamber for all members to comment on it, so I suppose it is appropriate for me to put my comments on this report on the record. In looking at the first report of the current Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission, titled *Annual report 2020–21*, I make the following comments. I note that during this reporting period, there were two committees as such. The previous committee in the fortieth Parliament was chaired by Hon Margaret Quirk, MLA; deputy chaired by Hon Jim Chown, MLC; and further members, Matthew Hughes, MLA, member for Kalamunda; and Hon Alison Xamon. I am not sure whether she kept her honorific; I do not think she did. I wish to thank them for their work during the fortieth Parliament. The current committee is chaired by Matthew Hughes, MLA—he continued on the committee—and his deputy chair is Hon Dr Steve Thomas. The other members are Shane Love, MLA; and Hon Klara Andric, MLC.

I want to comment on the fact that from 2013 to 2020, the Parliamentary Inspector of the Corruption and Crime Commission was Hon Michael Murray, AM, QC, and I want to pass on my condolences to his family. Apparently, he did an extraordinary job during his tenure and I wish to add my congratulations and welcome Matthew Zilko, SC, to his new position of parliamentary inspector and hope he continues the work so honourably done by Hon Michael Murray.

I move now to page 1 of the report and the committee functions under the Legislative Assembly standing orders —

It is the function of the Joint Standing Committee to —

- (a) monitor and report to Parliament on the exercise of the functions of the Corruption and Crime Commission and the Parliamentary Inspector of the Corruption and Crime Commission;
- (b) inquire into, and report to Parliament on the means by which corruption prevention practices may be enhanced within the public sector; and
- (c) carry out any other functions conferred on the Committee under the Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003.

I note the activities of the committee during the reporting period. It held 11 deliberative meetings, one formal inquiry and nine formal evidence hearings and heard 26 witnesses. Three reports, 52 report findings, and 13 report recommendations were tabled.

The committee conducted public hearings and during the reporting period it held six public hearings and took evidence from 21 witnesses at these six hearings. Four hearings related to the previous committee's formal inquiry into the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission oversight of police misconduct investigations, particularly allegations of excessive use of force and two hearings relating to the annual reports of agencies undertaken as part of the committee's oversight role, a hearing with the Corruption and Crime Commission on 7 October 2020 and the Public Sector Commission on 9 November 2020.

During the reporting period the committee tabled three reports, the first entitled *If not the CCC ... then where? An examination of the Corruption and Crime Commission's oversight of excessive use of force allegations against members of the WA Police Force*. That was the fifteenth report tabled in both houses on 24 September 2020. The second report the committee tabled was the sixteenth report, the *Annual report 2019–20*, tabled in both houses on 12 November 2020. The third report was the seventeenth report, entitled *Meaningful reforms overdue: The Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003*, tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 19 November 2020 and the Legislative Council on 26 November 2020.

There may be more to this report that people wish to examine. I think it is a very good, very brief report. It probably does not need too much more examination but I am sure many members will stand up and examine it in more detail, and I encourage them to do so. As far as I am concerned, that is the report.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** I am a little bemused at the excitement in the chamber today on the first report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission. I am pleased to see that everybody is very heavily involved in the work of this committee because it is a very important committee. I am not sure that I truly understand the excitement but let us proceed anyway.

I want to point out a couple of key issues around the first report, the *Annual report 2020–21* of the Corruption and Crime Commission. Obviously, there are a number of key issues. As the previous speaker said, it is a very brief report. A number of things occurred around the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission that happened in that year that are not prescriptively reported in the report. Members will be aware that there were a couple of very controversial issues, one was the reappointment of the Commissioner of the CCC, which was done through legislation, the Corruption and Crime and Misconduct Amendment Bill 2021, which I noted was introduced into the Legislative Assembly on 16 June 2021, in the reporting period. It was third read on 16 June 2021, in a single day, and introduced the next day on 17 June into the Legislative Council. We did wait the normal week before the bill was debated. The Committee of the Whole process was completed on 24 June 2021, the bill was third read on 25 June, and royal assent was given on 25 June 2021. It was an incredibly efficient system to get this piece of legislation through.

The other thing that obviously occurred during this period was the heavy interaction between the Corruption and Crime Commission and the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges, particularly on the question of access to things that might be considered privileged. This also occurred during the period of this report. As the tabling statement said, the report summarises activities from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021. Much of the controversial activity around access to this material occurred during that period. The committee held a hearing with the Corruption and Crime Commissioner. It is not in the annual report, but the transcript is available on the website. It is a public document. I will not comment significantly on the public document, but I do intend to read in some of the transcript, particularly in relation to the access of the CCC to what might be privileged material. This is now a public document; members can access it on the website of the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission. It was a hearing with the commissioner and a number of the commissioner's staff. As a member of that committee, I asked —

Was there a process effectively of working out a MOU between the previous Legislative Council President and staff and the Procedure and Privileges Committee and the CCC?

The commissioner handed over to a staff member, who said —

There were some discussions—not substantive discussions. Historically, there was a recommendation made by the previous joint standing committee that there be an MOU.

It is interesting that the annual report of the CCC was tabled today, and that on page 44 of that report it states —

#### **Memorandum of Understanding with Parliament**

In November 2016, the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges recommended, amongst other things, that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) be developed between the Houses of the Parliament of Western Australia and the Corruption and Crime Commission to deal with documents that might be subject to a claim for Parliamentary privilege. The Commission was to be provided with a draft ...

That is relevant to further evidence given to the committee. During the hearing with the commissioner, I asked —

Do you know how long ago that was?

The staff member was not sure, and said —

I would need to go back and double-check the dates now. It was a number of years ago.

As the annual report says, it was 2016. This evidence is important. The staff member also said —

We did end up writing our own because it was important enough from the commission's perspective that we try to have one in place, but, unfortunately, we could not reach agreement over the draft that we presented for consideration.

I asked —

Was there a negotiation from the Parliament to amend that draft? Did that draft, for example, contain a component where the Parliament would review and decide on privilege or whether the commission would, or an alternative third party would?

I will go to the direct part of the quote of the staff member, where they said —

That draft did —

That was the previous draft —

and the draft that we are discussing in the working party at the moment provides a very easy process, we think—a very practical process—involving Parliament in the determination of privilege.

I then asked —

Did the draft that was put forward previously contain a process where the Parliament itself reviewed documents and determined privilege before the documents were handed on, or the laptop was handed on, to the CCC? If it did, was the commission prepared to negotiate that the Parliament itself at that point should determine privilege?

The staff member replied —

The short answer is yes.

I then asked —

So yes to both—yes and yes?

To which the staff member replied —

Yes to both. The commission has always taken the position that it is Parliament's privilege. The commission does not want anything subject to parliamentary privilege, so is more than happy to work with Parliament on that.

I found that a fairly astounding reflection, given the things that this house went through in the interim, so I will jump to slightly further along in this transcript. I asked —

From what I understand from your answer then, there was a willingness from the CCC's perspective to have the Parliament determine privilege effectively.

It was in fact the CCC commissioner who answered. He said —

I can answer that. There has always been; we have always—I was a constitutional lawyer in the state for years and always acknowledged Parliament's principal role in privilege. What went wrong, as the judge found, was that somebody else purported to determine privilege.

The transcript continues —

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** Exactly.

**Mr McKECHNIE:** That was a mistake. I think everybody acknowledges that was a mistake.

That is an astounding piece of evidence. I am amazed at that evidence. I absolutely appreciate the honesty of the Corruption and Crime Commissioner in that piece of evidence; he quite plainly said that the CCC was quite comfortable with Parliament determining privilege. It is in the transcript; I am using his words. I recommend that members read it. What happened was that somebody else placed themselves in the position in which they thought they should determine privilege. It was not the position of the CCC that privilege should be determined by anybody other than Parliament. I suggest that honourable members have a look at that transcript, because I think it is absolutely astounding. During the period covered by the report that we are discussing, 2020–21, there was an enormous battle over who would determine privilege in the case of Parliament and the documents that might stem from the Parliament. It was the position of the then President and the privileges committee —

**The CHAIR:** Order! Leader of the Opposition, I have been listening carefully to your contribution to the debate on the first report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission, and I will make two observations. The first is that this is a very brief report of the Joint Standing Committee on the CCC and, from my review of that document, I am struggling to identify the relevance between the matter you are canvassing and the content of the report. I will accept some peripheral argument around what perhaps ought to have been included in the report, but it is not something that is substantively included in the report. I also draw to your attention orders of the day 19 through to 21, which I think are more specifically relevant to the matters that you are now canvassing. I ask you to draw your remarks back to the first report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** Thank you, chair; I appreciate your guidance. Obviously, it was my opinion that significant things happened during the period covered by the annual report of the Joint Standing Committee on the CCC that should have been included in the report. However, that being the case, in my view these things needed to be aired because I have no idea when the government will bring on those other orders of the day. I will not canvass those ideas anymore. I think it was simply highly important that members became aware that those procedures had occurred. Having that on the record will be important for future debates. I look forward to the time that we discuss those orders of the day. I am sure that the Deputy Leader of the House will be keen to bring those on as quickly as possible. I appreciate being given the time of the house today to get those things on the record.

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** I would like to make a few remarks about this. I do not think there is anything particularly noteworthy about members wishing to contribute to questions about the noting of reports. I was particularly interested in the section of the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges report on the standing orders that came out recently, and I will make reference to that in a moment in a different context, but the thing that I really appreciated was the acknowledgement in that report of the significance of this one hour a week that we consider the reports that are laying on the table of this chamber. I also note that Hon Nick Goiran commenced his remarks with the observation that this is, I think, only the third time we have considered committee reports under the new standing orders, and that this is the first time this report has been considered since we adopted the procedure and privileges committee report. Would I be right in saying that? Hon Nick Goiran is looking at me in a slightly quizzical fashion.

**Hon Nick Goiran:** I think we discussed this report last time on 15 September. That might have been the first time we had the opportunity to consider it here.

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** That is interesting. I acknowledge and respect Hon Nick Goiran's forensic understanding of the standing orders. There might be a lot of things we disagree about, but I respect his understanding of these things. The fact that he is also slightly unsure about that leads me to make this remark, which I hope the chair will consider is appropriately made in this circumstance. I know that many members were struggling slightly to work out what the remaining time was for the three reports that are listed here. This is where I want to make reference to the report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges. Chair, I know that you take a deeply professional interest in the way in which this chamber is run, and that one of your particular areas of interest is making sure that the processes are not unnecessarily opaque, recognising that we do have some need for formality and ceremony in this place. I notice that we did make changes to the standing orders for the consideration of committee reports. Those changes are found in paragraphs 4.10 to 4.16 of the sixty-fourth report of the PPC. I notice that we now have double the time for consideration of committee reports. They still drop down the notice paper when they have been considered for one hour, but at the end of the four-hour period, they can come back on for another four hours. I think I am right in that understanding. I just wonder, chair, whether as part of your role in maintaining the order and efficiency of this chamber, reports could be shown on the notice paper in a way that would make it more obvious to members where we are up to in that process. I hope, chair, that you will take that on board in the spirit in which I mean to convey it.

I have said that the review of the standing orders was significant in that it draws attention to something that I have always felt was underdone in this chamber. That is what happens to a report after the committee has done its work. Chair, I know that you have devoted a considerable amount of your time in this Parliament to making sure that our committees are as productive as they possibly can be, as I have done. That is why the procedure and privileges committee has decided that this extra time should be devoted to the consideration of committee reports. I thank Hon Martin Pritchard for taking us through some of the elements of this report. The report is relatively brief, with only a couple of pages. Nevertheless, as members of the committee, such as Hon Dr Steve Thomas, the deputy chair, have pointed out, a wealth of material is buried in those few pages and those few paragraphs. That is why I began by saying that I do not think we should be surprised that a number of people seek the call when we come to debate these things, because it is something that we all have a great deal of interest in, and it acknowledges the work that has been done by committees.

Noting that it has been some weeks since we last considered the first report of the oversight committee, I have refreshed my memory about some of the things that members in this place have said already about this report. I note that one of the things that Hon Nick Goiran is using to drive his argument about the specific issue that he has been prosecuting for some months, indeed years —

**Hon Nick Goiran:** Years.

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** — about the operation of the Corruption and Crime Commission and the role that the oversight committee might play in making some amendments to those operational procedures, is the fact that the committee is run under the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly. The honourable member has some very strong views about the merits of the way in which joint standing committees, and, indeed, joint select committees, are divvied up between the Assembly and the Council. Recognising that we have a number of relatively new members in this place, I think this is something to which we all rightly turn our attention on occasions like this when we are considering a report from a joint standing committee with oversight functions.

I note that another very similar committee is the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, of which I was the chair in the last Parliament. We need to look very carefully at the way in which responsibility is divvied up between the two houses of this Parliament. That is because, as Hon Nick Goiran has pointed out on a couple of occasions in this place, in a different context, the fact that a committee is run by the Legislative Assembly leads to a very different process for report writing. I will be bold and suggest this might be another area upon which Hon Nick Goiran and I agree. If we had a preference for those two processes, it would probably be for the system that is run by the Legislative Council. Unfortunately, often when questions come up about which chamber will service a committee, and therefore what standing orders will apply to that committee, it is often done on the basis of resources. That perhaps is not the right basis on which to take those decisions.

I raise this in the context of considering the first report, which as honourable members have said is the *Annual report 2020–21* of the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission. I note that one of the issues that is referred to briefly in this report is the fact that the Department of Justice is currently conducting a review of the act under which the CCC operates. The person whom I gather we are now always going to refer to as the hardworking parliamentary secretary representing the Attorney General —

**Hon Nick Goiran:** He is!

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** He is definitely. I would probably want to add a couple of other things, like the highly efficient and extremely productive parliamentary secretary.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** And he is not here!

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** He is not here; he is away from the chamber on urgent parliamentary business. His hard work takes him out of this chamber occasionally. I thank the equally hardworking, efficient and productive Minister for Mental Health for noting that and for playing his role in the debate on this particular report by holding the fort while the parliamentary secretary is away.

I notice that when Hon Matt Swinbourn, to use his proper title, second-read the bill that this chamber considered recently that saw the reappointment of Hon John McKechnie as head of the CCC, he referred to the fact that it is noted in the first report that a review of the act is currently being carried out by the Department of Justice. In fact, he called it a “major” review. In case members are interested, that was on 17 June 2021.

**Hon DAN CADDY:** I rise today to comment briefly on this report, which I hold up for the benefit of members in the chamber. It is the *Annual report 2020–21* of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, as presented in this place by Hon Neil Thomson and tabled on 16 September. Before I start talking to the report, I would also acknowledge, as was acknowledged in this report —

**The CHAIR:** Order, member! Just before you commence, we are dealing with order of the day 1, which is the first report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission, *Annual report 2020–21*, not the report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, as tabled by Hon Neil Thomson.

**Hon DAN CADDY:** Okay.

**The CHAIR:** That will be order of the day 2, once we have dealt with the CCC report.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** We have a situation here with this report before us in which it makes reference to the *Annual report 2019–20*, which is the sixteenth report. As I was saying earlier, when members have a look at that, it indicates that there is this matter that the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission said was of ongoing importance and interest. We have now found out, because of the work of the Minister for Mental Health and the hardworking Parliamentary Secretary to the Attorney General, that this report, which was of major interest to the committee, as identified, has now been provided to the chamber. The question is: Why has it taken so long? Why does it require so much follow-up for these matters to finally come to a conclusion? The report was prepared, we know, in May 2020. This is why consideration of committee reports on these Wednesdays is so important, because it gives us the opportunity, whether someone is a member who supports the government or otherwise, to follow up these things. Otherwise, the work of these committees would come to nothing. If the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission tells us repeatedly, over many reports—including the sixteenth report, which it makes reference to on page 2 of the report before us—and continuously makes reference to a matter that is outstanding, then it is appropriate for us to ask the government why it is taking so long.

It is the case that this review was recommended as far back as 17 November 2016. The review was due to be completed in September 2018. It was the Attorney General who then sought a new deadline, which was 20 September 2019,

a year later. When was the review completed? It was completed in May 2020. Putting aside the fact that the review was actually due to be completed in September 2018—let us give the Attorney General that benefit of the doubt, as he said that he had negotiated a deal with the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission and extended it by a year—the Attorney General was supposed to provide the report by 20 September 2019. But it did not happen. When was it prepared? In May 2020. When was it tabled in this place? It was tabled on 3 August 2021. It was almost two years overdue, without any explanation given whatsoever.

The Minister for Mental Health and the hardworking Parliamentary Secretary to the Attorney General have drawn to our attention that this matter was tabled on 3 August this year. The reason for that is supposedly provided on page 4 in this report. For the benefit of Hansard, this is the probably now infamous report titled *Review into prosecutions arising from the Corruption and Crime Commission investigations report*, which has taken so long to be completed and tabled but which was prepared in May 2020 and only tabled in here in August 2021. It says at page 4 —

Owing to a period of heightened operational activity involving the CCC and SSO in the second half of 2019 which impacted the ability of key officeholders to finalise consultations for this Report, the Attorney General wrote to the Chair of the JSCCCC on 19 September 2019 seeking an extension to the reporting timeframe.

There seems to be a lot of extensions being sought. But the reason for that, as provided by the government, is because of heightened operational activity involving the CCC and the State Solicitor's Office in the second half of 2019. What is this "heightened operational activity" that took so many resources of the CCC and the State Solicitor's Office that they were unable to comply with their obligations to the Parliament of Western Australia? That has never been explained. Nevertheless, I certainly get the sense that members of government would like us to move on from this point. That being so, I draw to their attention the recommendation made in respect of this longstanding saga, as Hon Dr Sally Talbot quite rightly pointed out in her contribution moments ago, which is a matter that I have been pursuing for a number of years.

Page 19 of the report has the recommendation. It says —

The Review recommends that in consultation with the ODPP, the SSO and CCC to develop an MOU within six months of the tabling of this Report —

That is this report here that we have been chasing all this time —

which contains agreed:

- procedures for the referral of matters by the CCC to the SSO;
- standards for briefs of evidence;
- timeframes; and
- arrangements for the ongoing liaison and monitoring of the process.

The thing that troubles me here is that in September of this year when we were considering this report I asked the government why this matter was taking so long. Thankfully, as I said, two honourable members opposite then pursued this particular matter. But what was not known plainly to them at that time, as I was not aware—I acknowledge that the parliamentary secretary was away on urgent parliamentary business, as he is now—is that the report had actually been tabled in this place in August of this year. According to this recommendation, there is work to be done within six months of the tabling of the report. That means that that time frame has not yet expired. We are now some two months on from the infamous late tabling of this report. But the government has had more than a year—in fact, it has had nearly a year and a half; next month will mark a year and a half for the government—to have done something about this. Is it not the case that the Attorney General and his office have purposely hidden this report from Parliament and not tabled it, having sat on it for more than a year, to buy extra time? How much time is required to prepare this memorandum of understanding between the CCC and the State Solicitor's Office in consultation with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions?

This is why we have consideration of committee reports. What I like about the forty-first Parliament, and this is probably in stark contrast to what happened in the last Parliament, for those members who were not here—I do not know if it is some kind of rostered system—the idea of having the deputy leader here and the Minister for Mental Health who is then able to pursue these matters that we raise is an excellent enhancement of our procedures. Otherwise, these reports that these parliamentary committees table, whether they are joint standing committees or otherwise, mean nothing. All that happens is that these reports end up getting shelved and no-one pays any attention to them. The committees and the staff make a number of recommendations and the recommendations are not followed through because nobody follows it up. This is an extraordinary example of when something was started in the thirty-ninth Parliament and here we are in the forty-first Parliament just receiving the material, let alone for there to be actual action as a result of it.

This is no trivial matter, because at the heart of all this is whether the very powerful Corruption and Crime Commission should have the ability to charge and prosecute a matter that ended up being in the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ended up having to make a decision on this matter, and that is why the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission drew it to the attention of the Parliament in the thirty-ninth Parliament

and said that this matter needs to be reviewed. It manifested itself in a set of circumstances in which the review took an extraordinary period of time—because of what? It was because of so-called heightened operational activity. That might, if we are very, very charitable, explain why the report took so long. But it does not explain why it has taken such an inordinate amount of time for the government to table the report. Why would it take the government more than a year to table the report? We now find out, when we finally get to have a look at it—this has been the first opportunity that the chamber has ever had to discuss this matter—that there is work to be done within a six-month period. But in a very, very tricky way, the government has made sure that the time frame only begins to run from when the report is tabled which, conveniently for the government, was August. In fact, according to the information provided to me by the hardworking parliamentary secretary to Hon John Quigley, Hon Matthew Swinbourn, who told me on 5 October, that was 3 August this year.

**Hon KLARA ANDRIC:** I welcome the opportunity to make a very brief contribution to this debate on the first report of Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission, *Annual report 2020–21*. As previously mentioned in this house, in late May this year, I was appointed as a new member of the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission, but I welcome the opportunity to speak on this report once again. As members of this chamber are aware, the committee's role is to monitor and report on the exercise of the functions of the Corruption and Crime Commission and the Parliamentary Inspector of the Corruption and Crime Commission; to commence own-motion inquiries related to the means by which corruption prevention practices may be enhanced within the public sector; and to carry out functions under the Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003. I have also mentioned previously in this chamber that the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission is different to most parliamentary committees in that it was established by legislation in 2003 and tasks and issues that one committee addresses may carry over into the new Parliament.

As the annual report notes, between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021 the committee held 11 deliberative meetings and nine formal evidence hearings with 26 witnesses. The previous committee undertook one formal inquiry and tabled three reports, the first of which was the fifteenth report, *If not the CCC ... then where? An examination of the Corruption and Crime Commission's oversight of excessive use of force allegations against members of the WA Police Force*. This report was tabled in both houses on 24 September 2020. The sixteenth report, *Annual report 2019–2020* was also tabled in both houses on 12 November 2020, and the seventeenth report *Meaningful reform overdue: The Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003* was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 19 November 2020 and the Legislative Council on 26 November.

I might take this opportunity to once again thank the new Parliamentary Inspector of the Corruption and Crime Commission, Mr Matthew Zilko—I have had the opportunity to meet him twice now—and the Corruption and Crime Commissioner, Hon John McKechnie, QC, who has been reappointed. All members know that both these agencies play a really important role in ensuring the integrity of the public sector for the benefit of all Western Australians. Very importantly I would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee's secretariat, Suzanne Veletta and Jovita Hogan for their support. I am quite honoured to work with my fellow committee members: the chair, Matthew Hughes, MLA, member for Kalamunda; the deputy chair, Hon Dr Steve Thomas, member for South West Region; and Shane Love, MLA, member for Moore. I thank them for their support and I look forward to playing my part in continuing the important work of the committee in the forty-first Parliament.

**Hon KYLE MCGINN:** I thank everyone who has made a contribution on this report so far, in particular Hon Klara Andric. It is quite an achievement for a member in their first term to be on the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission, so well done on getting that role. I am sure that she will perform very adequately on a committee that, as she will learn over the term of Parliament, comes up from time to time in this place and is spoken about quite regularly. I would also like to mention the outgoing members of the CCC committee from the previous Parliament, Hon Alison Xamon and Hon Jim Chown. I know that Hon Alison Xamon had a strong work ethic and was very energised. She was particularly passionate about her work with the committee and ensured many times that these reports were debated in this chamber.

Whilst this first report is a short one, I found it quite intriguing to read about the committee's hearings. My experience stretches across only one term of Parliament. I was a member of the Standing Committee on Public Administration that reported on WorkSafe and held so many hearings that I could not keep count of them. The report notes that the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission has the power to send for persons, papers and records, which obviously it should do, and that it held four hearings that related to the previous committee's formal inquiry into the Corruption and Crime Commission's oversight of police misconduct, investigations and particularly allegations of excessive use of force. I recall Hon Alison Xamon talking at length on particular matters around excessive use of force by police. I recall her talking about an incident involving a taser for a very long time in this place, and rightly so. She had views to express and she put them across this chamber. I look forward throughout this Parliament to hearing about the direction this committee takes and what it will seek to achieve.

The committee also held two hearings related to the annual reports of agencies that were undertaken as part of the committee's oversight role. I can relate to that from being a member of the public administration committee, which also holds annual report hearings that provide further insight into what is happening within those agencies. The Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission held two hearings related to the annual report



of agencies. The first was held with the Corruption and Crime Commission on 7 October 2020 and the second was with the Public Sector Commission on 9 November 2020. I am no lawyer, nor do I have any experience within the CCC—I am just an ex-seafarer with not many qualifications—but I daresay that meeting with the CCC is one of the key things that this committee does to ensure that the CCC is acting appropriately. The Public Sector Commission also plays a key role in WA.

It is good to see that transcripts of the public hearings are available on the committee’s website. I like how we have a website link in the hardcopy of the report without the actual website address written next to it; I have been clicking it for ages and it just does not seem to be working! Members in this chamber would now be aware that it does not work and that they should make sure that they look up the actual website. On the website members can find a list of the public hearings and what the committee inquired into at those hearings. I think it is really good for transparency as well to find out what the committee is looking into. The three reports that were tabled in both houses have been touched on by other speakers already. They are *If not the CCC ... then where?*, *Annual report 2019–2020* and, obviously, *Meaningful reform overdue: The Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Conduct Act 2003*. That is obviously some pretty heavy work that the previous committee was involved in. It took a lot of time and effort. These reports cannot be put together without committee staff. Hon Klara Andric made mention of that. It was very honourable thing to do at this early stage for a new member to acknowledge that staff are key players in what our committees do, whether it be the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission, Standing Committee on Public Administration or Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation. It is particularly relevant to the Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation, in which we get all the local laws in from local governments. It is a mountain of work that staff put together to ensure that reports like this are possible and that the CCC committee functions so it can get the most achieved. Without having staff doing that job as diligently as they do, these committees would be bound to fall apart. I acknowledge on the record CCC committee staff and ensure that they get their dues for the work they put in.

I found the financial statement for the CCC committee quite intriguing. It was a bit new to me to understand that the committee does not have its own formal budget. It being a joint committee, it is funded out of the budget of the Legislative Assembly. In the previous Parliament there were questions about committees being joint between the other place and this chamber. There is quite an interesting crossover in respect of the standing orders. Hon Nick Goiran made quite a few points in the last Parliament about how these committees operate, particularly when they are joint committees between the other place and the upper house. I do not really know whether to say “other place”, but I have not mentioned it very often since being in this place! The committee is funded out of the budget of the Legislative Assembly. Approval for major expenditure is required on a case-by-case basis, and is entirely at the discretion of the Speaker. The Speaker can make a decision, but for a committee formed in the Legislative Council the President would make that decision on expenditure. That committee’s expenditure during the reporting period is set out in a table. I have to say that it is quite modest expenditure for a committee that does such wideranging work and delves deeply into certain issues. I would have expected it to be higher than \$1 908 in total. When I was perusing the report, someone mentioned the sum of \$1 549 for printing. There must have been some monster reports, because I think printing gets to be about 2¢ or 3¢ a page. There must have been some massive days of getting that printer running hot, running out of cartridges and everything else. The committee got some couriers out for \$283. There are occasions when couriers are needed to ensure they deliver things directly to people and that there is trust that they are the only ones handling those things. There was also miscellaneous expenditure at \$76. That is interesting. I wonder what “miscellaneous” is—whether it is pencils, pens and erasers. I am not 100 per cent sure, but we will see.

Again, I want to thank the committee and I look forward to the work the CCC committee will do in the future. Like I said, well done to Hon Klara Andric for getting on to that committee in her first term. I look forward to seeing future reports on the CCC committee.

**The CHAIR:** Members, the question is —

**Hon KYLE McGINN:** I have not sat down yet!

**The CHAIR:** Okay.

**Hon KYLE McGINN:** Can I finish?

**The CHAIR:** No, time has expired!

Several members interjected.

**The CHAIR:** Members, before I report progress, during debate Hon Dr Sally Talbot asked some questions about the operations of consideration of committee reports. I want to remind members that under the new standing orders, particularly standing order 23(1)(b), each item of business in consideration of committee reports is allocated 240 minutes. Standing order 110(2A) requires that once an item has reached one hour of consideration, it cycles through the list and the next order is taken. Members should also be aware that there are provisions in standing order 110(2C) for an item of business in consideration of committee reports to be further considered on motion of a member.

**Consideration of report adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.**

**Progress reported and leave granted to sit again, pursuant to standing orders.**

## ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

### *Consideration of Tabled Papers*

Resumed from 26 October on the following motion moved by Hon Stephen Dawson (Minister for Mental Health) —

That pursuant to standing order 69(1), the Legislative Council take note of tabled papers 534A–D (2021–22 budget papers) laid upon the table of the house on Thursday, 9 September 2021.

**HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral)** [4.06 pm]: I rise today to give my reply speech to the budget. This is my first reply speech to the budget, and from what I have seen, the format gives us a very wide brush to raise issues relating to WA in and out the budget. I have listened to a couple of speeches so far over the last few weeks, and I have heard different topics ranging from general criticisms of the government to a detailed economic analysis of the economy of WA. As this is my first speech in reply to the budget, I thought I would focus on my last five months of being in my role and some of the experiences and issues I have seen while travelling through regional WA over the last five months, especially in the Mining and Pastoral Region.

In the last five months I have made several trips to the region and visited a number of different shires, towns and cities in various places, ranging from the Kimberley to the goldfields, Pilbara and the north west. As I have visited these places, I have seen some commonality in the issues and themes that have been raised with me as I have had conversations with organisations and people. None of these issues will come as a surprise to members here; they have certainly been debated at length. But be that as it may, I will raise them again.

Firstly, we have the housing crisis and the lack of affordable housing in regional WA. This is certainly not an issue specific to the regions. It is a WA-wide issue, but it is being felt particularly in the regions, and certainly in the Mining and Pastoral Region. There is a chicken-and-egg scenario of a lack of houses to house workers and a lack of workers to build those houses. The second issue that has been raised with me is the skilled worker shortage. Again, this is not just specific to the regions. It affects a wide range of industries, certainly in the mining and resources sector, the building and construction sector and some government services as well such as police and nursing. Really underpinning these two issues is the global pandemic and WA's hard border policy. I take this opportunity to acknowledge that in my opinion the WA government has done a good job to date with the handling of the pandemic. WA and Australia are in an advantageous position geographically compared with a lot of places around the world. It certainly has been a more straightforward exercise than in a lot of other places to close the border and keep the virus out. However, I acknowledge that the Labor government has done a good job to date keeping the virus out of our community and the economy ticking along. We see that particularly in the mining sector, which has contributed in a very big way to the historic \$5.6 billion budget surplus before us. However—there is always a “however” in these things—it could be argued that the crux is still to come. That is, how do we lower the border and allow the virus to come in to our community safely without overwhelming our hospital system, which is already in a state of crisis, and keep the economy ticking along? I am glad the McGowan government has acknowledged that it is untenable and unfeasible to keep the virus out forever, that maintaining a COVID-zero policy is unrealistic in the long term, and that eventually we will have to lower the borders and let the virus in to our community.

A lot of us have lived unabated for the past two years; the pandemic has not affected us and our lives have been relatively normal. However, many of us with family and friends overseas have felt the impact and certainly a lot of people in Western Australia have had their livelihoods impacted by global supply chain issues. People have not been able to travel over east and vice versa; people from the eastern states have not been able to come into WA. My concern is not with the government's handling of the border policy to date, but with the lack of a clear roadmap or indication of what will happen after the border comes down. We have had a shifting vaccination target and a shifting date for when we can expect to be able to travel and enjoy freedoms such as seeing people overseas and in the eastern states. Earlier this year a date was communicated for when the state could expect to open up, which was November. That date changed to December, and then an April date was communicated to us by our Premier. After giving that April date, the Premier backed down from giving any hard target and moved to a range—an 80 to 90 per cent vaccination target before we could expect to open up. To my knowledge, no other jurisdiction in the world has hit that 90 per cent double vaccination target.

**Hon Kyle McGinn:** I think Israel.

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** Israel? Okay.

Given the Melbourne Institute reported a 30 per cent hesitancy rate in WA earlier in the year—I believe that now sits at 13 per cent—I find it highly unrealistic to expect that WA will hit that target anytime soon. I have no idea why it was communicated as a potential target.

During the budget estimates I asked a range of questions of the Vaccine Commander, and this was also reported in an ABC News article. At the time the Vaccine Commander said that we were aiming for an 80 per cent target by the end of December. The next day the Premier made an announcement on mandatory vaccination, which encompasses 75 per cent of our workforce, or 1.1 million workers. In line with our policy, an end-of-January target was given to us. In the space of 24 hours, we have seen a backflip and a change of date. My concern is not around the border policy, but about communicating a clear date out of this pandemic.

Another concern I have is around the visibility of the modelling or the health advice that is being used by cabinet to guide the decision-making process on the border policy, which is dictating the lives of two million people in this state. WA today attempted to obtain through freedom of information the modelling used by cabinet. It was rejected, citing cabinet-in-confidence. I asked a range of questions during the budget hearings about this modelling and these inputs. I am not concerned about seeing the decision-making of cabinet, or the sausage-making that is happening behind the scenes, but I would like to see the data and the science that is guiding that decision-making process.

We all know that the Doherty report is being used federally, and that certainly will be used as a potential input here in WA. The Milne report has also been reported as a possible input. The responses to the questions I got was that cabinet uses a range of inputs, but they were not specific as to what those inputs are. Without this visibility, all we can really do is draw conclusions. The conclusion I draw is that the government is using modelling that suits its agenda rather than relying on the science to dictate its policy, essentially politicising the pandemic and cherry-picking the data to suit its narrative.

The other concern I have is around mandatory vaccinations. This feels like a very heavy-handed approach. We are not seeing the carrot; we are seeing the stick approach here in WA. Western Australia does have a high hesitancy rate and that can be attributed to a number of factors. Certainly a lot of people in WA have not experienced the pandemic firsthand. They do not know anyone who has had COVID-19, so from that perspective one can understand their hesitancy. I will share with members a story about my time living in Seattle and experiencing the lockdown and pandemic for 16 months there. When the vaccine was available to a small cohort of people, there were cases of hundreds of people lining up for hours and hours at the end of the day to fight over the remaining few vials that were available. When the vaccine was open to the public I remember getting in line with thousands of people for a number of hours. It was almost like a carnival atmosphere. People were breaking protocol and high-fiving and celebrating. A lot of people had not been able to leave their house for 12 months, except to walk their dog or go to the shops, basically, so people did not care whether they got the Pfizer, Moderna or Johnson and Johnson vaccine; they just lined up and got their medicine. We really need to see more emphasis on the vaccine in WA as a way out of this pandemic. Just to be clear about the COVID tracking and the communication around the tracking, when we do get an active case in WA, I think it is important to communicate to the public and really emphasise that, but the same emphasis should be put on the vaccine.

I will share another story about living in Seattle. Joe Biden put a hard target of 100 million vaccines in 100 days. This was echoed in Washington by the Governor, which is essentially the equivalent of a Premier. They fronted the cameras daily, set a hard target and really communicated the roadmap forward for what life would look like once people had had the vaccine. The government set a target of 100 million shots in 100 days, and then increased it to 200 million and 300 million—and it hit that target. It was more of a carrot, not the stick, approach to communicating a way forward out of this pandemic.

I will change tack now to talk about housing in WA and what I have seen, certainly in the Mining and Pastoral Region. We are all aware that there is a housing crisis and a housing shortage in the state. Recently a \$2.1 billion investment has been made in this space, with \$875 million invested in social housing, which is a welcome announcement. I congratulate the McGowan government on that funding. It could be argued that it was a little late, but it is better late than never. However, the depth is in the detail. It will be interesting to see how much of the funding will be given to the regions, particularly the Mining and Pastoral Region. For a lot of towns and cities in mining and pastoral right now—Kalgoorlie, Port Hedland and Karratha spring to mind—rental prices are up 25 per cent from last year and there is a housing availability of 0.1 per cent in some of these places. That is really driving some of the lower income people out the other end. Mining companies compete with private businesses and residents as well. Obviously, mining companies are able to throw a lot more money at the situation and drive up those prices. The moratorium on rental price increases has expired and owners of properties who are renting them are essentially price gouging and going above the market rate.

A lot of mining companies have a memorandum of understanding with local councils to, essentially, use the local workforce first. There is an understanding that these local workers are members of the community, they give back, they help stimulate the economy and their children go to school. Previous governments—I believe the Barnett government—had a propensity to green-light mining companies to build separate dongas and separate communities outside town. The mining companies in those cases control the workforce. They control where workers sleep and where they eat and there is no integration or giving back to these small places. It is good to see that councils are pushing for a more integrated approach moving forward.

Karratha and Kalgoorlie right now are striving to hit the 40 000 and 50 000 numbers that are more self-sustaining. Given the lack of housing now, they are struggling. If people look on Seek.com now, they will see about 200 job vacancies in Kalgoorlie and on the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia website they will see about 10 properties available, so the numbers are not really stacking up at the moment.

I refer now to Government Regional Officers' Housing properties. I have asked a range of questions on GROH properties. I got some answers back on the availability of some of these properties in Kalgoorlie, and some of them have been vacant for three years. In one case, a property had been vacant for 10 years. There was a recent admission

by the government that the current model for GROH properties is broken and under review. Certainly, no process is perfect but it is a welcome admission to hear that GROH properties can be managed more intelligently. Certainly, if a property has been vacant for 10 years in a dilapidated state, something is clearly wrong.

I refer to the skilled worker shortage. We are certainly seeing this in a number of sectors. I think we are all familiar with the healthcare sector. Evident in the metropolitan area is the symptom of ramping, when an ambulance officer is unable to offload their patient because there are not enough resources at the hospital end and the paramedic has to stay with the patient, so the ambulance cannot get back on the road. The government made a recent announcement about taking international nurses and doctors, which is great to see, but the same provision should be extended domestically.

There have been cases of nurses—a nurse in particular—who have struggled to navigate the complexity of the G2G system. It is extremely inflexible and they are not being offered the same compensation as the international workers. I asked a range of questions during a Standing Committee on Public Administration hearing about the G2G system, and was told there had been over 1 000 iterations of the app. Coming from a software background, I do not have a concern with 1 000 iterations of an app. I am certainly one to release smaller changes rather than go for the big bang approach. It smooths out that risk; however, there is no visibility into why those iterations were made and there is certainly no feedback for people who were potentially impacted by their G2G application. There is no visibility, transparency or flexibility when it comes to G2G. If we are in a pandemic, we are all in this together, but if a health worker decides of their own volition to come to WA, we should be rolling out the red carpet and making their life easy as opposed to the restrictions they currently face trying to get across the border.

It has been all doom and gloom so far, but there are a couple of things I am excited to see and it would be great to see more of them. One is the hydrogen industry. It is fantastic to see WA getting on the front foot. We have a very capable Minister for Hydrogen Industry who has hit the ground running recently with some announcements in this space. As we all know, the Pilbara in WA is one of the sunniest and windiest places in the world. We are well positioned in the renewable space to try to diversify our economy and get out of the boom-and-bust cycle we find ourselves in, and our heavy reliance on iron ore.

In the last couple of weeks, I have managed to visit Barrow Island, courtesy of Chevron Corporation, and view its carbon capture storage technology over there, which was exciting to see. I also managed to visit the Yara processing plant that is producing green hydrogen in a form of liquid ammonia. The plan is to export that to other international markets that do not have as rich renewables as WA does to use in the heavy industry sector.

I will change tack now and switch to technology and to technology in Parliament. I think we all agree that connection with constituents is important; certainly for regional members, connecting to people is a challenge. WA is a very big place, and the Mining and Pastoral Region is the largest jurisdiction in the world, at least it will be for the next three years. Trying to encourage people to participate in our democratic process is a good thing in my opinion and there are a number of ways we can do that. E-petitions is one. It was great to see that this was a recommendation from the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges, which reviewed the standing orders, and it is being supported by the government. I made a submission to that committee and I am glad to see it has been made a recommendation. In my opinion it will allow for more people to participate in our democratic process. Circulating a printed petition in the Mining and Pastoral Region presents a number of challenges and e-petitions are a good way of being a bit more intelligent about it.

Referendums is another issue. Again, WA is a very remote place; it is difficult to hold a referendum here and it is also very cost prohibitive. I think it is in the \$2 million range. If we segue briefly into daylight saving, four referendums have been held on the issue. The last one, which was held about 10 years ago, was defeated marginally by 54 per cent. Given the Australian Bureau of Statistics data we will see for 2021, cross-referencing with referendum data, I believe daylight saving would have majority support in WA. Certainly, the cost of a referendum on the issue has been used as a counterargument considering how prohibitive it is and would cost taxpayers \$2 million. E-referendums are a good way of overcoming that and would allow for a vote by the people, which is direct democracy, and is better in cases than the representative democracy that we see and some of the fuzziness that comes with it. E-voting is another way. We have e-voting in WA; it is available to small cohorts of people who have accessibility issues and struggle to get to a polling booth on election day. There is also a very significant undertaking by the Western Australian Electoral Commission when we talk about holding a statewide election. My Mining and Pastoral Region colleagues will be aware that it took about three weeks for the vote to come in at the last state election. I am advocating not to completely remove the traditional means of holding an election, but to use the printed version side by side with the electronic version, and do it in a smarter way, which would be cheaper and more cost-effective.

I note also that the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform made a recommendation to increase voter equality in WA by using e-voting. In the Mining and Pastoral Region, there is about a 72 per cent voter turnout, which is lower than the 85 per cent in a lot of other jurisdictions. Going down to a polling booth in the Mining and Pastoral Region is not easy for a lot of people and a lot of people live in some very remote areas, so using e-voting side by side with traditional means would be a good way of overcoming that.

In summary, WA is in a strong economic position. Labor has done a good job with the pandemic in my opinion. It certainly got lucky with a few factors that have contributed to a very high iron ore price, but it should certainly

take those wins as they come. It is great to see emphasis on hydrogen in WA. It presents a very big opportunity to set an example to the rest of the country and the rest of the world given the abundance of renewables we have here in WA. There are some big challenges ahead in navigating the people of WA out of this pandemic. In my opinion, we need to communicate a clear road map and, ultimately, encourage people back into WA.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Colin de Grussa**.

**CONSTITUTIONAL AND ELECTORAL LEGISLATION AMENDMENT  
(ELECTORAL EQUALITY) BILL 2021**

*Second Reading*

Resumed from 26 October.

**HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan)** [4.30 pm]: I will recount a couple of things I was saying yesterday. Essentially, we have here a situation in which the entire Constitutional and Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Equality) Bill 2021 is based upon the premise that the Premier stated that the current system is absolutely corrupt and that the opposition is responsible for it. He identified a number of areas in which there is no equality in voting. He is saying “Let’s go for equality in voting”, and using that as the premise for this entire bill. We had the sham of a report that was done over the course of two months, which will completely change the entire electoral system of Western Australia. That is because, apparently, the electoral system we currently have in this place is corrupt, and everyone on this side of the chamber supports corruption. However, it is the exact same electoral system that the Premier himself instituted in 2005 and voted for, along with Hon Alannah MacTiernan; the now Minister for Electoral Affairs, Hon John Quigley; Hon Michelle Roberts; and Margaret Quirk. They all voted for this system that is apparently corrupt. They now want to undermine the system they created because it is apparently corrupt. Go figure!

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 4864.]

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

NATIVE FOREST — LOGGING — CARBON SEQUESTRATION

**848. Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS to the minister representing the Minister for Forestry:**

I refer to the government’s announcement of 8 September 2021 about the ending of most native timber harvesting in Western Australia and the budgeting of \$350 million to plant 33 000 hectares of softwood plantations, which will result in up to 50 million pine trees being planted, “sequestering between 7.9 and 9.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent”.

- (1) Will the 50 million pine trees be harvested in the future?
- (2) If yes to (1), will any of the carbon sequestered in the harvested pine trees still be sequestered after harvest?
- (3) If yes to (2), how much of the 7.9 to 9.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent will remain sequestered after harvest?
- (4) If pine trees can be grown and harvested for carbon sequestration, why can native hardwood not also be harvested for carbon sequestration?
- (5) Why does the government have different rules for different tree species?

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:**

I will give the member a lesson in carbon sequestration! I thank the member for the question. The following information has been provided by the Minister for Forestry.

- (1)–(2) Yes.
- (3) The exact amount of carbon that will remain in harvested wood products and also how long it will remain sequestered depends on the product produced and the end use of the timber. I note that this is basically for construction.
- (4) Existing trees in a landscape do not meet the “additionality” criteria under the commonwealth harvest methodologies to generate Australian carbon credit units.
- (5) The same additionality rules apply for all species under the commonwealth’s harvest methodologies.

BYFORD RAIL EXTENSION

**849. Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Transport:**

I believe the Minister for Mental Health has the answer to this question. I refer to the Byford rail extension project.

- (1) What was the total original cost and project time line, from commencement to completion of the project, at the time that the first contracts were signed?
- (2) What works of the project have been initiated and completed to date?

- (3) What changes of scope have been applied to the project since the McGowan government was elected to power in March 2017, and what is the proposed cost of each of those changes in scope?
- (4) Have there been any cost overruns on the original scope of work during construction of the project; and, if so, what are they?
- (5) What is the current expected total cost and project time line for commencement to completion of the project?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for some notice of the question. The following answer is provided on behalf of the Minister for Transport.

- (1)–(5) The Byford rail extension project is currently in the competitive tender phase. At contract award, the project cost, scope and expected time line will be confirmed. Works have started on the Thomas Road Bridge Over Rail project, which is required for the Byford rail extension.

HYDROGEN AND AMMONIA PRODUCTION FACILITY

**850. Hon COLIN de GRUSSA to the minister representing the Minister for Lands:**

I refer to the Premier's recent statements to the media regarding the hydrogen and ammonia production hub being proposed by Woodside.

- (1) What is the nature and extent of assistance being provided by the state government for this project?
- (2) Will the proposed 130-hectare site be leased on commercial terms?
- (3) Did the government propose any regional sites to Woodside for this project?
- (4) If no to (3), why not?

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:**

I thank the member for the question. The Minister for Lands has provided the following answer.

- (1) DevelopmentWA will grant Woodside an option to lease.
- (2)–(3) Yes.
- (4) Not applicable.

CORONAVIRUS — VACCINATIONS

**851. Hon TJORN SIBMA to the minister representing the Minister for Health:**

I refer to the evidence provided by the Vaccine Commander during budget estimates hearings last week, which focused on efforts to encourage vaccination among culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the metropolitan area.

- (1) How many people received a vaccine dose from the COVID-19 pop-up vaccination clinic in Mirrabooka last week?
- (2) How many people received a vaccine dose from the COVID-19 pop-up vaccination clinic in Mirrabooka this week?
- (3) Why is the operation of the pop-up clinics limited to between 10.00 am and 3.30 pm on Mondays and Tuesdays until 30 November?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1) WA Health is currently running two clinics in Mirrabooka. Vaccines administered for the period 18 to 24 October 2021 are as follows: The Square Mirrabooka, 1 935; and Herb Graham Recreation Centre, zero. The Herb Graham clinic formally commenced on 25 October 2021.
- (2) COVID-19 vaccines administered within the above-mentioned clinics for 25 and 26 October 2021 are as follows, current to 10.30 am today, 27 October 2021: The Square Mirrabooka, 870; Herb Graham Recreation Centre, 19.
- (3) The vaccination clinic at The Square Mirrabooka is open seven days per week, with current operating hours as follows: Monday, 9.00 am to 4.30 pm; Tuesday, 9.00 am to 4.30 pm; Wednesday, 9.00 am to 4.30 pm; Thursday, 9.00 am to 7.00 pm; Friday, 9.00 am to 4.30 pm; Saturday, 9.00 am to 4.30 pm; and Sunday, 11.00 am to 4.30 pm.

The Herb Graham Recreation Centre, directly across the road from The Square Mirrabooka, is currently open Monday and Tuesday from 10.00 am to 3.30 pm, and provides a complementary vaccination service to the clinic at The Square Mirrabooka. The Herb Graham Recreation Centre clinic engages with community groups, including MercyCare, Ishar, the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, The Smith Family, Red Cross, Youth Futures, and the Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors, with interpreters on hand

from eight language groups to provide assistance. This program has been tailored to the availability of these community groups, who have knowledge of what days and times are most suitable for their clients. Extended clinic times and additional dates may be added, pending demand.

#### CHILD PROTECTION — REGISTERED CARERS

**852. Hon NICK GOIRAN to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Child Protection:**

I refer to the evidence from the director general to the budget estimates hearing on 18 October 2021. The director general stated —

... as a last resort, our workers take children home. But that is only if they are registered carers and it is absolutely a last resort; it is not something that we encourage.

- (1) How many workers are registered carers?
- (2) Is the minister aware of any instance in which a worker who is not a registered carer has been left with no other option but to take a child home or look after them in a hotel or in similar accommodation?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of the question. I provide the following answer on behalf of the Minister for Child Protection.

- (1)–(2) The Department of Communities advises that the evidence provided is inaccurate. The department advises that formal notification will be sent to the committee through the existing processes. All child protection workers who take children home are screened to work with vulnerable children via the Department of Communities' screening processes, in addition to them holding a working with children check.

#### SCHOOLS — PERIODS, PAIN AND ENDOMETRIOSIS PROGRAM

**853. Hon DONNA FARAGHER to the Minister for Education and Training:**

I understand the Minister for Mental Health will be answering my question on behalf of the minister. I refer to the periods, pain and endometriosis program, which is delivered in a number of Western Australian schools.

- (1) How many government schools delivered the program in —
  - (a) 2020; and
  - (b) 2021 to date?
- (2) Can the minister advise the total amount of funding allocated by the Department of Education to deliver this program in the following financial years —
  - (a) 2020–21; and
  - (b) 2021–22?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. The following answer is provided on behalf of the Minister for Education and Training.

- (1)
  - (a) None.
  - (b) Up to 27 October 2021, the foundation has delivered the PPEP to 45 public schools and is planning to deliver the program to an additional 10 public schools before the end of the 2021 school year.
- (2) The Department of Education does not fund this program. However, it does provide in-kind support.

#### DANGEROUS OFFENDERS — GPS TRACKING DEVICES

**854. Hon PETER COLLIER to the minister representing the Minister for Corrective Services:**

I refer to the GPS tracking system for dangerous offenders, including sex offenders.

- (1) Have there been any system-wide blackouts in the last 12 months?
- (2) If yes to (1), how long for each incident?
- (3) Have there been any technical failures of GPS tracking for any individuals in the last 12 months?
- (4) If yes to (3), how long was the failure for each incident?

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:**

I thank the member for the question. The following information has been provided by the Minister for Corrective Services.

- (1) No.
- (2) Not applicable.

- (3) Yes; one on 29 May 2021.
- (4) The Department of Justice's community offender monitoring unit's contracted electronic monitoring service provider experienced a global technical outage, which impacted the communication for certain types of GPS monitoring devices. During the period from 4.06 pm to 11.12 pm on 29 May 2021, the COMU implemented alternative monitoring methods. The Western Australia Police Force was advised of the technical failure but assistance was not required.

#### ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE BILL — DRAFT

##### **855. Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs:**

I refer to the early warning and urgent action request filed under the United Nations' International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination on 7 September 2021 by the Environmental Defenders Office on behalf of five Western Australian traditional owners.

- (1) Does the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill contain protections for places of cultural heritage significance that cannot be repealed by the minister?
- (2) If not, why not?

##### **Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1) Yes. Blanket protection for Aboriginal cultural heritage applies regardless of whether it is recorded and reported to the government. The Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill recognises Aboriginal people are the right people to make decisions about their cultural heritage, including deciding what cultural heritage is important and how it should be managed. Under the bill, Aboriginal people will make decisions as to what is Aboriginal cultural heritage, rather than such decisions being made by a statutory committee, as is currently the case with the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972. Traditional owners can also apply to have a really important area made a protected area. A protected area will have the highest protection under the law. Both houses of Parliament are required to approve the repeal of a protected area or any amendments to reduce the size of a protected area.
- (2) Not applicable.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA — FREE SPEECH

##### **856. Hon SOPHIA MOERMOND to the parliamentary secretary representing the Attorney General:**

Recent Australian legal decisions can now see individuals, as well as businesses or corporations, held liable for the comments of others on social media platforms such as the all-powerful Facebook, or whatever it is rebranding itself as this week. This is cause for great concern amongst those of us who wish to protect free speech. Can the Attorney General please explain how this government plans to empower ordinary citizens to protect themselves in light of this new threat against free speech, and has the government taken into consideration how recent legal changes in this area might be used to target individuals?

##### **Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of the question. I provide the following response on behalf of the Attorney General. The question of internet intermediary liability in defamation for the publication of third-party content is a topic currently under review by the Model Defamation Law Working Party, which reports to all Attorneys General Australia-wide. It forms part of the stage 2 review of model defamation law reforms. Defamation laws Australia-wide are based on model provisions agreed by the Council of Attorneys-General. The working party issued a discussion paper in March this year as part of the stage 2 review and will report to all Attorneys General in due course. Any legal advice received by ministers is subject to legal professional privilege and is therefore not disclosed.

#### HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE — MORALE

##### **857. Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER to the minister representing the Minister for Health:**

I refer the minister to a recent Australian Medical Association staff survey undertaken here in Western Australia and publicised on the ABC's website on 28 September, which concluded that there was "damning and disturbing evidence" of poor morale across the WA health system and of doctors feeling victimised.

- (1) Does the minister concede that evidence shows those hospitals with fewer short-term contracts for doctors tend to have the highest levels of low morale?
- (2) Is the minister concerned that Rockingham General Hospital, which services his electorate as well as that of the Premier, was amongst those hospitals said to have the lowest staff morale ratings?
- (3) Given that the AMA has stated publicly, "It's great having new buildings, just not so great having a demoralised workforce", will the minister commit to funding more long-term contracts for doctors going forward?



**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. The following answer is provided on behalf of the Minister for Health.

- (1)–(2) I draw the honourable member’s attention to standing order 105(1)(b), which states that questions shall “not seek an opinion or a legal interpretation or opinion”.
- (3) The industrial agreement covering medical practitioners currently provides for senior medical practitioners to be employed under fixed-term contracts of five years’ duration. The WA Department of Health is currently renegotiating a replacement medical practitioners’ industrial agreement with the Western Australian branch of the AMA. Discussions are continuing under the auspices of the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

## CORONAVIRUS — VACCINATIONS

**858. Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE to the Leader of the House representing the Premier:**

I refer to advice from the Chief Health Officer.

- (1) Will the Premier please table the advice received on 19 October, including any attachments?
- (2) Will the Premier please table the advice received on 22 October, including any attachments?
- (3) Was attachment 1, titled “Mandate Summary” and dated 19 October, provided by the Chief Health Officer?
- (4) Who created the infographics titled “Mandate Summary” dated 19 and 25 October?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. On behalf of the Leader of the House, the following answer is provided on behalf of the Premier.

- (1) I table the attached advice, which has been publicly available on the WA government website since 19 October 2021.
- (2) I table the attached advice, which has been publicly available on the WA government website since 22 October 2021.

[See paper [828](#).]

- (3) Yes.
- (4) They were created by the state government’s COVID-19 communications unit in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, on the advice of the State Emergency Coordinator and the Chief Health Officer.

## PRACTICAL DRIVING ASSESSMENTS

**859. Hon JAMES HAYWARD to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Transport:**

I refer to practical driving assessments.

- (1) What is the current number of learner’s permits in Western Australia?
- (2) How many Western Australians received their C-class driver’s licence for the first time in the following financial years —
  - (a) 2019–20; and
  - (b) 2020–21?
- (3) What progress has the minister made in investigating recording technology options to be utilised in C-class driver’s licence PDAs?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. On behalf of the Leader of the House, I provide the following answer on behalf of the Minister for Transport.

- (1) The number is 134 254.
- (2)
  - (a) The number was 28 148.
  - (b) The number was 35 530.
- (3) The Department of Transport implemented iAssess in 2019. The C-class practical driving assessments are conducted on a tablet device. The exercise—GPS recording of the route taken and audio recording of the assessment are digitally captured—allows driver assessors to provide detailed written feedback and replay audio of the PDA should in-depth feedback be requested. At the end of all PDAs, feedback is provided to the candidate regardless of the outcome of the PDA.

## POLICE — DOG UNIT — BROOME

**860. Hon NEIL THOMSON to the minister representing the Minister for Police:**

I refer to the escape of a prison inmate from Broome Regional Prison yesterday.

- (1) Has police dog Hank, or any other police dog, been flown to Broome to assist in tracking down the fugitive?
- (2) If no to (1), why not?
- (3) Will the minister direct police to reinstate a permanent Kimberley police dog?
- (4) What resources have been requested by Broome police to assist in the search for the fugitive?
- (5) Of the requested resources outlined in (4), what has been allocated or provided to Broome police to assist with this operation?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of this question. The following information has been provided to me by the Minister for Police.

- (1) The Western Australia Police Force advises that a police dog has been flown to Broome.
- (2) Not applicable.

**Hon Neil Thomson** interjected.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Am I giving the member the answer or what? You have asked the question. Let me give the answer.

- (3) The deployment of resources is an operational matter that is the responsibility of the Commissioner of Police. Deputy Commissioner Dreibergs outlined the reasons for this operation decision during the estimates hearing in the Legislative Assembly.
- (4)–(5) Police also advise all requested resources have been provided and deployed.

## GERALDTON HEALTH CAMPUS — STAFF

**861. Hon STEVE MARTIN to the minister representing the Minister for Health:**

I refer to recent media coverage that Geraldton Regional Hospital is experiencing a staff shortage.

- (1) What is the current approved number of FTE doctors, nurses and midwives required to safely run Geraldton Regional Hospital?
- (2) How many doctors, nurses and midwives were employed at Geraldton Regional Hospital over the following years —
  - (a) 2019–20;
  - (b) 2020–21; and
  - (c) 2021 to date?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. The following answer is provided on behalf of the Minister for Health.

It is not possible to provide the requested information in the time required and I therefore ask the honourable member to place this question on notice.

## TRANSPORT — FOOD AND DRINK ADVERTISING — INCOME

**862. Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Transport:**

I refer to question on notice 2713 in the previous Parliament and the Department of Transport's response regarding all food and drink advertising, which includes unhealthy food and drink promotions.

- (1) What was the total income generated from food and drink advertising in 2019–20 and 2020–21?
- (2) Will the minister please advise if any advertising contracts that allow unhealthy food and drink promotions have been extended or awarded within the last two years?
- (3) If yes to (2), on what date?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for some notice of the question. The following answer is provided on behalf of the Minister for Transport.

- (1) Nil.
- (2)–(3) Not applicable.

## MAIN ROADS — WEEDS — ROAD VERGES

**863. Hon COLIN de GRUSSA to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Transport:**

I refer to the growth of resistant weed populations on road verges managed by Main Roads Western Australia.

- (1) Does Main Roads regularly test or assess weed populations for herbicide resistance; and who provides these services?
- (2) How many populations of resistant weeds have been identified on main road verges and where are they located?
- (3) What procedures and policies are in place to manage herbicide resistant weed populations on road verges? Please table any relevant policies or guidelines used internally by Main Roads.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. The following answer is provided on behalf of the Minister for Transport.

- (1)–(3) Testing is conducted if potential resistance is identified. Several known populations of glyphosate-resistant rye-grass are located on multiple roads around Albany, Northam, Cranbrook Road near York and the Perth–Bunbury highway from Lake Clifton to past Bunbury and along South West Highway to Donnybrook.

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (COST RECOVERY) REGULATIONS 2021

**864. Hon TJORN SIBMA to the minister representing the Minister for Environment:**

I refer to the pricing model developed on behalf of the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation for the purposes of the Environmental Protection (Cost Recovery) Regulations 2021.

- (1) Do industry stakeholders concur with the underlying assumptions of the pricing model developed by Lisa Byrne Consulting and validated by EY?
- (2) If not, can the minister account for the divergence of opinion between DWER and the industry on the model's assumptions?
- (3) Has DWER invoked the inclusion of its mandated non-disclosure clauses in contracts with both consultants, as the justification for not providing industry stakeholders with the documents and data generated in the development of the pricing model?
- (4) If yes, can DWER waive its privilege and provide these documents to industry to facilitate genuine consultation?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. The following answer is provided on behalf of the Minister for Environment.

- (1)–(4) The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation—DWER—consultation on implementation of cost recovery for part IV of the Environmental Protection Act 1986 closed on 22 October 2021. DWER is still undertaking its review of the submissions received. As advised through the answer to question without notice 824, stakeholders were offered direct briefings on the documents and data that informed the cost recovery model as part of the consultation process. The honourable member has submitted a separate question on notice requesting a copy of these documents. DWER continues to work with the authors regarding the authority to release this information, and an answer to this question will be provided by the due date.

## POLICE — G2G NOW

**865. Hon NICK GOIRAN to the minister representing the Minister for Police:**

I refer to the article in *The Australian* on 10 October 2021 entitled “Facial recognition for home quarantine a ‘recipe for disaster’”, which asserts that Western Australia is using home quarantine apps with facial recognition technology.

- (1) How many home quarantine apps are being used in our state?
- (2) How many use facial recognition technology?
- (3) Is the minister aware of the discussion paper released last month by the Australia Institute's Centre for Responsible Technology that opposes the use of facial recognition technology for home quarantine and general pandemic monitoring “with the technology proving to have systemic weaknesses and limitations, including errors in identifying female faces and people of colour, and risks of privacy and ethical abuses”?
- (4) Which of the discussion paper's four recommendations does the government intend to implement?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. The following information has been provided to me by the Minister for Police. The Western Australia Police Force advises —

- (1) The G2G systems are used in Western Australia.
- (2) The G2G Now application uses facial recognition technology.
- (3) No.
- (4) Not applicable.

## CARERS RECOGNITION ACT — REVIEW

**866. Hon DONNA FARAGHER to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Community Services:**

I refer to the minister's press statement titled, "Improving recognition for thousands of WA carers" released on 29 May 2018, which announced a review of the Carers Recognition Act 2004 and states that "the review will be completed by the end of the year".

- (1) Has this review of the act been completed?
- (2) If yes to (1), when was the review completed and has the Department of Communities provided a final report to the minister for consideration?
- (3) If no to (1), why not?

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of the question. I provide the following answer on behalf of the Minister for Community Services.

- (1) Yes.
- (2)–(3) The Department of Communities recently provided a final report to the minister that is currently with the minister for consideration.

## DANGEROUS SEXUAL OFFENDERS — GPS TRACKING DEVICES

**867. Hon PETER COLLIER to the minister representing the Minister for Corrective Services:**

I refer to the GPS tracking for dangerous offenders, including sex offenders.

- (1) Have any offenders removed, destroyed or otherwise absconded from their GPS tracker in the last 12 months?
- (2) If yes, for how long were they not tracked?

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:**

I am sorry, member; I have not seen that question and it is not in my file, but I will ask the office to follow that up. What number do you have?

**Hon Peter Collier:** It is C906.

## BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION (EXEMPTIONS) AMENDMENT ORDER 2021

**868. Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT to the minister representing the Minister for Environment:**

I refer to the Biodiversity Conservation (Exemptions) Amendment Order 2021 published in the *Western Australian Government Gazette* on 15 October 2021.

- (1) Did the minister seek any advice prior to the publishing of the Biodiversity Conservation (Exemptions) Amendment Order 2021?
- (2) If yes to (1), can the minister list who was consulted and provided advice on the Biodiversity Conservation (Exemptions) Amendment Order 2021?
- (3) Will the minister table the advice received?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. The following answer is provided on behalf of the Minister for Environment.

- (1)–(3) The Minister for Environment sought advice from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions prior to the publishing of the Biodiversity Conservation (Exemptions) Amendment Order 2021. DBCA consulted with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation on the preparation of the amendment order.  
DBCA advised the government that the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016—BC act—introduced additional requirements for an authorisation to take and disturb threatened fauna species and modify threatened

ecological communities. These requirements were identified following concerns raised by stakeholders and following DBCA's implementation of the BC act. It was identified that the legislation placed an added administrative burden on landowners and occupiers seeking to undertake bushfire mitigation activities to reduce fuel loads, including planned burning.

The amendment order will reduce the administrative burden on landowners and occupiers, local government and Department of Fire and Emergency Services employees who are undertaking the bushfire mitigation activities specified in the order, and it will clarify how the defences in the Biodiversity Conservation Act apply when a person undertakes a bushfire mitigation or bushfire suppression activity. This approach considers the potential impacts of reducing fuel loads through bushfire mitigation activities against protection of the community and the environment from the impacts of bushfires. As the climate continues to change, low-intensity planned burning is critical to prevent high-intensity bushfires impacting on the environment, with potentially long-lasting impacts. To help ensure that biodiversity values are maintained, a series of fire information notes for key threatened species and ecological communities has been developed to assist landholders to manage fuel loads, while recognising the requirements of threatened species and ecological communities.

#### CORONAVIRUS — VACCINATIONS — ADVERSE EFFECTS

**869. Hon SOPHIA MOERMOND to the minister representing the Minister for Health:**

- (1) If a person who has been mandated to be vaccinated, either by the government or their employer, experiences an adverse event with long-term sequelae, who will be responsible for the financial cost for ongoing care, medications, and/or income support if this person has become disabled and unable to work?
- (2) What methods of recourse are available to those people who experience long-term negative effects that impacts on their quality of life; will the responsibility lie with the government, the employer, the manufacturer or the Therapeutic Goods Administration that provided provisional approval only?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1) The commonwealth government.
- (2) The commonwealth government is developing a claims scheme for people who suffer a moderate-to-significant impact following an adverse reaction to a Therapeutic Goods Administration-approved COVID-19 vaccine. The TGA closely monitors adverse events temporarily associated with receipt of a vaccine.

#### CORONAVIRUS — VACCINATIONS — DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES VOLUNTEERS

**870. Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE to the minister representing the Minister for Emergency Services:**

I refer to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services general circular dated 20 October 2021 and titled "Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccinations for DFES Staff", which states —

As the State Government's direction does not apply to volunteers, DFES will continue with its plans to implement its Infection Prevention and Control Policy.

- (1) Will the DFES infection prevention and control policy mandate vaccinations for DFES volunteers?
- (2) When will this policy be released and what time frames will be mandated for volunteers to receive their first and second dose of a COVID-19 vaccination?
- (3) Noting the health advice from the Chief Health Officer of 19 October specifically excludes DFES volunteers, has the minister or DFES received subsequent health advice supporting a mandatory vaccination policy for DFES volunteers?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. The following answer is provided on behalf of the Minister for Emergency Services.

- (1)–(2) The DFES infection prevention and control policy is still in its consultation phase and under development and does not mandate vaccination for emergency services volunteers. Emergency services volunteers who have not received a COVID-19 vaccination may be required to participate in control measures.
- (3) DFES has not received additional advice from the Chief Health Officer following the announcement.

#### DANGEROUS SEXUAL OFFENDERS — GPS TRACKING DEVICES

*Question without Notice 867 — Answer Advice*

**HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (South West — Minister for Regional Development) [5.03 pm]:** I advise Hon Peter Collier that we do not have an answer from the minister at this stage, but hopefully we will have that tomorrow.

**CONSTITUTIONAL AND ELECTORAL LEGISLATION AMENDMENT  
(ELECTORAL EQUALITY) BILL 2021**

*Second Reading*

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

**HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan)** [5.03 pm]: To conclude, we now have a system that apparently is corrupt that was constructed by the now Premier and now Attorney General; Minister for Electoral Affairs. That is what we are dealing with. In addition, a report I mentioned and quoted from extensively yesterday handed down by the Standing Committee on Legislation unanimously argued against having a whole-of-state system for the Legislative Council. Membership of that committee included Hon Jon Ford from the Labor Party as chair; Hon Giz Watson, deputy chair; Hon Kate Doust, the former President; Hon George Cash; Hon Adele Farina, former Deputy President; Hon Peter Foss; and Hon Paddy Embry. Yesterday, I quoted numerous examples of correspondence in this report from members of the regions desperately asking the government not to go down to an all-of-state approach. I urge members to read this report and look at my comments from yesterday. Nothing has changed—it is now 2021 and we are at the point at which we are basically going to disenfranchise rural Western Australians. I will read from one letter that I received. It was sent to the Premier by the president of the Shire of Narrogin. All members will have received this letter because it went out to all members. The letter states —

Dear Premier

...

Any electoral reform that reduces the voice of regional people is a concern for not just Narrogin —

Several members interjected.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Excuse me —

and its electors,

**Hon Darren West** interjected.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Do you mind!

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Steve Martin):** Members, please. Order! The member has limited time remaining, thank you.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** The letter continues —

but also the electors of the wider district. Narrogin, as a sub-regional centre, services not just the 5,200 residents of this Shire, but also the immediate hinterland of over 11,000 people.

These are people that rely on the Members of Parliament of metropolitan areas appreciating and recognising that one vote one value and equal representation between voting districts, based purely on population, would be totally inappropriate and indeed unjust.

In a State as diverse, large and indeed in many instances remote, Governments need to consider the voices and issues of the minority, as well as the voters that have the largest voice (or power). Labor has, since inception, been founded and prided itself on representing the masses, the downtrodden, the common man (and woman). We in the country, need your help more than ever now.

The letter goes on —

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Do you mind! I have a minute left.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Members! Order, please. The member has very limited time remaining.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** The letter concludes by saying —

Premier, on behalf of the constituents of our municipality and representing its 5,200 inhabitants, we ask this question, will you allow your Labor MPs a conscious vote on this matter?

I finish my contribution today, Acting President, by saying exactly that. The Labor Party has not given its members a conscience vote. The Labor Party going into the 2021 election did not ask its constituents whether they wanted an all-of-state franchise for the Legislative Council, to basically napalm rural representation. It did not give them that opportunity. The Labor Party needs to give its constituents an opportunity now to have their say. I say to the Labor members opposite, particularly those from the regions: this is your opportunity; do not be silenced. Stand up and have your say. Express how you overwhelmingly support your constituents' disenfranchisement in the Legislative Council. Have the courage of your convictions. You voted on this legislation in the caucus room, you voted for it. I have not seen one Labor member stand at this stage. Now is your opportunity; have the courage of your convictions and stand up and say how you feel about this new electoral system. Put it to the people you represent and give them the opportunity to have a say, because you did not give them that opportunity before the 2021 election. For those reasons, I totally oppose this bill.

**HON JAMES HAYWARD (South West)** [5.07 pm]: I stand to voice my opposition to this bill as a soon-to-be-extinct member for regional Western Australia —

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Are the Nats going to do that badly?

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** We are not talking about the Nationals WA; we are talking about regional members. With the Constitutional and Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Equality) Bill 2021, the Labor Party is out to wipe out specialist regional members.

I draw members' attention to an article published the day after the state election, on 14 March, in which the Premier Mark McGowan is quoted as saying Labor would run a centrist government. When questioned about his intentions, he said —

“I don't know what the outcome will be in the Upper House at this point in time, I think it is pretty speculative ...

“People have seen—with me and my government—that we are very centrist, we are very ‘middle of the road’, we are very progressive, we are caring, but we are responsible.

“There is nothing to fear.”

That is what the Premier was saying the day after the election. I do not know what happened between then and 26 May, when the government announced it was going to wipe out regional representation. In fact, I was mocked in this house when I suggested that this was coming. I was told, “There's no proposal before the Parliament. I want the member to acknowledge that there was no proposal.” Surprisingly enough, the crystal ball that I was looking into turned out to be correct.

The real issue about this legislation and what I am really, really hoping to hear from members opposite in their contribution is for someone to articulate why this is good for the people who live in the bush. Tell me what the benefits will be for the people who live in members' electorates. How will this proposed system enhance the opportunities and experiences of people who live in the bush? How will it give them a political system that will serve them better than the current system? Explain to me how Dave from Mt Marshall will be better off under this system. How will it help him? What about Melissa from Boyup Brook? How will someone from Boyup Brook benefit from this new system, or Gary from Jerramungup, or Nerida and her kids from Newman? What benefit will this change deliver to those people who live in regional Western Australia?

The other thing I would like to know from members opposite is: What evil will this sort out? What is the problem that needs to be fixed so urgently that this was the most important piece of legislation for the forty-first Parliament? We know that it was the most important legislation because it was the first thing that the government did when it got back in. The government announced its specialist committee on electoral reform on the first or second day of sitting. Clearly, it was the most important thing for this government to do. I am looking forward to someone explaining to me what the government is trying to fix. We have heard outrage about the idea of malapportionment. Malapportionment is the problem, we are told. There are people who get to elect a member of Parliament with fewer votes than someone else and apparently that equals injustice. That is what we have heard so far. Let me give members a bit of an idea about what life is like in regional Western Australia. My electorate of the South West Region is 38 592 square kilometres.

**Hon Darren West:** Luxury!

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** I agree; it is luxury. I welcome the member's interjection because his electorate, the Agricultural Region, is significantly larger than that; it is 288 922 square kilometres. The Mining and Pastoral Region is 2 205 281 square kilometres—two million square kilometres!

**Hon Dan Caddy** interjected.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** How does that compare with the metropolitan electorates? The North Metropolitan Region is 536 square kilometres, the South Metropolitan Region is 799 square kilometres and the East Metropolitan Region is 3 681 square kilometres. That is what we are talking about. We are talking about the massive space across our state that members of Parliament need to service. That is what we are here for. It is not about us; it is about our constituents. That is why I cannot wait for members opposite to explain to me how this proposal benefits the people in their region.

**Hon Darren West:** If you sit down, we will.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** I can guarantee the member that I will not be sitting down for a while.

Which legislation has failed? What has broken in the system that has caused the state to shudder, fault or not work so that it needs to be fixed? What has gone wrong? Why is this legislation so important? Talking about the idea of malapportionment, potentially, people are disadvantaged. Interestingly, at the last state election and other state elections we have found that, largely, each of the regions is a microcosm of the larger electorates. The definition of “microcosm” is a community, place or situation regarded as encapsulating in miniature the characteristics of something much larger. An example of that is in the Mining and Pastoral Region where we saw a landslide towards the Labor Party, just as we did in the metropolitan area. I am wondering why there is a sense of great injustice when

the reality is that the microcosms in each of the regions reflect how the major parties and the other parties do across the state. The issue is how this will affect people's lives. What will be the change on the ground for the mums, dads, workers, pensioners and children who live in our state? What will change for them? I suggest to members that experience throughout history has shown that the political result in each of the regions largely reflects each other.

Another thing we have heard is that Hon Wilson Tucker was elected with 98 first preference votes. The reality is that he reached a full quota. He was actually elected in fifth position, I am pretty sure, ahead of one of my parliamentary colleagues who would otherwise be here. Hon Wilson Tucker reached a full quota. How did he reach the full quota? He reached a full quota by a complex and complicated system of preferencing, which I think we would all agree should not exist within our Parliament. That is how he was elected. I have asked before: who could possibly get elected with so few first preference votes? The answer is Hon Jackie Jarvis, with 66 first preference votes.

Several members interjected.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** How about Hon Shelley Payne, with 36 first preference votes; Hon Sandra Carr, with 37 first preference votes; and Hon Kyle McGinn, with 32 first preference votes?

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Steve Martin):** Honourable members, please direct your comments through the chair.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** I apologise, chair. Hon Kyle McGinn got 32 first preference votes; Hon Peter Foster, 18; and Hon Rosie Sahanna, 23.

Several members interjected.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** I do understand the system. It is a preference flow. I understand it. All I am saying is that whilst members opposite have claimed outrage over Hon Wilson Tucker being elected with a small number of first preference votes —

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** His whole party got 98 votes.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** Yes, that is correct.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** That is very different from tens of thousands. Your argument has flaws in it.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Order, members! Hansard is struggling to hear the debate.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** The government has made the issue around first preference votes. I understand what the Minister for Mental Health is saying about the party, and I do not disagree with him. I agree that the system needs to be changed in relation to preference whispering. All I am pointing out is that the outrage is a beat-up.

I saw an article by ABC South West WA in the newspaper today that I could not help but share with members. The article says fludated—fluorided —

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Spell it out for Hansard!

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** I will give it to Hansard afterwards!

The headline states —

Fluoridated water rollout set for 2023 Bunbury, 55 years after Perth

Bunbury is going to get fluoride in its water 55 years after Perth. Members like to mock, but the fact that the regions do not have the same basic —

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** You're the one who was mocking. You were mocking people over here. So if it is mocking, mocking is catching.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** Some 55 years later, Bunbury still does not have fluoride in its water. We talk about the fact that regional Western Australia is disadvantaged because there are special circumstances, and people like to mock that, but the reality is that things that members take for granted here in Perth simply are not available in regional areas.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** With the greatest respect, honourable member, the Liberals and Nationals campaigned against fluoridation in Kununurra before the last election—not this recent election. Look after your own backyard. If your party is campaigning against it, it makes it hard for the government to deliver these things.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** I have only 33 minutes left, honourable member; thank you.

The problem with what is being proposed is that you guys are calculating electoral equality at the beginning of the equation and not at the end. Let me give members an example. I get that it is not the best example but it is an example that I want to use because I think it communicates what I am trying to say. If the state government decided to give every family in Western Australia a litre of milk, what ultimately would be delivered is that people in Perth would get fresh milk, and people in the regions, depending on how far out they live, would get sour milk. That is the reality. Obviously, there needs to be some consideration about what special arrangements could be put in place for regional people.

**Hon Darren West:** Aren't the cows in the regions?



**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** They certainly are in the regions.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Members, please direct your comments through the chair.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** This is what I mean by making an evaluation about equality. A uniform approach might sound like it is equitable and fair but what will it actually deliver? What will it actually deliver to the people who we are here to serve—the people who elected us? Just because “uniform” sounds fair does not mean it will be fair and equitable. There are many examples within our society in which we see need and the government responds to needs that are not uniform. An example would be, with the greatest respect, some of the challenges that Indigenous communities face or children who, for whatever reason in their social setting, might not get breakfast. The state runs programs, rightly so, to help those young people because there is a need and the state responds appropriately. It is not a uniform approach but it is an important one that makes a difference in people’s lives. That is why we need to understand what these changes will do for people who live in the regions.

The argument that regional electors have too much say is nonsense. We know that the regions have 16 seats and there are 43 metropolitan seats in the lower house. There is no way that the regions have their way in the lower house—in fact, of the 16 seats, Mandurah and Dawesville are two. There is no way one could argue that the regions have too much say in the lower house. In the upper house, we currently have half and half—18 and 18. People might say that that is over-representation, but given that the role of the lower house is to form government and bring legislation, it cannot be argued that regional people are over-represented in the Parliament and have too much say.

The other thing is that the upper house, as we know, has a different role from that of the lower house. One of the roles of the upper house is to check and make sure that legislation is fair and equitable for the people of Western Australia. How does a member do that if they do not live there? The reality is that people who live and work out in the bush have an understanding of issues that people who live in the city do not necessarily have. Regional members would attest to that. They know some of the challenges.

**Hon Klara Andric:** Where exactly are we going?

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** We will get to that, honourable member.

There are significant challenges, as many members would know. I have written to some members about some challenges facing people in Fitzroy Crossing. Fitzroy Crossing is a place that has always had significant challenges. I do not dispute that. It will probably need support and work for some time. Who is going to go to Fitzroy Crossing after this legislation is passed? Western Australia is a pretty big space to get around. Why would a member for all of the state, who is based in the metropolitan area, go to Fitzroy? There are not enough people there to get enough votes to make any difference. Why would they go there?

**Hon Dan Caddy:** That’s the way you think; it’s all about votes, not doing the right thing! That shows the mentality of your party, mate.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** It is not at all. In fact, what I am saying is “read the play”. You have to understand politics.

**Hon Rosie Sahanna:** Do you know anything about Fitzroy Crossing at all? You’ve been there, what—once in your last trip recently?

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** I have been to Fitzroy Crossing many times and I would certainly be happy to meet and discuss it with the member.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Members, order, please. Please direct your comments through the chair.

**Hon Rosie Sahanna** interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** I am sorry, honourable member—no. Hon James Hayward has the call.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** Thank you, Mr Acting President.

The reality is that it is about servicing people. The Leader of the House said just the other day, when we were talking about sending this bill to committee, that we are the experts in this room. We are the ones who have worked in political parties; we understand how they work. We understand preselection. We understand all those processes. The honourable member would well know that small constituencies are always traded off in that model. A central model will mean that places like Fitzroy Crossing, Jerramungup and Boyup Brook that do not have large populations will have far less contact from their local members. If members do not believe that that is true, I would be very surprised. They might not say it is true, but I think deep down they know that that is exactly what will happen.

Under this new system, there will not be enough people in the current Mining and Pastoral Region. I think there may just be enough people in the Mining and Pastoral Region to fill one seat. There will be enough people in the current Agricultural Region to fill two seats, and probably five seats in the now South West Region. That is if everybody in those communities voted for just a single member of Parliament. At the moment, six members look after the Mining and Pastoral Region, which is over two million square kilometres in size. That is a significant region to

get around and it is a challenge. The honourable members sitting in this house who represent that area on both sides of the chamber will talk about the difficulties that they have getting around to the communities and about how massive the region is. That is a challenge for six people to do. How do we think one person will do it? Of course, not everybody will vote for the same flavour or the same party, so that means there will be not even one person, but half a person or a third of a person voted in from the current Mining and Pastoral Region. That is the amount of effort we will see. I understand that members will probably jump up and say, “We’re regional members of this party and we’re going to hang around!” I have no doubt that they will; I do not doubt their intentions in wanting to do that. However, if we press the fast-forward button and move two or three cycles along, ultimately, the candidates will be retracted to Perth and those regional voices will no longer be here.

Several members interjected.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** Talking about New South Wales—thanks for bringing it up—I quote from Antony Green’s report —

My experience with NSW is that exhausted preferences combined with a low quota results in the final seats being won by candidates that are well short of a quota. That will be a major problem if the whole WA Legislative Council is elected from a state-wide electorate.

A state-wide electorate combined with a high rate of exhausted preferences under optional preferential voting could result in effective differential quotas being produced. Larger parties will elect all their members closer to the state-wide quota, while smaller parties slip in at the end of the count with a total vote well short of the quota.

**Hon Darren West:** Antony Green supports this reform.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** I am not sure that he does. I do not think that that is reflected in his report, but the member will certainly have an opportunity to stand up and talk about that later.

Interestingly enough, in the 2015 New South Wales election, three members were elected. Remember, they have only half elections; we are proposing whole elections. In New South Wales three members were voted in with less than a quota. The smallest was the Animal Justice Party with 0.39 per cent followed by the Christian Democratic Party, with 0.64 per cent and the Shooters Fishers and Farmers Party with 0.86 per cent.

The reality is that we do not know—we will not know until the system is running—what that will look like for 37 members. It is running at about five to 10 per cent, but we do not know the numbers. I do not propose that I know the exact numbers, but the point I make is that there will be some parties and some members who will not get the same votes as others in the system. Basically, we are taking a system that is perhaps not perfect and replacing it with one that will perhaps not be perfect, and certainly will be imperfect in many ways, particularly for the sake of regional people.

The reality is that the Premier and the Western Australian Labor Party care more about Tasmania than they do about regional WA. The Labor Party is using the argument about malapportionment and having equal votes, yet it is happy to benefit from a federal system that allows that to happen. Tasmania has 12 senators in the Senate. Under this argument it would be entitled to only one. Tasmania has 12 times the amount of voting power. There is nothing on the agenda, apparently. Nobody is concerned about the terrible circumstance that gives Tasmania 12 senators in our federal Parliament. I do not hear the Premier speaking about that. I do not hear anybody from the Western Australian Labor Party complaining about the fact that there is malapportionment in the federal system and that it needs to be fixed. We also benefit from that system because otherwise WA would be entitled to only, say, five senators.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** What—based on New South Wales having one?

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** There would be seven senators for Western Australia and New South Wales would be entitled 24 if the same approach was taken.

Here is an interesting point—I certainly do not want to have a fight with the unions —

**Hon Dan Caddy** interjected.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** That’s it!

I have always valued my contact with the unions, particularly in my role as a journalist. Unions have always been a terrific source of information and have helped me in many ways. But UnionsWA says that there are about 150 000 union members in the state. Union members make up about 60 per cent of this house, which makes the union movement over-represented in this house.

Several members interjected.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** This is a centrist government. That is right. That is what I understand.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** There are three Nationals here. That makes you over-represented too; we are not complaining about that.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** I am not sure how that works.

Nobody seems to be worried about that. Nobody seems to be saying that eight per cent of the population has 60 per cent of the say, potentially, in Western Australia's upper house. Nobody is saying that. The reality is that if we were to argue about undue influence within the state Parliament, we certainly could not make it about regional Western Australia. That is the point.

I want to talk about the ethics of this bill, particularly for regional members. The Premier said that electoral reform was not on the agenda. We heard that. Regional candidates communicated that message to the electorates that they were seeking to serve. I was on ABC South West with Hon Jackie Jarvis who told Stan and the listeners that Mark McGowan said electoral reform was not on the agenda and that basically there was nothing to worry about. She went on to say that she would not support a reduction in regional representation. Many members of the Labor Party—regional members—told their electorates that it was just a Liberal and Nationals smokescreen and they had nothing to worry about. That is one of the explanations that I heard in this house. We know that the Premier said that “enhanced regional representation” would remain. He definitely said that. He said it in Albany, the epicentre of where this all started. He said seven times that it was not on the agenda; he said that enhanced regional representation would remain.

I think Hon Alannah MacTiernan said in this house that the Premier was talking about large district allowances in the lower house—that they would remain. If that is honestly the truth, how deceptive is the Premier? Is that honestly what he was talking about? He was asked by Dan Mercer on the ABC —

If Labor is returned next Saturday will you pursue electoral reform in the Upper House?

The Premier's response was —

... it's not on our agenda enhanced regional representation will continue ...

Are government members telling me that when asked about upper house reform, the Premier of the day answered about enhanced regional representation in the lower house? Do they think that that is reasonable and fair for the community? I do not think that is right at all. It is deceptive behaviour. It is deceit. I do not believe that he meant that. I do not think he envisaged what is happening now would happen until, obviously, the final numbers were counted in the upper house. I think Hon John Quigley said on the steps of Parliament House that electoral reform has been a dream of the Western Australian Labor Party for 120 years. Obviously that dream, that desire to see that opportunity, was too good to be true, irrespective of the commitments that the Premier made to regional Western Australia before the election.

Hon Tjorn Sibma said in his speech that a member for everywhere is a member for nowhere. That is absolutely spot-on. I know how hard regional members of the Labor Party work in their electorates. I have a tremendous amount of respect for the work that they all do and how difficult it is. Does Hon Darren West honestly believe that somebody in the future will be prepared to put in the work in the wheatbelt and the ag region that he has? It is not going to happen.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** Will you take a genuine interjection?

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** Fire away.

**Hon Tjorn Sibma:** It is the first you have made?

**Hon Dan Caddy:** Hon Tjorn Sibma said when he made this point that if you make it all of WA, it's too big and it's harder to be an effective member. If you distil that down, it means we are not as effective as lower house members because all our regions are bigger, and they're not effective as local council members. You're effective depending on how hard you work, member; it is nothing to do with the size of the electorate.

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** That is purely not right. There are some simple basics. It is easier to get around a 500 square kilometre electorate to meet people and do the bits and pieces than a member who has two million square kilometres to get around. It is significantly more difficult. I do not accept that. The other thing is that we are more accountable to our communities now than we will be in a whole-of-state electorate. If nobody sees us in the whole-of-state of electorate, who will know? If they do not see Hon Darren West in the ag region, they will not know. They will miss him. They see him now because he gets in his car, gets out there and does the hard work. I know other members do that as well. Who is going to do that? The reality is it will not be done. The honourable member sitting beside me still does not have an office. We have been here for six months. The reality is that he is still waiting for an office in Kalgoorlie. Would that be acceptable in the Perth metropolitan area? Not a chance. These are the sorts of challenges that people face in the regions.

There are 21 members of the Labor Party who represent regional Western Australia. Not one of those members has stood up publicly and said that they have any concerns with this legislation, yet this legislation is absolutely going to take away the opportunities and aspirations of regional people right across the state, because they will not have the services that they have today. There is just silence. I do not get that. Each of those members was elected. Their first job is to represent the people who live in their space. I get that Hon Dan Caddy wants to interject here. He is a metropolitan politician.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** I tell you what, I've spent time in Fitzroy Crossing!

**Hon JAMES HAYWARD:** As have I. Then the member will understand that there are challenges.

In closing, I, too, challenge those regional members to think about what it is that they are agreeing to and ask themselves into the future: is this really going to best serve the people who live in my communities? The answer is that it is not. It is not going to serve those people well. It will mean a retraction back to the city. There will be more metropolitan thinking, more metropolitan WA making all the decisions for regional Western Australia, and it will mean that people who live in those communities will be worse off.

I honestly, with everything in me, reach out to regional members and ask them to please rethink supporting this legislation for the sake of the people who live in their communities.

**HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral)** [5.41 pm]: I must say how slow the other side are to get on their feet. They have plenty to say in interjections about what we are saying about this bill; however, as yet, we have not heard a single regional member get up and defend this unconscionable and cynical piece of legislation.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** Best contribution for the last hour!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I am glad Hon Dan Caddy agrees, because he is going to get some more coming his way right now. We are going to read from that other place that cannot be named. Mr Don Punch. This is what he said.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** We've heard this already!

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Steve Martin):** Members! Order, please.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** You have not heard this one before, because it is the gift that keeps on giving from the Labor Party. He said —

There is ... little to compel upper house members to give special consideration to their districts in decision-making. In fact, most members tend to prioritise their own party issues.

Then he went on to bag out the Liberal Party. You know what? That is a sad reflection on the members opposite in this place, because it is certainly not a value or consideration that I have on my own duty to this place and my own duty to the people of the Mining and Pastoral Region.

Hon Stephen Dawson had quite a bit to say in the last session by way of interjection. He is a decent person, I must say.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Thank you.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** He is a decent person, and I enjoyed standing with him at the polling station in Broome. We had some very good conversations. I know that he knows a lot of people I know up in that part of the world, and I know that he genuinely attempts to deliver for his community and his region. I am certain that he does not agree with what his colleague has said in the lower house. I am certain he does not.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** I didn't hear him say it, but I look forward to seeing the evidence.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** The minister can go to *Hansard*. I can read it to him again if he just wants a recollection —

There is ... little to compel upper house members to give special consideration to their districts in decision-making.

When the member ran for preselection in the Willagee state by-election, I am certain that he was thinking of bigger things, such as getting into Parliament.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** That was after I ran for the Mining and Pastoral Region. You haven't done your research properly!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Not according to Wikipedia! The minister had better get his officers to fix that up, because it says that he unsuccessfully contested the preselection at the Willagee state by-election. It is true to say that he did run number six on the ticket for the Mining and Pastoral Region, so I see that he had a long-term interest in that region and then obviously thought that there was another pathway into the Parliament. Good on him, and I am not decrying the point that he wanted to have his voice heard in one of these houses.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** Why did you run, member?

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I will get to that, honourable member. In 2013, he was elected to represent the people of the Mining and Pastoral Region. I know, because Hon Stephen Dawson confided in me, and I am sure he does not mind me sharing this—I will not spill the beans on anything that he shared —

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Anything I said to you wasn't in confidence, so don't say I confided.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I do not think it is something he would be concerned about. It was an issue around being, at the time, the single member for the Mining and Pastoral Region for the Labor Party. I am currently—I will share this honour—the single member for the Liberal Party for the Mining and Pastoral Region. It is actually a tough

gig. I understand that there is a bit of understanding across this place about how tough it is in the job of opposition, but the important thing is those people in our district who come to us when they are not being heard by their local members. Again, I do not want to criticise excessively the local Labor members for those seats in the Mining and Pastoral Region, because they are all, again, very decent people. The member for Kimberley, Divina D'Anna, is very sincere and is doing a good job in attempting to represent her region, but there are some massive challenges in that region. Who do people come to to get their voices heard when they are not being heard by the government? We see this point by the honourable—not the honourable; he is not an honourable—Mr Don Punch.

Several members interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Is he Hon Don Punch? My apologies. It says in *Hansard* “Mr D.T. Punch”.

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** Because he is a minister, he is given the honorific.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Of course. Thank you for the correction. What I might do is get a glass of water, if someone can, please. That would be excellent.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** I'll get it!

**Hon Martin Aldridge:** What are they doing to it?

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** We see that comment about there being very little to compel upper house members to give special consideration to their districts.

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** Make him take a sip first!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Thank you.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** It is an honour, member!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** See—we can work together! We are actually a bit of team in this place, and I think we get on better than we probably make out in the Parliament at times.

The important thing is that counterpoint. It is having that person to call when members have to take the party line as laid out. In fact, most members tend to prioritise their own party issues, because it is very hard for a member in the other place to criticise the government if things are not working properly, but it is very easy for somebody in the opposition, because that is our job.

We had a presentation on the previous report, which was done by a bipartisan committee that looked at the structure of this place and understood the importance of the voices that need to be heard on the other side. There are 27 local governments across the 2.2 million square kilometres of my electorate, and I confess that I have not yet been to all of them; I am still getting around, and I have been a member since May. When I talk to constituents, they say, “Who do we talk to to raise issues of concerns when they are not being heard?” Of course, I give them my card and say, “Ring me and I'll ask a question in Parliament. Email me and I'll stand up and make a member's statement, or I'll go behind the chair and talk to the minister and ask them if they can resolve the issue.” That is why the structure has been established in this way—so that there is a counterpoint to provide balance in our electoral system.

I think it is a very good system. Is it perfect? I do not know. I spoke about this yesterday in debate on the motion to refer the legislation to the Standing Committee on Legislation. We saw the example of my home country, New Zealand, where the process took 10 years from a royal commission to the first election in which mixed member proportional representation was introduced. There was detailed consultation, and the community was brought along with the process, but this government just wants to ram the Constitutional and Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Equality) Bill 2021 through Parliament. As I said, I will be proud to be here when a “Constitutional and Electoral Reform (Electoral Equity) Bill” is brought before the Parliament. The idea of replacing the word “equality” with “equity” is fundamental to our democratic system. I make the prediction that eventually there will be a bill with that title brought before this place, and I will very much endorse it.

This is a very cynical exercise that highlights the way in which the smart people in the Attorney General's office were able to come up with the plan to have 37 representatives in this chamber. Hon Martin Aldridge pointed out that the idea of having an odd number of members does not actually play out in reality. I think Tasmania is the only jurisdiction that has an odd number; what a ridiculous idea. I have a theory about the cynical reason for that idea. Apparently, the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform did not have that in its terms of reference, and it did not make that recommendation. It was cooked up in the office of the Attorney General or the Premier to try to make this legislation more binding so that we cannot go backwards. Let us look at section 73(2)(d) of the Constitution Act, which states —

expressly or impliedly provides for a reduction in the numbers of the members of the Legislative Council or of the Legislative Assembly ...

Section 73(2)(g) states —

the Bill has also prior to such presentation been approved by the electors in accordance with this section,

A future government that wants to restore the current arrangements after this legislation has been passed will have to go to a referendum. This is the game that has been played. We can increase the number, no problem; just throw in another member, because that will make it mathematically difficult to go backwards. That is the cynical approach of this government. It received the committee's report and said, "Let's go with the statewide idea, but how can we stop it going backwards? Six times six is 36; how can we stop it? Let's make it 37. Then all they can do is say seven times six."

**Hon Dan Caddy:** You know the regions haven't always had the same number.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** We know that, but it is a very important point that we will not be able to unwind this legislation to a regional equivalency; we will have to have one seat with seven and the others with six, so it would not be possible.

Several members interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I am just making the point about how cynical this government is.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Steve Martin):** Order, members!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** We heard yesterday that the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform did not even travel to the regions. It did not even go and ask people. I know Hon Stephen Dawson has spent many hours out in the regions, whether around a tree in a remote community or in a town hall meeting in a regional town. He has travelled far and wide. His pathway into this place was through representing the regions, and I will also continue to do that for the next three and a half years I have in this place because I was elected by the people of my region to represent their views in this place. But we can see that that is going to change. The Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform did not even bother to go and talk to people in the regions or canvass these ideas in detail across our vast state.

I want to take members on a bit of a walk through the regions.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** A Wander Out Yonder!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** A Wander Out Yonder! Yes, because I think it is important, for the record, to highlight some of the specific issues that the regions face. We know that the regions are the economic powerhouse of the state, and I could talk about that at length, but I will not because that is a positive thing from the point of view of the whole state; there are some enormous numbers that we do not need to go into. I want to talk about the specific issues facing the resident communities, and some of them are very serious issues. The committee took a very mathematical approach to this, and I was shocked when I read its report. I actually did a search for the word "Aboriginal" and it came up, I think, five times. It came up three times in the annexures in the context of why the current system should not be changed, but not a single reason was given as to why it should be changed. I think that is appalling, and it was absolutely remiss of that committee to not even consider or justify that. The word "Aboriginal" popped up only twice more.

In the Kimberley, 50 per cent of the population is Aboriginal. Hon Rosie Sahanna is someone who is from that country, and I respect that. She is someone who was born and bred there, and she understands, but members of those communities probably have more in common with people in the Northern Territory than they do with people in Perth. If the Kimberley were part of the Northern Territory, that region would have at least three, possibly four, members of Parliament. The Premier throws out his quasi-secessionist concepts; I will not be surprised if, in a few years' time, a bunch of Kimberley people say, "We're getting such a raw deal from the Parliament of Perth, we actually should be part of the Northern Territory because we'd be a lot better off. We'd at least have understanding and some representation." The Kimberley is a very different place from Perth. People need to live there to understand it and properly represent it. It is the most linguistically and culturally diverse place in Western Australia. It is almost 500 000 square kilometres if we include all the electorate, such as the area south of Balgo, which has been added to the Kimberley electorate to get the numbers up. The Kimberley has very specific issues, which I will continue to prosecute and on which I will challenge the government. I can see members with a frown on their face. If they do not agree with me, that is a disgrace. The Kimberley has very specific issues.

We have seen the challenges with some of the crime, sexual assault and family assault data. We have also seen the issues of stealing motor vehicles and problems with juvenile crime. I am not trivialising this. It is important to speak about these issues because we have to find solutions so that we do not lose a generation to hopelessness, failure and loss. Where is the Perth newspaper headline of police being hunted? We saw that headline relating to the Kimberley the other day.

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn:** They got into a scuff. The police had to shoot somebody this week in Gosnells, for God's sake, to protect themselves.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** The member is talking about a city of virtually two million people. The rates of disadvantage in the Kimberley far exceed those in Perth. If we "proportionalise" that—let us look at motor vehicle theft data—it would be equivalent to 27 000 cars being stolen in Perth every year. That is the "proportionalisation" of that

number when we look at it from the point of view of the population. We need to do something. There is a crisis in that community. Nurses are leaving communities such as Wyndham because of fear. This is a common occurrence. Members opposite might say that none of this is a problem but they are sitting safely in Perth. Perhaps members feel that way and maybe they are right. Perhaps these people are wrong. Perhaps the people in the bush are wrong. But I will listen to the people of the bush before I listen to the people of Perth. Unlike Hon Don Punch, I will give great consideration to the people of my region during my discussions in the party room or in this place. It would not matter whether or not I was a member of the government; I would do that because I always put the people of my region first. I am accountable to those people because they elected me.

I refer to the issue of untimely or premature deaths. Something in the order of 72 per cent of people who die in the Pilbara die prematurely. They do not die because of old age. I cannot recall the exact number across the state, but it is something like 40 per cent. These are important things. Suicide is one of the top three leading causes of death in the shires of Ashburton, Broome, Coolgardie, Derby–West Kimberley, Exmouth, Halls Creek, Karratha, Laverton, Leonora, Ngaanyatjaraku, Port Hedland and Wyndham–East Kimberley. These are serious regional issues. I am not saying that honourable members on the other side of the house are not thinking about this or trying to do something about it. I am imploring members to recognise that special representation is needed for people in the regions. They need additional representation because of their special issues. The situation in the regions is much more dynamic, diverse and difficult, and members need to get around to talk to people to bring these issues to the fore. As they say, the best disinfectant is sunlight and the only way these things can be dealt with is to bring them to the surface and present them in this place so that they can be dealt with and so that something close to equality can be brought about. That is the essence of equity. When there is disadvantage, we need to bring about over time something that is close to equality. I believe that we share that endeavour. I believe that we are all on the same page with that. When we dig down to our deepest consciousness and deepest morality, every single member of this place has the same view. I do not criticise people for their deepest consciousness and morality because we all come from different backgrounds. We come from different sides of the aisle but we all believe in the same thing—that there should be equality. But not through a mathematical figment of the imagination of someone who is based at Curtin University who sat down and did a half-assed—sorry, excuse me. They did a half-baked—apologies.

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**Hon SANDRA CARR:** Point of order!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I will retract that word.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Thank you, honourable member. I will give Hon Neil Thomson an opportunity to retract.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I retract that term. It just came out of my mouth.

*Debate Resumed*

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** There was a half-baked report without a decent time frame, which is what this issue needs. They sit in their ivory academia towers thinking that they have done something worthwhile on this matter, but they have not—and nor have the Attorney General and the Premier. We can look at the ranking of some of these problems. In Ashburton, coronary heart disease is the number one killer. Land transport accidents are the second highest killer in the shire of Ashburton—who would have thought?

**Hon Peter Foster:** There's over 1 000 kilometres of road!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I know. Hon Peter Foster, I agree with you. I am on your side. I have spoken to the honourable member about joining us on this side of the house at any stage. He is welcome to join the Liberal Party in order to speak up. In fact, at the Pilbara Regiment, Hon Peter Foster was announced as representing the opposition more than once by the Governor so I figure that that is a good reason for him to join us. It was announced by the Governor, so it is official—he is a member of the opposition. Come and join us, Hon Peter Foster, because you are on our side; you are concerned about these issues.

I refer to the two-year delay on Manuwarra Red Dog Highway.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Do not reflect badly on the Governor.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** My apologies again. Acting President, do I need to say something about the Governor?

**Hon Stephen Dawson** interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I will keep that in mind. Thank you, honourable member, for your guidance. Hon Stephen Dawson guided me as we stood together at the polling booth—we are in this together because we want the best for our state. We want to see equality by the virtue of equity in this place leading to a position in which we have equality across this great state for all its residents.

We know that geographical separation is a massive issue. The boundaries of geographic separation are definitely closing in—roads are getting better and air services are improving—but some massive issues are getting worse. I refer to the fly-in fly-out mentality.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** Do you need some more water?

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I am very touched by the honourable member's consideration. Thank you.

The FIFO issue was no more obviously demonstrated than in today's question time with the question that related to the FIFO dog called Hank. The great region of our state, which is the size of a moderately-sized European country, does not have a single resident police dog. Not that long ago, Hank was the talk of the town in Broome—PD Hank had done this and that and he appeared on Facebook. Then, without any consideration of the community's view, the dog was returned to Perth. At that time, I was very much of the view that it is fantastic to have the soft touch of a dog and the sharp teeth of the law, and that is why we engage young people.

**Hon Samantha Rowe:** What's that got to do with the bill?

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I am making a point here if the member just listens. Someone based in Perth, probably, made the decision that we did not need the police dog anymore. It was not a priority in the budget. Off he went back to Perth. But members know what happened a couple of weeks later. The government had to fly the dog there to hunt down and bring in the person who had done a runner—he is still on the run from Broome Regional Prison. The services have already been wound back, but because I am here, I am raising this issue. What if I were not representing the four electorates? Would it all just be brushed under the carpet to disappear? FIFO is a scourge.

Several members interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Has Hon Rosie Sahanna raised the issue of Hank? I will ask the member this: does she think we should have a FIFO dog servicing —

**Hon Rosie Sahanna:** Are you really worried about a dog? There are other issues to be worried about in the Kimberley.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I am worried about FIFO services. That is just an example. Let us take FIFO child support services.

Several members interjected.

*Point of Order*

**Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD:** The member should be directing his comments to you, surely.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon James Hayward):** Hon Neil Thomson, you probably have only a few minutes before you will be interrupted, so if you would like to keep your comments directed to the chair, that would be most helpful.

*Debate Resumed*

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Comedy hour is almost over!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I am not sure the issue of suicide being a top three leading cause of death for about nine or 10 of the local governments in my region is comedy hour, member. I think it is a very serious matter, because unless people speak up and talk about it, we will not deal with it.

I am not going to go through every single one of them. We get limited time in this place as members of the opposition, but I invite members opposite, especially members of cabinet, to speak with me. If they are willing to engage me in discussion, I am happy to talk behind the chair about what might be the best solution. I do not always go out and make a big song and dance about issues. I get calls from the media and I say that it is not appropriate for me to make a comment. I say that they best go talk to the traditional owners or the local people about the issue. I am not always out there trying to make a point, because I want to see change in my region. I want to see things improved in my region. This place is not simply a house of review. The job of this place is not simply to review legislation. It is to get out and talk to people and be that counterpoint to those elected members, particularly in the government, who might find it challenging to speak up about these matters. The government just wants to suppress everything. It wants a good news story for its next Facebook post and to say, "How great are we going at the moment?" We see some of the Dorothy Dixers that are asked in the other place. Thankfully, in this place we do not have that culture. We spend most of our time talking about issues that are important. I am keeping an eye on what is going on.

I am prepared to continue and would like to talk about another piece. Recently, we had the budget estimates hearings. I do not know how many on the government side sat through all those budget estimates hearings, but again it was an incredible process that allowed me to raise issues relating to not only my portfolio responsibilities of planning, lands and heritage, but also my region.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** Planning was not called to estimates. What are you talking about?

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Yes, but let us say the portfolio issues, particularly in relation to transport.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** Your shadow portfolio was not called.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** If the member opposite, who keeps interjecting on me, would care to look at *Hansard* and see the issues I raised, particularly in the transport portfolio—yes, on a technicality they were not related directly to planning, but definitely were a result of the planning process—he would see that I made a very meaningful contribution. I did as much as possible in this place in the time frame that we had.



The important point is that, in addition, sprinkled throughout the hearings—it was probably about 50–50—I asked questions relating to my region. I have also looked at my questions in Parliament since coming to this place and it has been about 50 per cent, so I have been able to ask many questions related to my region in addition to questions about my shadow portfolios. I know that a statewide process will go through, but it is important to make the point that it will be up to the parties to make sure that members will represent the regions. It will absolutely be up to the Labor and Liberal Parties to do that. I call on the Labor Party to ensure that it has people allocated to the Mining and Pastoral Region when it goes through its big predetermined list from the union movement or whoever makes those decisions. Apparently, 16 people get to make that decision.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** That was you I was talking about.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** There were more than 16 people who made the decision, and they were regionally based, by the way. That is why I am here.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** Sixteen people, 18 votes.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** The decisions were made based on regional people who travelled to the place. But anyhow, I should not be distracted by the honourable member next to me who just keeps talking about this matter. The point is that it will be up to the parties to make sure that regional representatives are present in the regions to take on these issues.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Do you know what I reckon will happen, member, that will give you a bit of space? I reckon Hon Nick Goiran will jump over to the Christian Lobby party and be the leader of that. That will leave a bit of space for you.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I am not going to take that interjection. Acting President, the important thing is that by having people on the ground and travelling around our region, we can speak up for the 27 local governments in my region. I will give members another example—the Shire of Dundas. I travelled by road from Hyden to the Shire of Dundas the other day. I must say that this is a common and recurring theme that I hear when I am in the regions. When I was with the people there, a comment was made that they do not often see politicians.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Perhaps they could be a bit nicer and maybe they would.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** We can see that there is a lack of real consideration. All the Minister for Regional Development can do is make some sort of negative comment about that group. It has suffered seriously from a decline in population. It is looking forward to the Pantoro Ltd project, which will, hopefully, be coming online in 2022. A number of issues have come up for the region, particularly around the environmental protection of the Great Western Woodlands. That is a big concern for the people of that community.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** They want it protected, or not?

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** They absolutely want it protected. They are also worried about road safety issues. This is a constant thing. It does not matter which shire; I can pick any one of the 27 local governments in the Mining and Pastoral Region. It is important that I do the job and get about, and that I call on the four Labor members of the Mining and Pastoral Region to join me and get out and talk to people right across the region, and make sure that they are actively travelling throughout the region. I know it is quite handy at the moment because Labor has three lower house members and four upper house members in the region, so it can spread the love around pretty comfortably. However, by having this one Liberal in the region, I am able to hold members to account and say, “Are you doing your job?” I will hold the minister to account.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members. I invite the member to make his comments through the chair and not across the chamber.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Thank you, President. It is good to see the President in the chair, by the way.

**The PRESIDENT:** I am very pleased to be here, just for you, honourable member.

Several members interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** It is an unruly lot here today.

**The PRESIDENT:** Not helped by you, honourable member; please continue.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** My case today —

**Hon Colin de Grussa:** Is rested.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** It absolutely is rested—I rest my case.

A government member interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Thank you, member.

Members, especially those who share the Mining and Pastoral Region, please join with me when the division comes on this bill and stand for those people in the Mining and Pastoral Region who voted for you. Please do not support this bill. Do not be like Mr Don Punch. Go against his statement, which I will reiterate —

There is very little to compel upper house members to give special consideration to their districts in decision-making.

This one time members can say, “Member of the Legislative Assembly, you are wrong. I will give full consideration for the districts that I represent. I will consider the disadvantage that my region suffers because of its geographical isolation. I will consider the disadvantage my region suffers because of the unique challenges that every family in our region face. And I will consider the diversity of our regions, from the Kimberley, which is more like the Northern Territory, down to the goldfields and across to Kalbarri.” Members, come and stand with me and vote against this bill so that it can go back to the drawing board for reconsideration. Thank you.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

### SIR CHARLES GAIRDNER HOSPITAL — EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

#### *Statement*

**HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [6.22 pm]: I rise tonight to make a statement about an experience I happened to have when I had to take my dad to the emergency department in Perth on 15 October. It was interesting to see and experience from the inside what was going on in that department at the time. As some members will know, dad has been undergoing treatment for oesophageal cancer, which has involved radiation. It has been pretty brutal, I have to say, watching someone who was a very fit and healthy person—never smoked or drank in his life—go through that and to see the dramatic effect that it has had on him.

Anyway, on the Friday morning he had had a follow-up treatment. At that point, they did say, “Your condition is not great. If it does not improve, pop into the ED here”—this was at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital—“and we’ll get you up on the ward where we can offer further treatment.” That all sounded fair and reasonable, until we arrived at the emergency department, of course. We arrived at Charlies emergency department at 5.05 pm. About 45 minutes later, dad got through the waiting room and into the ED room—briefly. It was just long enough for him to have an intravenous line put in, be stuck in a wheelchair and then wheeled back out into the waiting room, because there was no room to keep him in there.

While we sat in the waiting room for another six hours before he got a bed in the emergency department, I witnessed a procession of people with various ailments. Of course, the wonderful design of our EDs, with the reflective glass or perspex panels in front of the nurses, meant I got to know everybody’s ailments pretty well, because people have to shout in order to be heard by the nurses on the other side of the panel. I do want to say that the staff were absolutely amazing given the circumstances they faced in that emergency department, which I am sure they face every night. I commend them for the way they conducted themselves with every patient and every person who walked into that place. I witnessed elderly people who could barely stand but had to stand because there were no seats, until someone would come and find them a chair or wheelchair to sit down on. Of course, as people walk into Charlies, they see a line on the floor and a sign that says, “Stand here until you can see the person behind the desk”, but that takes quite a long time.

There were those people, but I also saw a procession of people—I lost count of how many, and it disturbed me greatly—almost one after another, with the same complaint, “I’ve just had my COVID jab today and my arm is really sore.” There were dozens of them sitting in the emergency department. There were some pretty ill people in that department at that time, and there were just so many people who did not need to be in an emergency department. Of course, the staff behind the desk cannot turn them away; they have to treat them. They have to triage them. They have to do their job. There are obviously some significant pressures on our hospital system and our emergency departments but it is not helped by people turning up with ailments like a sore arm from a COVID jab. I do not know what the solution is. Perhaps some of those people were in genuine need of emergency treatment. I am not a doctor so I am not qualified to make that call, but, from what I saw, I do not think so.

Mental health patients in great distress were coming into the emergency department, but they could not be seen. I could see they were in great distress and significant mental anguish. It was pretty traumatic to witness so many different people coming into that place who could not get through the door because there were so many people in that place who probably did not need to be there. I do not know what is being done to divert people away from EDs, but it is clear to me that people are either not aware of or are not seeking alternative pathways, or they are not available. I am not sure what the answer is there either, but it is clear to me that something needs to be done to divert people from emergency rooms.

It was about 11.10 pm by the time dad finally got a bed inside the emergency ward, which was great. I sat there for another 45 or 50 minutes before I went home. While we were sitting in the emergency ward, a fairly senior nurse came in with two boxes of examination gloves. She popped them on the desk in the middle of the ED ward and announced to everyone, “I’ve done it. I’ve found us two more boxes of gloves, but I’ve been unequivocally told that we’ve gone over budget and there’s no more room for gloves, so this is it.” I looked a bit sideways at that, but there

was a lot of shaking of heads and tut-tutting by the doctors and nurses on staff that night. I do not really know the veracity of the claim, but it was pretty clear that she had had to work damn hard to get those two boxes of examination gloves, which I think would pretty much be essential kit for an ED.

The next day I went to the hospital in the early morning. Dad was obviously still in there; he had been moved to a different part of the ward that was a little quieter, which was great. He had managed to get a bit of sleep and he was looking mildly better. But the patient next to him had obviously been deemed infectious, so no-one would pass through the curtain to talk to him. The doctors would stand on one side, and anyone who went in would put on the full hazmat protection suit, plastic visor and so on. I am not sure how safe other persons were in that ward. I guess that is what has to happen. The protocol obviously is that doctors and nurses have to put on that protective equipment when patients are deemed to be potentially infectious. I thought it was a concern that they were so close to others, but there was nowhere else for them to go. Finally, at 1.00 pm on the Saturday, so 21 hours after arriving in the emergency department, dad got a bed on the ward and the treatment he needed. It took until then before he got any real treatment other than intravenous fluids, but the staff were fantastic and did everything they could. He was discharged on the Monday afternoon. I think he needed to stay longer, but they needed the bed because the hospital was full, as is the case generally at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, but particularly in the oncology ward. Having sat through that period and witnessed countless people coming in with all sorts of, frankly, minor ailments, I wonder what we are doing to divert them and I wonder what we are doing to support the staff, whom I really felt for. They were almost at the end of their tether with the amount of work they were doing. Of course, when we arrived, about nine or 10 ambulances were parked out the front. That did not change. We came back in the morning and there were a dozen ambulances parked out the front. That is just the way it was.

I wanted to recount that experience to the house so that we can all be aware of what is going on inside our emergency departments and so I can have the opportunity to express my gratitude to the staff at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, both in the emergency department and on the ward and, of course, the oncology team who have been helping out dad over the last few weeks. They are doing a fantastic job. They are amazing human beings. I thank each and every one of you for the work you do trying to keep Western Australians safe. I hope that at some point we can find solutions to the problems that plague our hospital system, particularly our emergency departments.

#### **DR MICHAEL LIVINGSTON**

##### *Statement*

**HON SHELLEY PAYNE (Agricultural)** [6.32 pm]: Similar to Hon Colin de Grussa, I rise tonight to recognise the people in our medical profession who are working hard and doing very important jobs. I congratulate in particular Dr Michael Livingston, who just last week won the Distinguished Service Award from the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine in recognition of his significant contribution to rural and remote medicine and for his general service to the community. For the past 12 years, Dr Livingston has been working as a doctor in regional WA, with his main practices in Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun, travelling hundreds of kilometres between clinics to attend medical emergencies around the region. Ravensthorpe is a small town about 180 kilometres from Esperance and 300 kilometres from Albany. His other clinic is in Hopetoun, which is 50 kilometres further again. There are many stories over the past 12 years that prove his dedication to the medical profession and his community.

As well as his work as an emergency physician, he has worked hard to improve the health of those living in the regions. He also operates clinics in Jerramungup, which is 130 kilometres from Ravensthorpe, Bremer Bay, which is 210 kilometres from Ravensthorpe, and Varley, which is 110 kilometres north of Ravensthorpe. He has also worked really hard over the past year to set up COVID-19 vaccination clinics around the regions, including at Ravensthorpe, Hopetoun, Varley and Jerramungup. He has single-handedly given over 1 300 COVID jabs. His hard work in promoting and delivering the COVID vaccine is one of the main reasons that these communities have such high rates of vaccination. The community spirit that Dr Livingston has demonstrated, along with many other people in our regional communities, is a large part of why our regions are so special and why I am proud to represent its people. Dr Livingston's work is valuable to these regional communities. I again extend my congratulations to Michael and his beautiful family for his well-deserved award and I thank him again for his contribution to our regional communities.

#### **WITTENOOM CLOSURE BILL 2021**

##### *Receipt and First Reading*

Bill received from the Assembly; and, on motion by **Hon Alannah MacTiernan (Minister for Regional Development)**, read a first time.

##### *Second Reading*

**HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (South West — Minister for Regional Development)** [6.34 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of this bill is to allow for the acquisition of the last remaining privately held properties within the former Wittenoom town site. Acquisition of the 14 remaining freehold properties will occur by using the compulsory

acquisition provisions of the Land Administration Act 1997. The previous version of this bill was introduced by Hon Ben Wyatt during the last Parliament, and although it was passed by the Legislative Assembly, it was unable to progress through the Legislative Council prior to the Parliament being dissolved ahead of the 2021 state election. In introducing this updated bill, it is my intention to finalise the acquisition of the last remaining private properties within Wittenoom as soon as possible.

It has been more than 100 years since blue asbestos was first identified in the Hamersley Ranges and more than 80 years since it was first mined and milled in the area's gorges and surrounds. What followed that initial discovery and mining was a replication of what was occurring elsewhere in Western Australia when a new mineral deposit was found; that is, a workers' camp was established, which then evolved into a thriving town site. In this case, it led to the establishment of the town of Wittenoom, which, at its peak, was reported to be home to 20 000 workers and residents.

The mining of asbestos in Wittenoom ceased in 1966 as the significant health impacts on workers and residents became more evident. In 1978, the government of Western Australia made the unprecedented decision to phase down the town. As part of the phasing-down process, the government closed the Wittenoom town site—it was formally abolished as a town in 2007—withdrawed the provision of services, installed significant warning signs and, more importantly, purchased a significant number of the privately held Wittenoom properties from owners who sold voluntarily.

Since the previous version of this bill was first introduced into Parliament, two of the remaining property owners have taken up an offer from the government and subsequently transferred their properties to the state. There now remain three property owners, who collectively own 14 properties within the former town site and with whom the government has been unable to reach a final agreement. Given the ongoing health risks associated with residing in and visiting Wittenoom, the intention of this bill is to compulsorily acquire these last remaining properties as a public work under the provisions of the Land Administration Act. The bill will also provide each landowner with compensation to be paid commensurate to the value of each property, based on property type. Once the bill is passed and the private properties have been acquired, the government will remove all remaining above-ground infrastructure within the former town site to limit the attraction and opportunity for people to visit and stay in the area.

By no means will this bill put an end to the contamination issue in the area; it is part of a larger body of work required to mitigate future public health risks and manage the contamination caused by the mining and use of asbestos in and around Wittenoom. Further, the bill is a significant step in resolving the unfortunate legacy of one of Australia's worst industrial disasters, which has led to thousands of deaths and the area's reputation as the largest contaminated area in the Southern Hemisphere.

I wish to acknowledge the Banjima people, who are the traditional owners of the land on which the former town of Wittenoom is situated and who have been, and continue to be, heavily impacted by exposure to asbestos. It is essential that the Banjima people are part of the decision-making process in finding a suitable outcome to the ongoing management of asbestos contamination on their country. The government has committed to work with the Banjima people to address this longstanding industrial legacy and support them in their aims when possible.

Pursuant to standing order 126(1), I advise that this bill is not a uniform legislation bill. It does not ratify or give effect to an intergovernmental or multilateral agreement to which the government of the state is a party; nor does this bill, by reason of its subject matter, introduce a uniform scheme or uniform laws throughout the commonwealth.

I commend the bill to the house and table the explanatory memorandum.

[See paper [829](#).]

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

*House adjourned at 6.39 pm*

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