

**WESTERN AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF SPORT**

*Standing Orders Suspension — Motion*

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [2.54 pm] — without notice: I move —

That so much of standing orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the following motion to be debated forthwith —

That this house condemns the Minister for Sport and Recreation for ignoring the raft of issues confronting the Western Australian Institute of Sport and flouting the concerns raised by those who have trained at the institute.

*Standing Orders Suspension — Amendment to Motion*

On motion by **Mr D.A. Templeman (Leader of the House)**, resolved —

To insert after “forthwith” —

, subject to the debate being limited to 10 minutes for government members and 10 minutes for non-government members

*Standing Orders Suspension — Motion, as Amended*

**The SPEAKER:** As this is a motion without notice to suspend standing orders, it needs an absolute majority in order to succeed. If I hear a dissenting voice, I will be required to divide the Assembly.

Question put and passed with an absolute majority.

*Motion*

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [2.56 pm]: I move the motion. I take this opportunity to reiterate the motion: that this house condemns the Minister for Sport and Recreation for ignoring the raft of issues confronting the Western Australian Institute of Sport and flouting the concerns raised by those who have trained at the institute.

I reiterate that this is not about the quality of the facilities or the quality of our athletes; this is about Western Australians being worried about our former gymnasts and athletes, and Western Australians asking what is actually going on with the board. Another question is: what is going on with the minister’s review? I must say, from the outside looking in, as a Western Australian reading articles that the likes of Rebecca Le May have been writing in *The West Australian*, analysing what is actually going on at the Western Australian Institute of Sport, I believe there are questions to be answered. I think it is important for the Minister for Sport and Recreation to give the people of Western Australia some answers.

It has been reported in *The West Australian* and other publications over the last few days that we have now lost all our board members. Nine out of 10 board members have departed the scene and the one board member left is an ex officio deputy director general of the minister’s department, so the minister should be well aware of the things that have been going on at the Western Australian Institute of Sport.

Those are the questions. It is about the governance and the former gymnasts and athletes. What is happening to them, and what communication has there been? We know that the minister has made an apology; he spoke about that today, but what is going on with the review that he said would be tendered in February? Here we are in September and it still has not happened. The minister yesterday apologised on radio for the stalled process. Those are the questions that the people of Western Australia and I are asking.

I will just do a bit of a time line, if I can. I go back to when *The West Australian* broke this story on 24 April 2021 in an article by Annabel Hennessy titled “Scarred for life by Olympic dream”. It was an excellent article that was about how complaints have spanned over three decades from the late 1980s to 2016. The article states —

When Julia Murcia was just nine years old she wrote an entry in her diary titled: My worst nightmare.

...

In green felt tip she added: “I’ll never ever forgive or forget.”

Almost three decades on and Ms Murcia has certainly not forgotten.

The woman she was writing about was her gymnastics coach, and the incident is one of many where she was allegedly verbally abused during her training at the Western Australian Institute of Sport.

Some of the allegations were that child athletes were sworn at; harmful comparisons were made to other gymnasts; there was a negligent attitude to injuries; there were feelings of worthlessness among gymnasts; and gymnasts had had difficulties with relationships after being taught to be docile and compliant. This is about a sustained culture,

not one-off incidents. In that article, the Western Australian Institute of Sport confirmed that some of the allegations raised related to at least one coach who was still employed by WAIS in a managerial role. Gymnast Alliance Australia was formed to represent the athletes and told *The West Australian* that the group was seeking a public apology from WAIS. As the Minister for Sport and Recreation pointed out earlier today, he made that apology.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** No. Can I be very clear: I made the apology on behalf of the government and Parliament. That article relates to WAIS making an apology.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Yes. I have the article on the WA government's apology, dated 22 June 2022 and titled "Apology to gymnasts as child safeguarding unit established". Discussions have been ongoing with WAIS since September 2020. In an article in *The West Australian* of 21 April 2022, former child gymnasts who say they were abused at WAIS called for government intervention in the sporting body after Sport Integrity Australia released its report the day before. The report looks into allegations of the mistreatment of child athletes who trained in the now-defunct gymnastics program between 1987 and 2016. The Sport Integrity Australia report was ordered in 2021 after a group of former athletes came forward alleging they were abused during their time in the elite program. The women said they were subjected to physical abuse; forced to compete with serious injuries, such as broken bones; and were subjected to verbal abuse, including being called fat if their skin folds were too thick. Sporting Integrity Australia interviewed 92 people and collected more than 15 000 pages of documentation. It found it was likely that some gymnasts suffered abuse and/or harm at WAIS. It found also that the policies and procedures that governed the program did not adequately protect some of the gymnasts.

That is part of the time line of events. As we now know, earlier this month, six of the 10 members of the WAIS board quit. The three remaining board members quit shortly after that and it was left with one ex officio member on Monday night. The minister has appointed four male members to the new board. I want to put it out there that the organisation receives 90 per cent of its funding from the state government—\$2.416 million each year over the forward estimates—and around \$13 million in cash each year. That is a summary of the situation.

The thing that concerns me more than anything is that a media release on 8 February 2023 states —

Minister David Templeman today announced the open tender process to appoint a consultant to undertake an independent review into the culture and governance of the WA Institute of Sport ... is now live.

The government called for the tender on 8 February and here we are in September, and I do not think anyone is aware of where that review is at. The minister yesterday talked about his regret that the process has been stalled. It has been too long, minister. It has taken seven or eight months to get a review organised. These are the questions everyone is asking: What is happening with those board members? Why did they quit? I would appreciate an answer from the minister today. Was it because they were worried about their protection as board members and future liabilities? What is the situation with the four new board members the minister has appointed? Will they have any liability? Will the minister guarantee them some sort of exemption? These are the sorts of things we are worried about. I am also worried about the reputation of WAIS. It runs a great program. As the minister said today, many great athletes have come out of that institution. The facilities are great. Look at the aspiration of events such as the Commonwealth Games. Western Australia still has the opportunity to host the Commonwealth Games. I understand the Premier was keen for that until he went to the ALP federal conference and it came to a standstill. The state still has an opportunity to host the Commonwealth Games. The WA Institute of Sport still has aspirations, but the questions need to be answered: What is going on with the board? Why have those people resigned? Why has the minister had to appoint another board and what will the process be in filling that board? What has happened to the minister's review? That is what we want to know.

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Sport and Recreation)** [3.06 pm]: I will speak on the motion that stands in the name of the member for Roe. Of course, I completely reject the premise of the wording of the first part of the motion that condemns me for ignoring a raft of issues. The fact is that a new board has been appointed because of a range of processes that have broken down, including the capacity of the outgoing board to progress an important process, which is the restorative justice program for the gymnasts. As I said in question time, I am absolutely committed to that. The member for Roe went through a time line. He will note that the integrity report came out in April 2022 and, importantly, highlighted that there was a likelihood that various acts, including some of abuse and bullying et cetera, were likely to have been imposed on gymnasts from the 1980s through to, I think, 2016. They are very serious allegations and it was a very serious finding by the integrity body. I remind the member that these matters affected gymnasts, many of whom were children, or very young, so of course not only should those findings be considered very carefully, but also their needs and aspirations in seeking redress for those concerns are understandable.

I will just go through a few things that are important for the member to understand. The report came out in April 2022. On 11 May, the Western Australian Institute of Sport publicly stated its commitment to the former gymnasts and the WA community by responding to that review. On 22 June, after I had sought a meeting directly with the gymnasts, my decision was that we needed to apologise on behalf of government and that, in fact,

consideration of the apology—anything included in the wording—was done in consultation with the gymnasts because I wanted to come in here and make sure that what we said was appropriate to those gymnasts. Included in that were commitments. Many of those commitments require the actions of the board, which is an incorporated body, according to its governance model. As part of this process, we engaged the department to oversee some key actions. One action was to facilitate the restorative and reconciliation process that the report recommended. The other was, of course, to ensure that we had a process and a firm policy regarding child safety. That has been put in place. In our engagement, we included the Commissioner for Victims of Crime because we wanted to make sure that we had the expertise to advise on the establishment of an appropriate process. The commissioner has continued to work to prepare all parties to participate fully in this.

It is not a process that can be put in place in a couple of weeks, because we are dealing with some very traumatised people. I have personally met them, and I acknowledge the pain and trauma they have been under and continue to be under. I made the apology in June 2022.

The reason we have a new board in place is that I have been frustrated by the lack of progress, particularly in the restorative process. I had a meeting with the gymnasts a couple of months ago. I cannot remember the exact date; maybe it was just over two months ago. I recognised that I needed to talk to the board. I had a meeting with the board a few weeks back, and I said to the members, “I think we are in a stalemate. If the board’s concerns are a range of legal issues, we need to move forward.” I understand the board’s concern. Members are actually not paid, but they put themselves forward, so I am not critical of them personally, but I could not have a blocked and frustrated process. I am sure that the board members considered their situation and decided to resign. I think that is a good thing, because now we can put in place a board—I have done that—that is able to progress the restorative justice process, making sure concerns are moved forward and addressing some of the outstanding issues that could not be progressed by the previous board. I think that Dr Neale Fong and the others—as I mentioned yesterday and reiterated in the house today during question time—are very well positioned to do that. I thank Priya Cooper, a wonderful woman and an outstanding para-athlete, for her services to the board, but we had to move on because it had taken too long, and it was very frustrating for me. We will now continue to set a course.

Part of this is the cultural review. I understand PricewaterhouseCoopers has now been appointed to conduct the cultural and governance review. It is appropriate that we look at the culture of the organisation over its history to inform us about what other things might need to happen to make sure that the Western Australian Institute of Sport is functioning appropriately on behalf of the taxpayers of Western Australia and, more importantly, on behalf of the young men and women who have and will come through WAIS on their pathway to elite sport.

I am committed to that. It is important that we also look at WAIS’s structure and how it operates because, as the member for Roe highlighted, it gets millions of dollars from the state. That includes whether it should be. I am unashamedly interested in the new board’s considerations of how WAIS should fit within the governance arrangements and how it relates to me, as minister, and to Parliament. As the member knows, WAIS is an offline agency that we can call if we wish during the estimates process. I do not think we called it this time.

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** It was very difficult to find a question to ask.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** That is right. I think the question needs to be asked: is it better that it become a statutory body? That is something I would entertain. I would like to hear the argument why that would be the best option.

I think that board members should be remunerated; I honestly believe that. I would not be doing it for nothing. They do important stuff, so I would not be doing it for nothing. I am trying to progress what the remuneration would look like for a WAIS board going forward and, of course, ultimately, what the arrangements will be.

I will finish on this. I said this to Nadia Mitsopoulos yesterday: because of the nature of how sport is operating in the nation now, sadly, we will see more legal challenges about a range of past and present sports administration practices, and that will be a challenge for sports administration. We are already seeing it now with the concussion issue in the contact codes. We will see more of these sorts of things emerge, so we have to make sure that an entity like WAIS has a very strong governance structure and framework so it can deal with these things when and if they occur. Sadly, the reality of the world is that we will see more of this. The concussion issue is a live one, and we have only scratched the surface of that. Many others are likely to come at us. My focus is making sure that WAIS is absolutely in the best position to deliver as it should to the taxpayers, the athletes and the community of Western Australia.

I also acknowledge that it has been a very effective organisation for many, many years, delivering high-quality athletes and providing athletes into the future.

*Division*

Question put and a division taken, the Deputy Speaker casting his vote with the noes, with the following result —

**Extract from *Hansard***  
[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 13 September 2023]  
p4549b-4552a  
Mr Peter Rundle; Mr David Templeman

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Ayes (5)

Ms M.J. Davies  
Dr D.J. Honey

Mr R.S. Love  
Mr P.J. Rundle

Ms M. Beard (*Teller*)

Noes (42)

Mr S.N. Aubrey  
Mr G. Baker  
Ms H.M. Beazley  
Dr A.D. Buti  
Mr J.N. Carey  
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke  
Ms C.M. Collins  
Ms L. Dalton  
Ms D.G. D'Anna  
Mr M.J. Folkard  
Ms K.E. Giddens

Ms M.J. Hammat  
Mr T.J. Healy  
Mr W.J. Johnston  
Mr H.T. Jones  
Mr D.J. Kelly  
Ms E.J. Kelsbie  
Ms A.E. Kent  
Dr J. Krishnan  
Mr P. Lilburne  
Mrs M.R. Marshall  
Ms S.F. McGurk

Mr D.R. Michael  
Mr K.J.J. Michel  
Mr S.A. Millman  
Ms L.A. Munday  
Mrs L.M. O'Malley  
Mr S.J. Price  
Mr D.T. Punch  
Mr J.R. Quigley  
Ms M.M. Quirk  
Ms R. Saffioti  
Mr D.A.E. Scaife

Ms J.J. Shaw  
Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski  
Dr K. Stratton  
Mr C.J. Tallentire  
Mr D.A. Templeman  
Ms C.M. Tonkin  
Mr R.R. Whitby  
Ms S.E. Winton  
Ms E.L. Hamilton (*Teller*)

Question thus negatived.