

*Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs — Fifty-eighth Report —  
Overview of petitions 2 June 2021 to 2 December 2021 — Motion*

Resumed from 12 October on the following motion moved by Hon Peter Foster —

That the report be noted.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** I know there is not a lot of time before we move from this report to another one, but I want to take the opportunity to refer to and reflect upon some of the petitions dealt with by the committee over the period covered by the report. I will start on a positive note, as I generally like to do. I note that petition 3, “Speed limit on Bussell Highway”, which is dealt with on page 5 of the report, probably has to be considered a successful outcome, although not necessarily as a result of the work of the committee, which is often the case. That is not a reflection on the committee, for the committee members who are present in the chamber today, particularly Hon Peter Foster, the chair of the committee. The committee went through the process of consultation, which is excellent. It did its job as it is supposed to do; I make no reflection upon that.

Page 6 of the report says —

The Committee resolved to finalise the petition on the basis that a project is underway to improve Bussell Highway through the construction of an additional 17 km of dual carriageway. Once the works are completed, further traffic data will be collected by Main Roads and a decision made about whether any changed traffic conditions are required.

At the time, that may well have been a reasonable supposition to make. I note that, as I am sure members of the chamber from the south west, particularly Hon Jackie Jarvis, will recognise, the speed limit was dropped to 80 kilometres an hour in that area. That change was not necessarily a result of improvements being made to the road but an ongoing campaign, which had support from all sides of the chamber. I actually attended a little celebratory event in the Shire of Capel, and awards were handed out to the people who had supported the campaign. The Shire of Capel was rewarded. The original campaign was put together by the Capel Country Women’s Association. People take their life in their hands when they oppose anything proposed by the CWA, so everybody was a little nervous about taking an alternative position. The member for Collie–Preston was also there, and I thank her for supporting the campaign. Apologies to any members of Parliament I have missed who were also at the event. A former member of this place, Hon Colin Holt, was also thanked for his work in supporting the cause. We had a member of the National Party, a member of the Labor Party and a member of the Liberal Party all being thanked for their work in this direction. The committee itself did not generate the change, though it obviously worked on it, but it was a good outcome. It may well be one of the best outcomes of any petition that has gone through. The petition itself did not specifically lead to the result, but it certainly did not do any harm.

I also want to mention petition 4, “Biosecurity levy imposed on the residents of Bridgetown–Greenbushes”, found on page 7 of the report, and petition 26, “Biosecurity levy imposed on residents of Boyup Brook”. Arguably, biosecurity is an issue that could be replicated around the state. The shires linked to these petitions are both in the Blackwood catchment. The committee looked generally at the issues under petition 4, and petition 26 referred to petition 4. These petitions raise an issue of terrible unfairness for communities that engage in biosecurity regularly and watch government not doing the job. Again, I offer no disrespect to the committee, Hon Peter Foster. This is a policy decision of government, so the committee is quite limited in its capacity to review.

People might remember me talking about this, as I talk about it a lot: the biggest recalcitrant on biosecurity in this state is the state government. Before members think, “We’re back to another party-political argument”, I assure them it is not. The recalcitrance has been a feature of numerous governments over a long period. Let us go right back to what used to happen. Thirty years ago, we had a thing called the Agricultural Protection Board, and its primary role was to deliver biosecurity outcomes. It was separate to but supported by the then Department of Agriculture. The Department of Agriculture hated it with a passion for as long as I can remember because the Agricultural Protection Board had its own leadership and the department was required to provide services to it. The department conspired for many years to get rid of the Agricultural Protection Board, the APB. It took until about 2011 or 2012 for the last vestiges of the APB to be killed off.

In 2006, the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act was debated. At that point, I was a member of the chamber that shall not be named, and I took up that debate as the shadow Minister for Environment. The debate then was exactly what the debate is today: rules can and should be applied to people managing biosecurity on the properties that they manage, but when the rules for government are weakened and watered down, the community sees government making almost no effort and the private sector putting in the effort that is required. That makes people incredibly angry.

Instead of doing the job that was required, the government instigated a process to establish recognised biosecurity groups. The upper Blackwood RBG was dealing with the two Shires of Boyup Brook and Bridgetown. The proposal was for the RBGs to do the biosecurity work, most of which should have been done by the state government or, in some cases, by recalcitrant landowners who did not do it. The RBGs were focused on the areas that needed

work. Generally speaking, private landowners who were not recalcitrant were doing the job for themselves. The government largely walked away from biosecurity. It abandoned ship on biosecurity. Again, this is multiple governments. I am not just blaming the current government for this. Governments abandoned ship. They gave the job to recognised biosecurity groups.

RBGs get their money by raising a levy that the government matches dollar for dollar. Most of them raise \$150 000 to \$200 000 in levies, which is matched by the government, so they get \$300 000 to \$400 000. That is enough to employ a couple of people to do a handful of work, but it is not enough to do the job they are theoretically there for, which is to take over the responsibility for biosecurity from the state. Because government departments, particularly the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions—the name of which should change back to something useful—do not do their job, these groups have to try to step up with minimal budgets. They cannot do it and they are being blamed. This was a disgraceful period, because landowners were outraged that they were paying another levy to fund activity when their biggest problem, particularly in Bridgetown, Greenbushes, Boyup Brook and Donnybrook, was a huge area of state land that was not being managed properly. It made them incendiary. What was the result and outcome of this problem? The poor old recognised biosecurity group—that wonderful group of volunteers who had tried very hard to deliver biosecurity—gave up, because the animosity and anger was too much. It was incumbent upon the government to step up and fix this issue, and it could not or it would not. This is a much bigger issue than the one simply being investigated as a one-off by the committee. The government needs to invest in biosecurity. The level that it does so at the moment is somewhat embarrassing and needs to be improved.

**Hon STEPHEN PRATT:** Given that I am a member of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs, I think I am obligated to make a contribution to the debate on this fifty-eighth report, titled *Overview of petitions 2 June 2021 to 2 December 2021*. I begin by thanking my colleagues on the committee for the work that has been undertaken so far—Hon Tjorn Sibma, Hon Shelley Payne, Hon Sophia Moermond, and obviously the chair, Hon Peter Foster.

**Hon Peter Foster:** Hardworking.

**Hon STEPHEN PRATT:** The hardworking chair—that is right! I will speak more generally on my experience so far and the process that has been undertaken by the committee through the petitions process. I slightly disagree with Hon Dr Steve Thomas's observation that the Bussell Highway petition did not necessarily equate to the outcome that was achieved. As was observed, it was part of a community campaign down that way. I think that most of us would understand that running a petition is often a valuable arm of a campaign like that that leads to an outcome, whether it be us enforcing that outcome or purely asking the questions that have been raised and putting the campaign on the agenda. It puts it front and centre. At the end of the day, it is good that the speed limit was reduced and those upgrades were done on that highway.

I will refer to a couple of examples that are along a similar vein in which outcomes were achieved. Sometimes principal petitioners may not be satisfied that what they were calling for has been achieved, but there is certainly value in presenting a petition and going through this process. The committee asks the appropriate minister or the governing agency for information, that is provided to the committee, and if the committee is satisfied, the petition is closed. We just spoke about transparency; this is a really transparent way for government agencies to respond to queries.

I think that the petition process is extremely valuable. I am going to point to two petitions. The first is petition 19 to increase bus services in Bullsbrook. Based on the Minister for Transport's advice, that was closed. Page 21 of the report states —

The Committee resolved to finalise the petition noting the Minister for Transport's advice the Public Transport Authority will review bus services in the catchment areas of the new train stations as METRONET further progresses.

We reached a point at which the work of the committee could not go any further, so the appropriate action was to close that petition based on that advice.

The second example I refer to is petition 27 on page 23 of this report, which Hon Dr Brad Pettitt introduced to the chamber. That petition was to do with a reserve in the City of Joondalup. After making inquiries, I guess the outcome would have been to the petitioners' satisfaction, but they may not have had clarity on the issue if it were not for the process that was undertaken. That petition was closed because the local government authority advised that it no longer intended to acquire that land. We were able to close that petition on the basis of that advice and provide clarity to those who had signed the petition that the acquisition they were concerned about was not going to proceed.

I wanted to touch on those two petitions and respond to Hon Dr Steve Thomas's contribution and his comments on Bussell Highway. I also want to touch on how impressed I have been with the work of the staff in supporting the committee members. They certainly make our lives a lot easier. It is done in a professional manner. I also thank Hon Tjorn Sibma and Hon Sophia Moermond, and our colleagues from the government the chair, Hon Peter Foster, and Hon Shelley Payne, for their work and detailed analysis of each petition. As I have said, every petition is dealt

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with on its face. There is no predisposition. Even if members have an opinion on something, I think that everyone approaches each petition with an open mind and accepts the advice provided by different government agencies and ministers. It is an important process and function of the Parliament. It has been a great experience for me, and the past few months that this report covers—June to December of last year—have gone quite quickly as we have all been learning the new roles that we have been elected into and working out our committee’s function. I look forward to our future work and speaking on the next report when it is handed down.

**Hon KLARA ANDRIC:** This is the first time that I have risen to speak on the fifty-eighth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs, which is titled *Overview of petitions 2 June 2021 to 2 December 2021*, and which, as mentioned by Hon Stephen Pratt, covers those six months. As outlined in the report, this committee was in fact appointed back in 2005. I agree with Hon Stephen Pratt that the process is transparent, and, as he noted, the process, if not necessarily the outcome, is a very successful one.

On page 1 of this fifty-eighth report, under the headline “Petitions process”, paragraphs 1.7 to 1.9 outline the various processes that are undertaken by the committee once a submission has been received. Paragraphs 1.3 to 1.6 on page 1 of the report outline the key purposes of a petition. Paragraph 1.5 states —

The Committee’s consideration of petitions serves to enhance transparency and to inform the Parliament and public about current issues of concern to the community.

Paragraph 1.3 of the report states —

A petition is a formal request for action from individuals or groups.

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