

Mr Richard Court; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Julian Grill; Mr Hendy Cowan; Ms Megan Anwyl; Mr Kevin Minson;
Mr Bill McNee

KING AIR ACCIDENT - CONDOLENCE MOTION

MR COURT (Nedlands - Premier) [10.09 am]: I move -

That this House records its sincere regret at the death of the people in the King Air plane tragedy and tenders its deep sympathy to all the families.

This tragedy has touched the hearts of all Western Australians. Eight people from two States and New Zealand have been killed. The aviation industry is an important part of our State's economy and, in a way, part of our social life. Many people must travel long distances and there is a heavy reliance on air travel, particularly in the mining industry in which fly-in fly-out arrangements have become increasingly common over the past two decades. The airport is often empty during the day on a Friday because an "armada" of planes is out working. On a Friday night and Saturday, however, the tarmac is full of the relatively small aircraft that are used to take people to remote parts of our State. The aviation industry has a good safety record, given the number of flights that take place. However, this tragic accident shows that some questions and safety issues remain unresolved and that we must be forever vigilant in ensuring the safety of the aviation industry.

On behalf of the Government, I express heartfelt condolences to the families, friends and workmates of the pilot, Ken Mosedale, who was known to some of us; Shaun McKay; Frederick Fineberg; Justin and Barry Woods; Brett Hewett; Roger Clarkson; and Matthew Luberda. We think of their families, friends and those people in the mining industry who travel to different mine sites in different parts of our State on a daily basis. I believe it is appropriate that this Parliament take the time to express its condolences, particularly as many members either knew these people personally or represent electorates in which these people lived and worked.

DR GALLOP (Victoria Park - Leader of the Opposition) [10.12 am]: I thank the Government for accepting the Opposition's initiative to acknowledge the grief and loss experienced through the death of the pilot and seven passengers of the King Air plane. We all know the importance of mining to the Western Australian economy and we need to recognise that it is a dangerous and risky operation. The commonality of fly-in fly-out operations provides another risk for those involved in this important industry. As the names of the victims are released, we become aware of the grief of the families and friends of the deceased. We offer our sincere condolences to all those who have lost their loved ones and friends. Such tragic losses are always very difficult, but the loss of these husbands, fathers, sons, brothers and friends will be even harder to accept due to the unexpected nature of the disaster in which they were caught up. The thousands of Western Australians who work in our mining industry on a fly-in fly-out basis and those in the aviation industry who support them will have a special understanding of the tragedy surrounding these men and their families. There are too many deaths in the mining industry, with six fatalities on mine sites already this year. Although these additional eight tragic deaths did not occur on a mine site, they are mine related. We recognise that considerable improvements in safety practices in the mining industry have been made over the past 12 years. However, even one death is too many. We must redouble our efforts to improve safety in the mining industry.

I offer the sincere condolences of the Opposition to the families, friends and work mates of the victims of this tragedy.

MR GRILL (Eyre) [10.14 am]: I join the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in speaking to this condolence motion. I express my deepest sympathy to the families, loved ones and the work mates of those who were killed in this tragic accident. Some of the victims and one of the parents of the victims are known to me, and I know this loss will touch many people in my electorate. Nothing we say here today will bring back those people, nor do I expect that anything we say here today will even console their families and loved ones. However, I am pleased that we are having this condolence motion so that we can indicate to the loved ones of the victims that we care about them and their loss and extend to them our sympathy and support. We can say, as we are saying now, that we care about these events.

It was a truly tragic event and a harrowing experience for all involved. I express my sympathy to the loved ones and the work mates of those killed and to the management executives of Sons of Gwalia Ltd. They have been through a harrowing time. They knew within minutes of the aircraft taking off that something was wrong, but did not know what. They had the unenviable task of endeavouring to contact the families of those on the craft. Of course, they could not convey to those people any definitive knowledge of the situation. It must have been a harrowing experience to have to make those telephone calls and it would have been worse when they revisited the families to indicate that the plane had crashed and all were dead. I have known Peter and Chris Lalor for most of my life, and I also know Mark Cutifan, the company's managing director. They are all compassionate, dedicated mining executives and wonderful people. They did not use third parties to convey any of the information to the families or appear at the press conference; they did it themselves. I think their actions bring them credit.

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I might be slightly at odds with my leader; however, I do not think these losses should be considered mining industry deaths, but as an aviation accident. The mining industry has received much blame over the past few months following a series of fatal accidents. I was talking with my colleague the member for Kalgoorlie about this matter just a few minutes ago. She expressed the view, with which I concur, that there but for the grace of God go any of us. I am on an aircraft every second day of the week and I know the member for Kalgoorlie is in much the same situation. We are quite often on small aircraft similar to the King Air. There but for the grace of God go many people in our community. These events are terribly tragic. Likewise, this accident cannot be laid at the feet of the fly-in fly-out operations. I do not agree with fly-in fly-out operations; I would rather they did not exist. I know the Leader of the Opposition and Premier probably agree. However, they do exist. Over the years, the Lalor brothers have endeavoured to minimise the number of workers on fly-in fly-out contracts. The operation at Leonora was predominantly not a fly-in fly-out operation, although some people did fly in from Perth. However, about 25 or 30 employees, quite a number of families and all senior staff remain on site. The management of our premier Western Australian-owned and operated mining company has done the right thing in this case. I would not like it to be blamed in any way.

A memorial service will be held next Wednesday at Leonora at 2.00 pm. I hope to be there, and I hope some of my colleagues will also be there.

MR COWAN (Merredin - Deputy Premier) [10.18 am]: The National Party joins with the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Eyre in this condolence motion. It extends its deepest sympathy to the friends and families of those people who lost their lives in this accident.

Many of us here feel close to this tragedy because, as the member for Eyre indicated, we spend much of our time flying to accomplish the tasks we have set ourselves. In an exercise done in conjunction with the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal last year, I calculated that I spend in excess of five hours a week in an aircraft. That does not include any time I spend travelling to and from my electorate. Those people who use aircraft as their major part of travel fly for many more hours than I do. We are very close to that mode of transport.

I also have been talking to the people involved with the management of Sons of Gwalia Ltd. The member for Eyre is correct: They feel very intensely about this issue. They have prided themselves on the fact that they take a very close interest in the management of that company and have a hands-on operation. The member is correct when he says that the management dealt with this issue directly rather than assign someone the task. For a State that depends so heavily on the mining industry, which depends so heavily on air transport, this is a tragedy that reminds us yet again that we must be extremely vigilant about safety in the aviation transport industry. I assure members that it is on the minds of everybody. I was at the airport at seven o'clock yesterday morning and it was a very solemn place.

On behalf of the National Party, I extend its sympathy and condolences to all the members of the families who suffered a loss in that accident and also to the management of the Sons of Gwalia operation.

MS ANWYL (Kalgoorlie) [10.21 am]: I, too, offer my condolences to the family, friends, work mates and associates of the people who were so tragically killed in this accident. I also want to acquaint those members of Parliament who are not familiar with mining communities with the effect that such an accident has on the whole community. I am aware that a number of members of Parliament have children, siblings and relatives in the mining industry. Every time we hear of the unfortunately too frequent accidents that occur, either in or associated with the mining industry, people immediately wonder whether their spouse, one of their relatives or family members was affected by this. I have a number of friends who work at Sons of Gwalia, most of whom work on a fly-in, fly-out arrangement from Perth. The associated weight of that is much worse for those who have family members who are working underground or elsewhere. It is difficult to offer condolences to the families without also acknowledging the very recent tragedies that have occurred underground at both the Bronzewing mine and the mine where Mr Criddle lost his life only last weekend. It is worth remembering that people who live or work in mining communities have a constant fear that one of their loved ones will be affected in a tragic accident of this nature or in one which is associated more directly with the mining industry.

The effect on families of the general level of toil and the extremely long hours that are worked is never brought home to me more than when I am in Perth and get up very early to drive to the airport. Other members have spoken about the number of people lined up to get on aircraft. There is not a lot of traffic on the roads in Perth during that drive to the airport at 5.00 or 5.30 am. If members were on the roads in Kalgoorlie-Boulder at 4.30 am, they would think it was peak hour. One is constantly reminded of the very long hours and the extremely hard nature of the work that those people experience.

Even though some of the children of these families have chosen to live in the metropolitan area, their families are still in the goldfields-Esperance district. I am sure all members wish to pass on their best wishes to the

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families, relatives and work mates of these people and to remember the extremely difficult nature of the mining industry generally.

MR MINSON (Greenough) [10.24 am]: I, as have other members, put on record my condolences to the families, particularly to the family of the pilot, Ken Mosedale, a man I knew pretty well. He was a very careful pilot, with whom I had flown on a number of occasions. Indeed, he had unofficially commenced my training on multi-engine rating. When I say "unofficially", he used to let me sit in the copilot's seat and take the controls, and he explained what to do. He was very thorough and unflappable and a very cool and competent pilot.

I was disappointed to hear on the news this morning that both the manufacturer of the aircraft, Raytheon Aircraft of America, and the Royal Flying Doctor Service have not supported the call by the Deputy Prime Minister to install in these aircraft aural warning signs for the loss of pressurisation. If a warning system is to be installed and wired up to a flashing light in an aircraft that costs about \$2.5m or \$3m new, it is just as simple to wire it up to some sort of siren as well. The true cost is probably literally only a few dollars, although aviation engineers and processors tend to inflate these things by many hundreds or thousands of per cent. If that is shown to be the cause of this accident, it will be the second one in Australia to be caused by depressurisation. If that is the case, I hope that John Anderson prevails and follows through with his request to the Civil Aviation Safety Authority to make these changes.

The fact of the matter is that when something goes wrong in a multi-engine aircraft, the cockpit becomes an extremely busy place. The pilot must fly the aircraft and make his radio calls, as well as a number of other things. What happens if something goes wrong in an abnormal way - perhaps the bulb of a flashing light does not work - and there is no backup siren? Perhaps eight people lost their lives for want of something that is probably worth about \$5 - a siren that could be hooked up as well as a light bulb. That would draw the pilot's attention to the fact that the aircraft was falling below the required pressurisation levels to ensure that the level of oxygen in the pilot's blood was such as to keep him conscious.

It is not for me to pre-empt the Civil Aviation Safety Authority's inquiries. I acknowledge that there are hundreds, and probably thousands, of King Air aircraft flying in the world. It is one of the safest aircraft of its type. If I were the owner and operator of a King Air aircraft, I would go down to the local tractor manufacturer and buy a \$5 warning siren and wire it up to my flashing light. It would not be legal because it would interfere with the original design of the aircraft. If it transpires that depressurisation was the cause of this accident, such a simple device would have saved the lives of eight people. I hope that John Anderson follows through with this particular inquiry. I saw Ken not only when I flew with him, but also when he frequented the Royal Aero Club of WA. He was not a member of the Royal Aero Club, of which I am the vice president. However, on behalf of the Royal Aero Club, I extend our sympathy to his family. I know he will be sadly missed.

MR McNEE (Moore) [10.29 am]: I support the comments of the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and other members. We all understand the difficult conditions under which people work. It brings home to us the suddenness of death when people leave home in the morning and never return. That is a terrible thing with which people must grapple and cope because it is so unexpected. I express my condolences to the families of those people. I particularly want to mention Ken Mosedale.

I flew throughout my electorate with Ken piloting the aircraft many times. When I charter an aircraft I always feel that I am putting my life in someone else's hands. We often do that with professional people, so we must have real trust in them. Ken was a professional in every way. I have been with Ken at airstrips at night, which are fire lit. Irrespective of whether he arrived at the plane first or we were with him, he always thoroughly carried out all the appropriate safety checks. He was a man whom I admired. I can remember on one occasion flying to Leeman from Perth where the weather was fine. When we reached Leeman the weather was nasty so we flew around for some time, until eventually he said that we could not land. I did not argue.

He was very proud of his family. When on the ground he frequently telephoned them to advise them when he would arrive home. I extend to his family my sincere condolences and I hope that they can look forward to better times.

Question passed, members standing.