

Hon Barry House; Hon Bruce Donaldson; Chairman; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Jim Scott; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Norman Moore

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS - CONSIDERATION

Committee

The Chairman of Committees (Hon George Cash) in the Chair.

Standing Committee on Public Administration and Finance - Sixth Report - Local Government Act 1995

Motion

Resumed from 7 May on the following motion moved by Hon Barry House -

That the report be noted.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I have a couple of additional remarks to those that I made the other day. I will not take very long. I am not sure whether I gave in my initial remarks my thanks in the most appropriate terms to the committee members and staff for putting together the report. As I mentioned, elements of the inquiry were contentious, but committee members and staff did an excellent job in managing those differences. It was difficult at times, but I am very pleased with the way in which we put together the report. I was not initially completely au fait with this inquiry, and I made my feelings known. It distracted us from other work and various other issues. However, I will not dwell on those. At the end of the day I am prepared to concede that the inquiry probably did prepare, to a large degree, the ground for the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development's subsequent actions. I still contend that he could have taken some of those actions earlier, but he ultimately took action with some of the evidence that the committee had gathered at that stage.

Hon Tom Stephens: How much earlier? Nine months earlier?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Probably the day the minister was on Liam Bartlett's radio program. I thought that he could have said that there were certain things that he could do and that he would get on with them. Never mind, we will not discuss that in too much detail. This was probably the most difficult inquiry I have been involved with in my time on parliamentary committees. It was on par with the inquiry a few years ago into the Rindos affair at the University of Western Australia, which members might remember. The then Standing Committee on Government Agencies got involved in that inquiry at the time. In hindsight, it probably should not have been involved in it.

Hon Tom Stephens: Did it ever report?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes. Anyway, I am prepared to accept that. The committee's inquiry - not the report itself, because the minister did not wait for the report - probably acted as a catalyst for certain actions. I put on the record that Parliament can learn some valuable lessons from the report about the process of parliamentary committee inquiries. The first lesson, which Hon Ken Travers alluded to last week, was that committees should never take evidence from a panel of witnesses who do not all agree with each other's points of view. To try to amalgamate some evidence and to facilitate not only our time but also the time of people who wanted to appear as witnesses, the committee arranged for six councillors from the City of Joondalup to appear at the same time. However, that was a disastrous exercise. Some witnesses wanted to cross-examine others and it turned into a bunfight. My first piece of advice to members is to never set up a hearing along those lines.

The second disturbing element was that it was a very strange situation to be a member of a parliamentary committee taking evidence from a lawyer on behalf of a public institution. The committee heard evidence presenting the City of Joondalup's position not from the mayor or the chief executive officer, but from a lawyer who had been delegated that task by the City of Joondalup.

Hon Ed Dermer: It took most of the day, as I recall.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The lawyer was being paid by the minute. It was a long day, and he wanted to spend another day giving evidence. That was a very disturbing element of the matter. Members will understand the background to that. The mayor had been disqualified by his own council from speaking on behalf of the council. The CEO was disqualified from giving evidence because many of the matters being investigated were about the CEO. It was a very messy business. It was a very strange set of circumstances to be asking questions about the City of Joondalup and being given answers on behalf of the city by a lawyer who had a huge dossier of information.

Hon Ken Travers: I don't know about you, but I still don't know in my own mind exactly whom he represented or who instructed him. I do not know that to this day.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The committee wanted to hear the official position of the City of Joondalup. Hon Ken Travers is right. There were many different interpretations of what was the official position of the City of

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Joondalup. It is not a recommended course of action to have a lawyer present evidence on behalf of a council. Lawyers have a role in giving evidence for witnesses; however, the lawyer in this situation took that one step further, which is not healthy for parliamentary inquiries.

Members should not generalise about local authorities as a result of the committee's inquiry into the City of Joondalup. The City of Joondalup is a large local authority; it is the second largest in the State. Often, references were made about what was the most appropriate course of action regarding the advertising of positions for CEOs and others. We should not paint a broad brush across all local authorities in Western Australia. We should not lump the City of Joondalup in with Shire of Sandstone. Sandstone came up often as a reference to indicate that we cannot propose rigid prescriptions. We cannot say that one size fits all for local government, because clearly it does not. If we are seeking a code of practice and recommending understandings and agreements, we should at least categorise local authorities into five or six different groups and ask them to follow guidelines, not prescriptive outlines.

Overall, I hope the committee has achieved some positive recommendations for the Department of Local Government and Regional Development, the Western Australian Local Government Association - which needs to play a role in these matters - and individual local authorities to bear in mind in their processes, particularly when employing chief executive officers. I hope that from this case study, the City of Joondalup can return to being an efficient and open administration. An inquiry is being conducted into whether the commissioners will continue to run the council or whether the former council members will be reinstated. Whoever is appointed to run the council will be required to take account of many issues and, hopefully, will be able to get the City of Joondalup back on track. It is a large area that controls a big budget. I wish it well in the future.

Subsequent events have resulted in the former CEO, Denis Smith, resigning, accepting a redundancy payment and moving on. There are different ways of looking at Denis Smith. I do not want to cast any personal judgment, but I could say that in one way he was ruthlessly pursued, even persecuted. However, I have to say that in another way he was quite foolish to allow some matters written in his CV to remain without clarification and explanation to clear them up. From where I am looking, it appears that he could and should have produced some documents in an open environment to clear up this debate long before it got to the stage it did. Regrettably for him, the issue probably started a lot earlier, during his employment in the planning department of a council in New South Wales, with Michael Knight, who subsequently went on to become the Minister for the Olympics in the New South Wales Parliament. Denis Smith and Michael Knight obviously had some personal differences at that time which manifested in allegations being made in the New South Wales Parliament. I think the seeds for some of those difficulties were sown about 20 to 25 years ago. Nevertheless, Denis Smith did allow some matters to remain on his CV, which the police investigated but found no grounds for laying charges. We must therefore assume that no illegalities were committed. However, in allowing the situation to perpetuate itself, he was in that sense his own worst enemy.

Hon Peter Foss: From the description in the paper he seems to have been disingenuous.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is probably right too.

I hope the saga is finished for the City of Joondalup, Denis Smith and the other personalities involved, including Don Carlos and John Bombak, former mayors of the City of Joondalup, and for the City of Joondalup councillors. Unfortunately, the councillors had very bitter personal differences about that and other issues. In pursuing them, they were prepared to cast aside their responsibilities to good local government, and any other responsibilities they might have had, to pursue their agendas, which was a pity.

If, through its inquiry more than its report, the standing committee has managed to bring to a head some of these issues, it has played a useful part.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: It is always a very sad occasion when local government finds itself in a bind of this nature. It plays a very important role in Western Australia's development and has done so for many years. It was probably at the forefront long before the legislative process began in Western Australia. I am a ratepayer in Joondalup and I did not like seeing my funds washed down the drain. The issue of Joondalup reminded me of events involving the City of Canning, although there was a subtle difference. The City of Canning had problems owing to the hatred and bitterness that prevailed in the council chamber. It overflowed onto the staff, who were very good staff and have gone on to prove that following the re-establishment of voter representation in Canning.

Canning is a very vibrant city with a great residential and industrial mix and a solid revenue base. It is a very good area. Rob Rowell, the mayor of the Town of Cottesloe, and I were asked to meet the City of Canning councillors to see whether we could save the council. Rob and I met the councillors during a weekend at Local Government House when it was in Adelaide Terrace. By Sunday night, Rob and I had well and truly made up our minds that the councillors should be sacked. David Smith, the then Minister for Local Government, asked

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me to meet him in his office on the Monday night after the cabinet meeting. When I arrived, he asked what my view was and I said that they should be sacked.

Hon Tom Stephens: What was your role then?

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: I was president of the former Western Australian Municipal Association and Rob Rowell was deputy president. David Smith said that he did not want us to throw a bucket of water over him if he sacked them. We said that we would not do that. The City of Canning councillors were beyond resolving their issues. By Sunday evening they were questioning Rob Rowell's and my credibility.

Hon Tom Stephens: What were you doing down there?

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: We were asked to see whether we could salvage what was left of the City of Canning council. We were asked to consider whether they should be dismissed or whether there was hope for the city if they continued as councillors. I spoke to the minister.

Hon Tom Stephens: Was it before the new statute was passed?

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: Yes. It was in 1990 or 1991. I said that we would not throw a bucket of water over him. He asked who we thought should be commissioner and we immediately recommended Charlie Gregorini, whom he said he would appoint. He sacked the council and Charlie Gregorini became the commissioner.

About eight or nine months later I attended a function with business people and some of the community leaders, a number of whom said that they did not want to elect another council for the next couple of years because they were very happy with Charlie Gregorini as the commissioner; the council had never worked better. First of all, the staff had a smile on their face and were going about doing their job without being hounded by individual councillors. We said that, from a democratic point of view, we would like to see an elected council returned. Then it was arranged for Rob Rowell, the chief executive officer, the planner, the treasurer, Charlie Gregorini and I to get on a bus one morning and drive around all the boundaries and crisscross the city of Canning to look at how we would draw up the new boundaries and determine how many councillors there should be. We got back, put the maps on the table and drew up what finished up as the boundaries of the city of Canning, and the number of councillors who would be on the council. That was presented to the minister and accepted. Dr Mick Lekias became the mayor. To his credit, although the councillors changed, the same more than capable staff were able to do their job at last. It was almost like a heavy load had been lifted off their shoulders. Now, not much is heard about the City of Canning.

I know some of the people involved at Joondalup, including Mr Lindsay Delahaunty, who was the chief executive officer when Mayor Bombak was in office. The City of Stirling could not grab Lindsay quick enough after he left Joondalup. When the position became vacant at the City of Stirling, it grabbed him very quickly. John Turkington, for whom I have great respect, is also now at the City of Stirling; they could not grab him quickly enough when he left. Due to the misfortunes happening at Joondalup, the city lost two very senior staff. The reasons they left were nothing to do with the jobs they were doing; it became untenable for them to work with a certain individual on the council. At that time, the mayor and a couple of the councillors believed they were almost councillor-CEOs or assistant CEOs. That was how the trouble in the City of Joondalup commenced. The council lost two very experienced officers. Then it lurched into employing Denis Smith, and the trouble really started.

As Hon Barry House has stated, we all agree that Joondalup is a tremendous locality. It is a great city with some magnificent attributes, and anyone living in such an area would be very happy. The staff of the city do a pretty good job, and it is a credit to them that they have been able to continue even with all this trouble happening in the council chamber and the administration. The City of Joondalup has not gone backwards in service delivery or anything else; it has just gone ahead and things have happened. That has been very important, and it is a great credit to the line managers, middle management and all the staff of the City of Joondalup. I am sure that, at times, they must have just scratched their heads and wondered what in hell was going on there, but they kept to their tasks. As a resident of the area, I have not noticed any ill effect, except what I read in the newspaper and the cost to the city.

There are continual bushfires in local government, and there always will be. I know that a panel was set up through the former Western Australian Municipal Association on the City of Joondalup. Nothing much was said by anybody, but I guess that during that inquiry the members of the panel must have been pretty frustrated with some of the problems and how they were to be overcome without taking that next step. In the long term, what has happened will be very good. It depends on who becomes the mayor when the elections are held. If we could get a Mick Lekias or somebody like that with a bit of strength, some councillors with a desire to work for and not against the city, and a good CEO etc, it would be a great start. There is great hope.

Extract from Hansard
[COUNCIL - Friday, 14 May 2004]
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On the subject of chief executive officers, one of the great tragedies is that the performance criteria and some salaries and allowances are being kept very private by a lot of councils. We must get away from that. They have no right to hide behind a shroud of secrecy; neither has any public servant or anyone else. After a council has made a decision about the salary and benefits and the performance criteria that should be met, that information should be available to every elector in the community. That is one thing that I hope comes out of this report.

Hon Barry House: That is in our recommendations.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: Yes, I know that. That is why I said that I hope that outcome will eventuate. There are a couple of little bushfires in my electorate at the moment in a couple of council areas. People are pretty angry that they have no idea what is going on within the CEO regime.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, before I call Hon Jim Scott, I indicate that in accordance with standing orders there is a limit of one and three-quarter hours for this debate. I advise members that there are two minutes left before I put the vote.

Point of Order

Hon TOM STEPHENS: How would one seek leave to contribute to this debate before it is concluded? Mr Chairman, are you the Presiding Officer who used to say that we could do anything by leave?

The CHAIRMAN: I never said that when we were in committee. That is the problem, we are in committee.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: We are in committee, and maybe there is no way around it.

The CHAIRMAN: I do not know for how long Hon Jim Scott wishes to speak, but I am required to advise members that we are in committee and there are two minutes left.

Hon Jim Scott: It was two minutes, was it?

The CHAIRMAN: I have just looked at the clock, and it should be three minutes.

Committee Resumed

Hon JIM SCOTT: I will give a one-minute statement. One of the major problems we have currently, which was really brought to the fore at Joondalup, is with the Local Government Act, which was brought in when I was the shadow minister for the meaning of life, because I was the only member of my party in this place. I must say that among all the other things I was trying to deal with, the Local Government Act was far too complex for me to fully understand at that time. It has become apparent to me now that this is an Act written by bureaucrats for bureaucrats, and not for elected local government bodies. The sooner we look at that Act and take into account matters such as those that Hon Bruce Donaldson referred to, so that the council executive comes under scrutiny as well as the elected bodies, the better.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I will be quick. I have no choice. I think that the committee chair undersells the work of his committee and its report. Yes, it was extremely significant in the way in which it impacted upon the issues with which the City of Joondalup was confronted by bringing those issues to a crux. The public hearings made it possible to get some clarity about the size of the problem with which the City of Joondalup was faced.

I rejected that part of the committee's report that is critical of me, and I reject it again. There was opposition comment that I should have acted nine months before I did. As I have said previously, that would have been slap-bang in the middle of the local government elections. I acted at the very first moment that I had an opportunity to act by suspending the council. That was when I had received advice that the level of dysfunction was such as to justify that suspension. I indicated in the statement that I made to the House on 8 April that I not only found useful the work of the committee in the lead-up to its report, but also accepted all of the 11 recommendations in the report. I am working my way through them. I hope to bring some amendments into this place earlier rather than later. Certainly, I would like to introduce them after the break. The House can do what it likes with them, but they will be a way forward in tackling the issues of salaries, contracts and advertising. There are better ways of doing this. We should never expect to get support from local government associations or local government managers' associations when resolving these issues. In the end, it is up to State Parliament to bring forward resolutions on behalf of ratepayers in the field of local government. In the end, a statute of this Parliament is responsible for the control of local governments in Western Australia.

Question put and passed.

Volunteers (Protection from Liability) Bill 2002 - Statement by Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health

Resumed from 13 November 2002.

Hon Barry House; Hon Bruce Donaldson; Chairman; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Jim Scott; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Norman Moore

Motion

Hon BILL STRETCH: I move -

That the statement be noted.

The statement was valuable in that it cleared up a possible conflict about the status of incorporated bodies. That is now well and truly taken on board. Given that it is National Volunteer Week, it is worth noting that, although the position of incorporated organisations working in the voluntary field is recognised and presumed solved, the problem with unincorporated and other voluntary bodies in the community remains. Many of these are operating under severe fear and dread of litigation, not for what they are doing, but for what some mischievous person may perceive them to be doing. The whole issue has become a dead weight on these types of organisations. They do not have the fall back of incorporation, so they do not have protection. We all have in our electorates dozens and dozens of very sincere and hardworking volunteers who take a huge load off all levels of government - local, state and federal. They are virtually working in the community unprotected, and rely entirely on the goodwill of other people. The old saying that the person who never makes a mistake never makes anything is equally true. Public and voluntary organisations and the people within them err every now and again and are under threat of being sued. Although it is not technically within the confines of this ministerial statement, it is worth all members and the Government noting that somehow, with our collective wit and wisdom, we must come up with a type of umbrella protection. I am not looking for protection that covers people from stupid mistakes; however, there must be some protection that takes away the threat of litigation for people pursuing a worthwhile duty in the public interest. At the moment, they are leaving themselves open to, as I describe it, mischievous litigation. I am sure my legal colleagues would say that there is protection under the law; that may be so, but it is very expensive protection. At some stage I am looking to the Government to come back with a type of protection that does not protect fools, but protects those who are genuinely working with goodwill in the community and who are vulnerable to frivolous legal attacks. Unfortunately, that is becoming a trend throughout society. Solicitors alert people to possible and perceived wrongs committed against them, by advertising for work. Governments owe the community a type of protection that allows those very sincere and hardworking people to continue with their work without the constant threat of litigation hanging over their heads. I know it is a huge task. It is the old question of Parliaments being very good at composing the letter of the law. However, sometimes we are very bad at making clear the intent and the spirit of the law. This spirit of the law and of protection is what we need to offer volunteers right across the field. Those organisations that are big enough to incorporate now receive this protection, but I make a plea on behalf of the smaller ones that might be made up of only half a dozen people. If they make a mistake and the other person is fortunate enough to have either the money or an unscrupulous lawyer who can pursue the good Samaritan, it is the good Samaritan who comes under the threat of what I call the misuse of the law. If the Government can offer any comfort in that regard, we will be doing the whole community and ourselves a great service because, as I said, volunteers in Western Australia and throughout Australia make enormous sacrifices of time and money, such as for petrol, driving people around. They do not deserve to be handed this sort of treatment. In some instances people might be taking a sick neighbour to hospital and something happens along the way, such as the car slipping on a gravel road at night. Somebody might decide to take action against that driver because he was not a qualified ambulance driver. What should a person do? Should he leave an old person at home to suffer or should he do the job anyway? Of course, what normally happens is that he takes the risk and does the job, hoping that the commonsense of the law will prevail. In most cases I think it does. However, it will be of great comfort to the people who work in these sorts of fields to have this reassurance that they will not be pursued legally. It sounds silly, but people have said to me, "I would like to work for such and such an organisation but I do not think I can afford to take the risk." People have also said to me that they would prefer not to go on the council because of directors' liability and all the other things that have been loaded onto positions such as that. I know it is an important issue for city councils, but most people on country councils in local government do the job predominantly out of goodwill. There is not much to be gained out of it. Certainly, things have changed a bit and I know it is different for city councils, but in the remote areas many of these jobs are taken on by a person purely for the reward of doing something for nothing for the community. We owe it to these people to give them some protection if we can. I ask Governments of all persuasions to look at what can be done to alleviate this legal threat that is seen by the people as a very real threat.

Hon PETER FOSS: Hon Bill Stretch has raised a very good point. If an association is incorporated, it gains protection by reason of that. For instance, if a negligent act is carried out by the association, the corporation is liable plus the person who was actually negligent. One of the reasons a body seeks to be incorporated is to reduce the risk of it being liable for the negligence of some other person. For an unincorporated association, normally the committee is liable for the negligence of something done by the association. As Hon Bill Stretch would know, in many country organisations the committee is the whole association. There is a real risk of them all being found liable in the event that someone is negligent. A negligent act can be someone just nodding off at

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some stage during a job; it does not mean that somebody has to be reckless and have total disregard for another person's interest. It can happen in a moment of inadvertence. I think the statistics clearly show that the biggest cause of accidents on the road is not drink driving, speed or mechanical failure, but inadvertence, or inattention. We are all liable to experience some form of inattention. However, when the work being done by those people is highly valuable, we must create a balance between holding them liable and not holding them liable.

I commend the scheme for the insuring of charitable groups through what is really a bulk scheme, but it leaves out unincorporated associations. A very small association may not have enough money to incorporate. It will have a double exposure to liability. It is twice as worse off as an incorporated association. First, there are not the protections that apply to a corporation and, secondly, there is not the benefit of the government scheme. That cannot be obtained through special insurance.

The reason insurance premiums are so high is not necessarily that the insurers believe a small group or association will be sued; it is that it just might be. It is one of those things that should not be left so entire livelihoods might be lost simply because of a moment's inadvertency. That is why people take out insurance. The major reason for taking out insurance is not in the hope of a payout on the insurance; it is that people hope they will never have a payout on their insurance. However, people have the peace of mind of knowing that if the worst happens, they are insured. Insurance is about peace of mind. It is extraordinary how important peace of mind is to human beings. The one thing that seems to get to people more than anything else is the stress of not knowing. It is rather like the man who knows he is to be hanged. Up to the moment of his sentence there is always the hope that it may not happen. Once he knows it is inevitable, he has the capacity to accept his fate. It is when people do not know their future or fate that they are most stressed. Is the same as when a person fears he has terminal cancer. Once he knows he has it, he often has the human fortitude to face it and put up with it. It is the moment between a person thinking he might have it and finding out that is most traumatic. The idea of peace of mind is very important.

Everyone, whether he knows the law or not, knows there has been a massive increase in litigation and cases in which the courts have found liability in circumstances that normal people would regard as stupid. It is not just normal people who think they are stupid; lawyers think they are stupid. Lawyers think things have gone far too far. The rules of law have changed so much that they are unpredictable.

The important thing about law is that it should be predictable. How can we operate within a law if we do not know what it means or cannot predict what will be the outcome? How can we do that if we cannot go to a lawyer and find out what the outcome will be and be told what to do? People cannot do that now. To give an example, occupiers' liability is a classic one for such associations. The law of occupiers' liability used to be quite simple because it dealt with the question of the types of hazards and visitors people had. Certainly, if a person were a trespasser, owners had no liability except for hidden traps. As long as a person did not put any hidden traps on his land he was okay. The liability depended on whether the person was merely a visitor or someone invited. If someone was invited, the owner had a higher liability to look after that person than if he were merely attending on a licence to come to the owner's front door. The reality of the matter is that that was a fairly practical test that people could work on. When that was changed to a general negligence test, people did not know when they would be held liable.

There have been two Bills on this. The first Bill, with its caps and thresholds, is not the way to tackle liability. I think it is a very unfair way to deal with most of these things. I think the fairest way is to go to the law and change it by making it predictable and fair. That is what we should be doing. I think the cap, in particular, can be extremely difficult because it makes the people who have suffered the most pay most of the cost of the change. Some of the changes, including those to the rate of interest, were good. I think there were others that reversed some changes in the law that needed to be reversed. It is a mixture of measures. I preferred the second Bill to the first. Even still, it does not deal with the problem. Insurance premiums have not come down sufficiently. This will not happen for a long time because insurance, unfortunately, has a very long tail, especially liability insurance. An insurance policy can be paid out 20 years after any change, which seems an awfully long time. Workers compensation is probably the worst of them all. Professional indemnity and other insurances can have long tails, and it takes a long time for premiums to reduce. Once the market is scared up, premiums must settle down. Until the losses are paid out following rapid changes in the law, premium reductions will not happen. People will not be able to afford the insurance overnight. Something will need to happen. The scheme to assist incorporated volunteer organisations is a good one, but it needs more ingenuity to overcome technical problems of providing it to unincorporated associations. I do not know what is to be done. Individuals may not want to take it up. Somewhere along the line some method must be found to enable the individual organisations to arrange submembership of an overarching organisation. Something must be done. I agree with Hon Bill Stretch: although the measures passed were extremely good, and the insurance processes set up by the Government were also good, they do not go far enough. I do not think they will solve the problem.

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Question put and passed.

Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs - Ninth Report - Albany Residential College

Tabled on 19 December 2003.

Motion

Hon KATE DOUST: I move -

That the report be noted.

In the absence of the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs, I will say a few words. This report results from an inquiry into a petition presented to the standing committee. A subcommittee was established comprising Hons Christine Sharp and Robyn McSweeney, which visited the Albany Residential College. The basic complaint in the petition was that the Albany Residential College required urgent upgrading. The college was built in 1973 to accommodate 72 male students, and it currently accommodates about 110 students. Pages 2 and 3 of the report list a range of current student conditions. After those two members had visited the Albany Residential College and spoken to people connected with the college, the committee decided to inquire into and report on the matter. The committee wrote to the responsible minister and asked what was to happen with the college. I understand the reply was that the college was due to have some additions made in the future, but the parents and the board of the college hoped to have the work brought forward because of the difficulties they faced. The minister wrote back indicating he would raise the committee's recommendations with the Expenditure Review Committee to see whether the funding could be brought forward. According to the Country High School Hostels Authority, there is an allocation for design in 2005-06 and construction in 2006-07. Apparently there has been quite an increase in the number of students living at the college, and a range of reasons are listed in the response from the Country High School Hostels Authority. The students who live at the college come from a diverse range of towns surrounding Albany. The college also provides accommodation for students attending not just state high schools in Albany, but also St Joseph's College in Albany.

The report provides quite a bit of detail on the two members' observations in Albany. They have raised the issue with the minister. Unfortunately, based on the reply from the minister, I do not think that there will be any change to the scheduling for upgrades at the college. We look forward to those upgrades commencing in 2005-06. Perhaps Hon Bruce Donaldson might want to add a few words to the debate on the report, or perhaps not.

Question put and passed.

Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges - Seventh Report - Report on an Order of Reference made 5 December 2002 Relating to Tabling a Paper on 18 June 2002

Resumed from 8 April.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I want to make sure that I have the right report. A report was tabled this week, I think.

The CHAIRMAN: No; report No 7 was tabled on 8 April this year. I have a copy of the report, if it would help the Leader of the Opposition. It is a matter that has been dealt with by the Chamber.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I have that report. The only problem with the report of the standing committee is that it does not have a number on it.

The CHAIRMAN: The report itself does not have a number. It is in fact report No 7, but the cover page is not marked.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: That is why I am confused. It would be helpful if in future the standing committee put a number on its reports.

Motion

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I move -

That the report be noted.

I have had a quick read through the report, which relates to the tabling of documents by Hon John Fischer in respect of an affidavit prepared by Mr Murphy. The matter was considered by the standing committee, and I am pleased with its finding, which states -

The Committee finds with respect to the matters contained in the Order of Reference that there has been no breach of privilege committed by Hon John Fischer or Mr M Murphy with respect to the tabling of the Murphy affidavit on June 18 2002.

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I am pleased that the committee has come to that conclusion. I think that it was quite possible for this issue to become a little murky. There may have been an opportunity for people to take a course of action that may have been more political than appropriate. The report, however, does raise a number of issues that members should take note of when they take action in this Chamber on allegations or proposals put to them by individuals. The question of the use of parliamentary privilege and the effect that comments made under parliamentary privilege in this Chamber can have on people outside the Chamber need to be considered very carefully by members. They should always, to the best of their capacity, avoid acting in a reckless way in tabling any documents or affidavits that might cause somebody serious distress outside the Chamber. It was pleasing to read the report and find that no breach of privilege had been committed by Hon John Fischer or Mr Murphy. One can only hope that that is the end of this affair.

Question put and passed.

Draft Regional Policy Statement for Western Australia - Statement by Minister for Housing and Works

Resumed from 26 November 2002.

Motion

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: I move -

That the statement be noted.

This ministerial statement was made on Tuesday, 26 November 2002 - nearly two years ago - and a lot has happened since then. The minister, Hon Tom Stephens, released the draft regional policy statement for Western Australia and called for submissions and responses. It was open for public comment until the end of February 2003. After that it was hoped to be able to provide a final policy document from about mid 2003 onwards. A lot of criticism was received up front. One of the things announced in that ministerial statement was the \$75 million regional investment fund. It was noted in this House and outside in the wider community that some of that \$75 million had been promised through election promises. I think some of it was to go to the forestry industry. It was indicated that a considerable proportion of that money could never be sought after by a lot of local governments etc because it had already been allocated in the first place.

The Minister for Local Government and Regional Development has been called away on urgent parliamentary business. It is a shame that he will not be able to respond and outline the Government's regional policy.

My interpretation of regional development is covered by the word "employment". That is the first thing it conjures up in my mind. Unless we can provide employment in regional and rural Western Australia, we will have a real problem, because people do not wish to stay in a location if they cannot see a window of opportunity, especially young adults and families looking for work. Employment is very important from a regional development perspective.

I am pleased the minister has returned from his urgent parliamentary business so that he can bring us up to date on this issue. I had pointed out that this ministerial statement was made almost two years ago and a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since then. Can the minister tell us where regional policy is at and what has been achieved, because it is sometimes difficult for people to lodge submissions? A number of people may have spoken to the minister at private functions etc in his electorate. One of the sad aspects of it being such a long time ago is that we all have had so many other matters to consider. If the minister is in a position to give us an update, I would appreciate it. I certainly look forward to getting a breakdown of the \$75 million regional fund. The minister has indicated in the House previously that he would do that in the near future. I look forward to the minister being able to bring us up to date.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The statement was made a long time ago. Since then, a refined regional policy document, which drew on the draft statement that was circulated at the time, has been embedded in the policy settings of the Gallop Government. The policy document was strengthened as a result of public consultation. The draft statement alluded to the fact that there would be such consultation and then an opportunity for drawing on it to determine the ways in which the policy document could be enhanced.

I am one of those people who, by disposition, are very naturally impatient and determined to get things done. I have worked with people, such as former Premier Peter Dowding, who were committed to structural and policy change. I have always been interested in getting on and doing things and, hopefully, through that process creating and forming policy. There is probably a balance to be struck between my approach and the approach of those who simply find themselves excited by the writing and formulation of policy documents.

I have watched the usefulness of this policy framework within government. It has been the framework against which I have been successful in going back through the budget round and getting included in budget strategies the regional investment fund, which I believe is of great significance to regional Western Australia. Embedded

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within it is the regional headworks scheme, which was the successful initiative of previous Governments and is now back and available for the regional communities of Western Australia to draw down. In a quick reply to Hon Bruce Donaldson yesterday, I indicated that I would take seriously his request for full details of the regional investment fund and make them available to the House. I am doing that seriously, which is why I want him to have all the documentation. I am making sure that will be ready to put before the Parliament as soon as possible.

One of the schemes provided for under the regional investment fund, whose policy underpins the regional development policy, is the regional development scheme of the development commissions. That initiative has seen in excess of 500 successful allocations of funds to a range of organisations across the nine regional areas of Western Australia. A fair amount of paperwork is involved in tabulating those nine separate statutory organisations, which have separate opportunities for allocating, in the first instance, \$400 000 in the first four years. It is envisaged that they will have some improvement on that in future years under the regional investment fund round 2.

All nine of the regional development commissions have increasingly become a bit of a lightning rod for critique within government and external to government. I have watched how regional development commissions champion the cause of their regions within government, sometimes to the annoyance of central agencies, and sometimes to the annoyance of my ministerial colleagues. They often become great allies of their region, as they should be, and of those who advocate on behalf of their regions, such as local councils and local members of Parliament, and become a source of great annoyance to anyone who is trying to rein in government expenditure, when sometimes reining in government expenditure in the regions is the easiest thing for any central agency of government to do. During the time that we have been in government, a real creative tension has developed, because the development commissions, under their separate statutory boards, on which sit people from all sides of politics, and from local government and industry, have not been not willing to cower to the view of a central agency, or even of a minister or senior minister of government.

The nine regional development commissions take great comfort from this policy document, which restates the commitment of the Gallop Labor Government to support the existence of development commissions in regional Western Australia. What is playing itself out in regional Western Australia right now is a focus on the opposition policy and attitude to the structure that we have committed ourselves to; that is, the nine regional development commissions, and the regional investment fund rounds 1 and 2. There is considerable interest in whether there will be bipartisan support for these initiatives of government or whether that structure will be dismantled.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: We did introduce the legislation for these to be established.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Yes, but regrettably there have been some murmurs to the contrary from some of the Liberal Party's city-based members, some of whom are at very senior levels. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition in the other place, Hon Colin Barnett, went to a meeting in Pinjarra and hinted to the assembled gathering, which comprised people from local councils all around regional Western Australia, that regional development commissions were no longer in vogue with the current Opposition. That sent alarm bells ringing across regional Western Australia, because people fear that he is articulating the case once more for a Terrace-based organisation that will somehow or other determine the way in which regional policy is applied across the length and breadth of regional Western Australia.

Hon Norman Moore: Who is the chair of the Pilbara Development Commission?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The chair of the Pilbara Development Commission is Erica Smyth.

Hon Norman Moore: Where does she work? On the Terrace!

Hon TOM STEPHENS: She works at Woodside Petroleum Ltd.

Hon Norman Moore: Yes, on the Terrace - probably the new building on the corner of Milligan Street - so just be very careful about how you express these statements.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I am making the point that she -

Hon Norman Moore: You appointed her. I have the highest regard for her as an individual, but do not start talking about these commissions being representatives of the regions when the chairperson is based in St Georges Terrace.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The Leader of the Opposition makes an interesting point.

Hon Norman Moore: A valid point.

Extract from *Hansard*
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Hon TOM STEPHENS: And a good point. These are things that we take into consideration when we are look at the appointments of boards of development commissions. Woodside is a major enterprise.

Hon Norman Moore: Based in St Georges Terrace.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: However, as the Leader of the Opposition will appreciate, it operates in a significant and important way with industry in the Pilbara. I hear the implied criticism of the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon Norman Moore: It is not a criticism at all. I am responding to your criticism of us as being Terrace-centric, and we are not.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: She chairs an organisation whose employees are all Pilbara based, as opposed to having a group of employees rolling out and implementing regional policy from the Terrace or somewhere else in Perth. We have a structure in which virtually all, if not all, the employees of the nine development commissions are based within the regional towns and centres of regional Western Australia. That is a far healthier situation than the one that seems to be increasingly hinted at by the -

Hon Norman Moore: I think you are misrepresenting what you think is being said. If you sit down soon, I can tell you what you really need to know.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I am never too sure who speaks with authority for the current Opposition. Hon Norman Moore says something and then suddenly the Leader of the Opposition in the other House says the opposite.

Hon Norman Moore: Can you give me an example of that?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I will come back to Hon Norman Moore on that.

Hon Norman Moore: Come on! You can't throw these accusations around and then not be able to substantiate them.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I will come back to the member. Maybe one of my colleagues could -

Hon John Fischer: Perhaps you would like to tell us whether the appointment for the Kimberley Development Commission was a straight-out political move.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: It is a great appointment. He does not live on the Terrace. Was that what the member was suggesting?

Hon John Fischer: No, I am not suggesting that at all. I am suggesting what I did say in the papers. I think you are using him politically. You have taken over well from the previous National Party minister; you use them as a political arm.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Only someone from One Nation would attack the appointment of Patrick Dodson.

Hon John Fischer: That's funny; I didn't know we had that many supporters. I am glad you put it that way.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Only someone from the One Nation party would articulate that. One of the most significant Australians has been generous enough to accept an appointment to chair the Kimberley Development Commission, based in Broome. He is currently working with that board in Kununurra. The board met yesterday and is meeting again today. He is working hard in support of the economic development of that region. I would have thought that the last thing someone could say about that appointment was that it was made for any base or crass political reasons. I consider him to be a great Australian and a great Western Australian. He will not be afraid to take up the fight on behalf of regional Western Australians. I consider myself very lucky, first to have been able to get him to accept the appointment and, second, to be able to get the Government to accept the appointment. One does not appoint someone like that to such a position and think that he will be anything other than a strong advocate for the issues and challenges that face a region such as the Kimberley. There is a risk associated with such appointments, because these are independent, statutory authorities that do not make life comfortable for ministers and Governments.

Hon John Fischer: Not enough people read *Hansard* for you to carry on any longer, minister. Quite frankly, it is not a popular appointment. If you knew a little more about -

Hon TOM STEPHENS: One Nation has a small coterie of support in regional Western Australia. The One Nation party does not reflect a view of a tolerant and inclusive society, in which Aboriginal people are welcomed along with all other sections of the Australian population.

Hon John Fischer: That is only your interpretation of it.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: All I can say to the member who has aligned himself with the leadership of the national One Nation party and has ridden into Parliament on its leader's coat tails and now tries to find a new place for

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himself in the sun is that he could never even dream of contributing to the body corporate of the Australian community like Patrick Dodson has done for the Western Australian community.

Hon John Fischer: You have been a minister and have been in Parliament for 20 years, but can you go to places like Halls Creek and claim that you represent this State in any manner at all? You are an utter disgrace. You spent six years in a seminary and you could not even come out of it with a white collar. There is one thing to be said about the whole Catholic thing: they were bloody smart enough to know a good man when they didn't see one.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The member is the sectarian edge of the One Nation party as well as being everything else. I have watched Hon John Fischer's performance and now know exactly where he is coming from. I know that his intolerance for the Aboriginal leadership, the Aboriginal community and for other sections of the community -

Hon John Fischer: My intolerance is for fakers, like you -

The CHAIRMAN: Order, members! Let us get back to the draft regional policy statement and concentrate on that.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The development commissions increasingly provide very useful roles on behalf of regional Western Australia. They need to be supported by government at the highest levels. Fortunately, in this Government, they are championed by the Premier because of the useful role they play. However, that comes at a price because it requires people to accept the independent status of the commissions. They can strike partnerships with their regions, industry and especially local government, and be strong, unwavering advocates for the regional communities of Western Australia. That is the policy setting for regional Western Australia that the State Government is keen to continue to work with. We throw out the challenge to members opposite to state unambiguously whether they are committed to the regional development commission structure or whether -

Hon Norman Moore: We finish at half past three. If you give me five minutes, I will be happy to respond.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I will give the Leader of the House more time than he gave me last time.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: What weight do you give to employment when making decisions to provide grants and funding?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: It is absolutely critical. Members should keep in mind that the regional investment fund is a contestable fund. The applications were received and assessed against each other and against that employment-generating criteria. I found the contest in some of the rounds disappointing.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: Was it not employment creation?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: No, the contest was disappointing. When we formed government, I was surprised that the regions had not found a way to structure applications that were as well focused on the criteria as I was expecting. However, despite that, the funding rounds delivered programs to those regions that have been very useful for economic activity and job creation strategies. Members might be surprised at exactly how that job creation process works. The Ord Valley Muster had received a small grant from the development commission to be held in that area under its regional development scheme. It put on a key showpiece event in the township of Kununurra that was attended by a very large number of visitors and a huge number of locals. It developed a great profile for that community. Essentially, it is an arts or cultural event at which the Darwin Symphony Orchestra performed. It is a vehicle by which the community can showcase itself. That event will also become a great source of community development for bringing the players of the town together so that they can work together. In this case that was with Qantas Airways Ltd. The town was successful on that weekend in getting Qantas to operate two flights in and two flights out, a total of four services.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: Did John Travolta go?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: No, he did not turn up, but just about everybody else was there, including James Blundell and endless glitterati.

Hon Simon O'Brien: You would have fitted in well.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I was very pleased to be there. Such events take on a significance for the region -

Hon Peter Foss: Did you use one of those nice four Qantas flights going in and out?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I flew in on a Maroomba Air Service aircraft from Port Hedland and out to Perth again on the same aircraft.

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Hon Peter Foss: I would have thought that with all those Qantas flights you would have had a chance of getting a seat.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I possibly would have, but there were none from Port Hedland where I was working on the budget presentation.

Hon Norman Moore: Working the numbers around the street!

Hon TOM STEPHENS: No, I was doing the budget.

Hon Norman Moore: You are not supposed to use a jet for politicking of that nature.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: No, I had done the budget presentation.

Hon Peter Foss: You spent a lot of time up there.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I did the budget presentation. I went to Phil Lockyer's pub and did a budget presentation with the Chamber of Commerce. It was a very well-attended presentation. People were very interested to learn of the commitments we have made to the Port Hedland Regional Hospital and the plans to develop a health campus in South Hedland in response to the needs there.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: Have you paid off the Port Hedland town debt?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: No, it has its reprogrammed budgets now in place, which it will tackle. The Town of Port Hedland has shown signs that it will be able to manage its budget in a way that will give increasing levels of comfort to ratepayers.

Hon Peter Foss: Wow! You do know about Port Hedland.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Increasing numbers of them.

Hon Peter Foss: I thought you said you knew about the increasing numbers in Port Hedland.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The Port Hedland community has increasing confidence that the Town of Port Hedland's council budget will be of use and benefit.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Is there any spare office space in Port Hedland down at Wedge Street?

Hon Peter Foss: Has that courthouse been rented out?

The CHAIRMAN: Order! We are talking about the regional policy statement.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I think the interjections are aimed at trying to get me in trouble with the Chair.

Looking across the ambitions of regional communities to find ways of working in partnership with the State Government, I can see how various sections of the community can take a policy document like the one that is now in final form, draw upon it, approach government and throw our own words back at us to build a case for a positive response from government to their observations of what is needed in the regions. They have done that very successfully with this policy document. The document provides a base from which regional communities can grab the words, throw them back at government and say, "This is what your policy document says and this is what we believe you should do." I find that of great use and benefit to regional Western Australians as I see their observations play themselves out in the cabinet room, the standing committees of Cabinet and in other policy and decision-making forums of the State Government. I find it a much more useful document than I ever anticipated it would be. It has the building blocks on which we can force agencies to respond to the challenges of regional Western Australia and work in partnership with local communities, councils and every other level of government. I commend the document to members as a document that is neither the final word on regional policy, nor the final way forward for regional Western Australia. However, it represents a significant step. In regional Western Australia it is very important to focus on how, in its economic development, every section of the community can be linked to the great opportunities out there. It is not done easily. By being focused, we can ensure that every section of the community has a chance to be part of that community in which many positive advantages are available. It requires the regional development portfolio to be economically focused, while recognising that the issues of the triple bottom line, education, training, health, safety and the Government's social agenda must be harnessed to link the community confidently to the State's economic development. It must be done in a sustainable manner that links it to a protected and nurtured environment. It must continue to deliver jobs from every section of industry, whether it be the pastoral or agricultural industries or in other great human endeavours represented in the challenges in the natural environment, such as aquaculture, mariculture and the fishing industry. By linking people to an appreciation of that triple bottom line and of the environment and by working with it in sustainable ways, we can produce jobs linked to all sections of the community in regional Western Australia that will last, be accessible to everyone and benefit everyone.

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That is the great contribution of this regional policy. I appreciate Hon Bruce Donaldson's moving that the draft statement be noted. Since he lodged the motion in this House, the document has taken final form and now underpins the basis on which we operate across regional Western Australia.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I recall very well that when this draft statement first hit the streets, so to speak, the member for Pilbara responded to the minister who then rewrote his draft statement. It was a scathing attack by a former member of the Labor Party, who had spent a significant amount of his time examining regional development issues.

Hon Tom Stephens: We received a submission from him and incorporated many of his suggestions.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I think that is good. Although I do not agree with many things Larry Graham says, one area on which he should be taken very seriously is regional development and administration. I am pleased to hear from the minister that he took into account Larry Graham's comments. His response to the original document was scathing and he described it in the same terms as the minister, a moment ago, tried to describe the coalition. He saw it as a city-centric St Georges Terrace document. I refer to the Government's structure for regional development and the outline in appendix 1 of the report. I presume it has not changed other than the minister's name being different. At the time, the members were the Premier; Hon Tom Stephens, who was responsible for the Gascoyne, Kimberley and Pilbara; Hon Nick Griffiths, responsible for the goldfields and Esperance; Minister McGinty, responsible for Peel and the south west; and Hon Kim Chance, who was responsible for the great southern, mid west and wheatbelt. I think Hon Nick Griffiths is no longer a regional minister, but Mr Kucera is. I think that is the only change. The Premier is in charge of the whole thing. There is a regional policy unit that responds to the Premier and a cabinet standing committee on regional policy. Interestingly, at least the Premier, Minister Kucera and Minister McGinty are not regional members. They are city-based members. Fortunately, Hon Tom Stephens and Hon Kim Chance have an understanding of regional Western Australia. I suppose that two out of five is not all bad. The views of Larry Graham about that were pretty well known.

Without being critical, and in a constructive sense, it seems to me that the structure the Government has in place now must be terribly unwieldy. I do not see how the Minister for Regional Development can be but one small cog in a structure that is run by the Premier. We have discussed this before and I do not know whether the minister has made any changes to the way it works. I am interested to know, some time down the track, what the Minister for Regional Development actually does, as opposed to all the other regional ministers. Does he have a different role from them? How does this role relate to that of the Premier, who presumably is the chairman of the cabinet standing committee on regional policy and has a regional policy unit reporting directly to him? I do not quite understand that. I know that Premiers often try to run the whole show on their own, and they want little groups reporting to them independently of their ministers. Maybe that is happening here.

The regional development commissions were set up by a coalition Government. They were the successors to regional advisory committees, which were serviced by regional administrators. They were set up in the 1970s, if my memory serves me well, by the Sir Charles Court Government.

Hon Tom Stephens: You are not entirely right. We set up the regional development commissions, and you gave them a statutory underpinning.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Some were governed by statute and some were not. The previous Government standardised the whole thing. I thank the minister.

To go back to the beginning of all this, the reason for regional administrators was for the Government to have an officer in the regions who could give the Government advice on the provision of government services to those regions, and to provide a coordinating function for the activities of government agencies.

Hon Peter Foss: They were there to get decisions as well.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: They would try to, but they were there to ensure that if, for example, a new road was built, it was not dug up three weeks later to lay sewerage pipes. That is a simplistic notion, but the idea was to try to get a coordinated approach to the delivery of government services to the regions. Regional administrators had advisory committees, and they worked well. From that came the creation of the South West Development Authority, which was the most highly political regional organisation ever created in the history of Western Australia. SWRDA was put in place by the Burke Government to make absolutely certain that the south west, particularly Bunbury, was politically in tune with the Government of the day.

Hon Tom Stephens: I can come up with one that is more politically motivated than that - the previous Government's building industry task force.

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Hon NORMAN MOORE: Most people wish it was still there, from what I can understand.

SWRDA was set up to look after the interests of the Burke Government, under the Bunbury 2000 or some such policy. It was a vast pork-barrelling exercise in the south west to make sure that the Government did not lose Bunbury. For some reason or other, the seat of Bunbury is the litmus test of who will win. Whoever wins Bunbury, wins the election. That process has been in place for a very long time. Therefore, hanging on to Bunbury was pretty important to the Burke Government. To give it its due, Julian Grill, who was the Minister for the South West in those days, was quite brilliant in the way he went about pork-barrelling, spending government money in the south west and brilliantly promoting what the Government was doing. Part of that was that brilliant new office block in Bunbury with about nine floors, which was built by Austmark, or one of those companies of Alan Bond. The Government was able to convince him to build that tower, which showed that Bunbury was a metropolis in the south west. The Government said to the owners of the property that it would pay them very large sums of money to rent that building. Therefore, the Government rented a large amount of floor space at very high prices. The same thing has happened in most regional centres. Kalgoorlie, Geraldton and Northam are the same. However, Bunbury is the classic case. As I said the other day just after the budget came down, another \$1.2 million is being paid by Treasury to the owners of that building to pay for unrented space. The reason it is unrented is that the price is so high, nobody will take it. Therefore, in 2004, we still have the legacy of a decision made in the early 1980s by the WA Inc Government. That is a bit of the history of regional development in Western Australia.

SWRDA was almost a regional Government. It got itself involved in a range of matters. It was not an advisory body by any means. It was a doing organisation. It was involved in spending a lot of money on a lot of projects. It started getting in the road of other government agencies and also local government. While the people of the south west were happy to benefit from the largesse of SWRDA, these underlying concerns became very obvious.

When our government came into office in 1993, we standardised the development commissions across the State and gave them all the same basic structure. However, that is now 10 or 11 years ago. Hon Colin Barnett is saying that instead of simply saying that what is in place now should stay there, we should look at whether we can do it better - certainly not with any intention of having them filled with St Georges Terrace people, but taking into account the views being expressed in regional communities about the involvement of local government and local communities in decision making.

In the north west, there are a couple of very interesting new creations. The Pilbara Regional Council is a combined meeting of the four local authorities in the Pilbara. They come together regularly and talk about issues that affect the whole of the Pilbara, local government and regional issues. The Kimberley is heading in the same direction. We will finish up with the Pilbara Development Commission and the Pilbara Regional Council, which is a local government body, probably getting in each other's road. It might make sense to work out whether there can be an amalgamation of the two, and whether the resources that go to the Pilbara Development Commission might not be better spent by providing support to the Pilbara Regional Council. Then there would be the benefit of local government input and the benefit of state government funding to endeavour to ensure that the interests of the local authorities and the interests of the region are taken into consideration and implemented.

As an aside, the Pilbara Regional Council is an effective organisation. It works very well in a number of ways. Members may be aware of the community sporting and recreation facilities fund, which provides funding for sporting facilities. The Minister for Sport and Recreation is the recipient of the applications for those funds, and must make decisions about priorities. One of the good things that happened in the Pilbara was that the four councils on the Pilbara Regional Council got together and decided what the Pilbara's priorities were. Instead of the Shire of Ashburton and the Shire of Port Hedland both wanting to have, for example, a swimming pool in the same year, they would decide amongst themselves what their priorities were. I, as the minister, and I presume subsequent ministers have done the same thing, took on board that list of priorities. If that is what they had worked out was appropriate for their region, it was not for me to argue. On most occasions we accepted their list of priorities. That is a pretty sensible way to go about doing business. I use that as a simple example of cooperation amongst the local authorities at a regional level. I notice that Hon Peter Foss has just yawned. I'm sorry to keep him awake! I know this is a scintillating issue, but I have been challenged by the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development to indicate to him which way the Liberal Party will go in respect of these matters. I can see now, it stands out like the proverbial, that the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development will be running around telling everybody who is prepared to listen to him that the regional development commissions will be disbanded by a coalition Government. That is the way he plays his politics, and that is fair I suppose -

Hon Tom Stephens: Are you saying that is not true?

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Hon NORMAN MOORE: It is not true. As a party, we are considering whether we can improve the delivery of regional services. I would hope that this Government is doing the same thing.

Hon Tom Stephens: But are you saying you will not abolish any development commissions?

Hon NORMAN MOORE: It is not for me to say; I am just telling the minister what we think about it. When our policies come out before the election, people will know what we are going to do. I am trying to explain to the minister the context in which comments were made by Hon Colin Barnett. They represent the thinking of an opposition party, soon to form a coalition, and how it can better understand the needs and aspirations of the regions and better provide the services they need. If regional development commissions are the way to go, and we decide that they are the best way to provide services, then we will continue to have them. However, I just mentioned to the minister another thing that he might consider; that is, the Pilbara Regional Council being funded in a way that -

Hon Tom Stephens: I agree with you that the Pilbara Regional Council is operating extremely well. It is chaired by Kevin Richards who is doing an extraordinarily good job in that role.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I agree; he is a good fellow. The fact that he happens to be Labor's candidate does not make a lot of difference to me. It makes no difference to my relationship with him because I get on well with him. He always used to commend me for coming to Karratha because every time I went there, I had a cheque for him.

Hon Peter Foss: He is a different sort of bloke to Tom Helm.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Absolutely. He is prepared to give credit where credit is due. He was even critical of the fact that the member for Pilbara and member for Burrup did not turn up at a meeting in Perth to discuss the issues of state agreement Acts and compensation to local authorities because of rating restrictions. He criticised his own member for Burrup, the Speaker, who is the same guy that got duded by the Government over the road. A person begins to wonder who is on Fred's side when those sorts of things happen.

Hon Peter Foss: Fred does not have enough numbers; he says there are not enough country members.

Hon Tom Stephens: I am on Fred's side. He is a great local member.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: He plays a good game of golf at Rockingham. All I am trying to say to the minister is I do not think that having a person who lives in Perth as the chairperson of a regional development commission is the best way to go, but it may not be the worse way to go either. For the minister to suggest that somehow or other we will run regional Western Australia from St Georges Terrace is simply wrong. We lost the election, in part, because people believed that we had lost touch with the aspirations of regional Western Australia, and we had. That is what happens to Governments. They get caught up in the bureaucracy and the way in which departments are run. Often they lose sight of what is going on beyond the Darling Range. That will not happen between now and when our policies come out, and it will not happen when we are elected as the next Government.

Progress reported and leave granted to sit again.