

## **COSSACK**

### *Statement*

**HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral)** [6.19 pm]: I am aware that people are concerned about the Matildas. It is nil all at the moment, so please do not be too anxious. I will update members on the score as we go.

I stand tonight simply because I have been asked to by some of my constituents, so I feel it is important to do so, notwithstanding some of the comments coming from others across the floor. I want to raise an issue in relation to the heritage settlement of Cossack. Many members will have been to Cossack and will no doubt be aware of the Cossack Art Awards. It is a very important heritage location in the Pilbara. It has a long history going back to the 1860s. Pearlers from Broome ranged down to that part of the world. It certainly has a long and deep history and also a huge connection. Historical buildings in the precinct are the location of the Cossack Art Awards, which the Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation operate and play an important role in.

A number of landowners have owned land through their families for a very long time. It goes back a long time. Schemes were put in place back in the 1960s, when people wanted to proceed with some sort of development. In my role as assistant director general at the then Department of Planning, I spoke to the then director general, Eric Lumsden, who has sadly passed away, because he was very interested in seeing a resolution to that situation. A degree of broken dreams and sadness has affected people who own these blocks of land and have paid rates in good faith, thinking that at some point they may be able to develop them as part of their dreams for the future and leave a legacy, as there has been a long connection with the family.

In 2022, a news article summed it up quite nicely. Some scheme amendment work had been done to provide an opportunity to develop a tourist centre in that location. There was a fair bit of debate at the time at the City of Karratha, which had a role in it. It was summed up in some of the comments by the mayor, who said that he felt sorry for those people. Development at the former pearling town has been prevented by myriad issues over the last four decades, including a special control area provision preventing development not connected to power, water and reticulated effluent disposal. This was a big issue, but after some discussion, the City of Karratha made the recommendation that there could be some development there and said that it might be sympathetic to a tourist outcome, which could provide capacity for more engagement in the community. As the shadow Minister for Heritage, I note that in other jurisdictions around the world, heritage can often be enhanced by engaging people on site. I know that the original houses have all gone—there are only remnants there—but having people in that part of the world would not, in my opinion, be a bad thing necessarily. Of course, there is the issue of scheme water, power and sewerage. I understand that the commission has made its decision on this and is not allowing for that possibility without connection, which is very unlikely to occur at any point in the future.

The point is that maybe it is time for the Minister for Planning to have a think about it and go up there and have a talk. We have a new Minister for Planning. As I said, I remember the former director general, Eric Lumsden, coming into my office in about 2012 and saying that he would resolve this longstanding issue because he felt sorry for those people. He felt there was a degree of unfairness about the way in which they might have been treated, or at least the expectation that had been created.

**Hon Kyle McGinn** interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I would appreciate it if I could be treated with silence, please, as I have been asked to speak on this matter.

There are many examples in our society where the saying “live and let live” can apply. Maybe there are ways of skirting around it with modern technology. Maybe under the right constraints and development conditions there is a way to provide people with the capacity to do some very light-handed development on that site, which might involve some residential development that allows people to live there permanently, particularly in support of tourism. That is my point. I am raising it today on behalf of those constituents. It is a sad case in which expectations and what has been delivered have been vastly different. Sadly, this is often a feature across our crown land system. In this case it is freehold land, but in some of those more remote areas in Western Australia, people have been strung along for a very long time indeed by bureaucracy. There might be an opportunity for the new Minister for Planning, Hon John Carey, who seems to be a very reasonable person, to get out there and meet and have a chat with some of those landowners when he is next in the Pilbara. The previous Minister for Planning had quite a capacity to make decisions on behalf of proponents when it so suited her, so I do not see why we could not see some engagement at least on this point. I offer that advice in the spirit of bipartisanship and in consideration of the very reasonable conversations that I had with many people about the future of Cossack. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

I hope that the Matildas do well tonight. Thank you very much.

*Point of Order*

**Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD:** The member should not be referring to his phone to get a score that we may not wish to hear.

**The PRESIDENT:** I am not clear on which standing order he is offending, so there is no point of order, but I call on members to demonstrate respect to other members in the chamber.