

GOVERNMENT TRADING ENTERPRISES — GOVERNANCE

Motion

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [10.10 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house condemns the McGowan government for —

- (a) its failure to deliver proper oversight of its departments and government trading enterprises as evidenced by the unfolding of the biggest scandal our state has seen since WA Inc at the Perth Mint; and
- (b) its lack of ministerial accountability for its failures.

Something is wrong in the state of Western Australia. The government has lost control of its departments and it lives in ignorance of what is occurring in its government trading enterprises. This should surely change. This government made some pretty big promises before the last election. This government was going to give us gold-plated transparency. This government was going to change the way government was run. I remind the government of couple of comments made by the now Premier just after he became Premier. In the lead-up to the 2017 election, before he was elected, the now Premier said this —

“The public interest must come first, transparency must come first, openness must come first.

“We need to limit the liability to taxpayers and stem the losses of this government’s bad and secretive deals.”

That is what he said about the previous governments. Let us remind ourselves: “transparency must come first, the public interest must come first, openness must come first”. All of those would be great, but we struggle to get answers from this government about what is happening in government trading enterprises and in government departments all the time. We struggle to get real answers to questions. The mere fact that the Premier mentions the need to limit the liability to taxpayers leads me to want to know what the liability potentially will be for taxpayers when the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre report comes down in a few months. I would like to know what the potential risk is. A budget will come down in May, which is about when the AUSTRAC report will come down. I hope that members of the government are looking at the government’s statement of risks and seeing there is a risk of significant penalties as the government is assessed on its performance by AUSTRAC. There is a significant risk.

In March 2017, around the time of the election, when the Premier was elected, he said —

“I want to make sure that we run a transparent, accountable government that is characterised by decency and ministers and members who behave properly.”

Even when he was opposition leader in 2016 he said —

The taxpayers, who provide the money for the government to spend, do not know how much the government is spending on various deals. Every single day the government has these commercial-in-confidence arrangements.

I have asked a number of questions over the last couple of weeks, particularly about the apparently commercial-in-confidence arrangements around the extension of the Collie Coal (Griffin) Agreement Act, and guess what? It is commercial-in-confidence; it is repeatedly commercial-in-confidence. That is because this government does not have a proper oversight of what is happening in various parts of the government—and it is not just government trading enterprises, it is also in government departments where it is very difficult to get a straight answer. This is the government that talked about gold-standard transparency. The Premier’s claim of gold-standard transparency will come back to haunt him numerous times over the next couple of years, as it turns out to be lead-standard transparency or perhaps coal-standard transparency. There is no gold-standard transparency in this state. Let us hope that AUSTRAC can provide some gold-standard transparency, which this government seems completely incapable of providing.

Why is the government doing this? It is obviously trying very hard to make sure it distances itself as much as possible from this impending disaster, particularly around who is able to use the Perth Mint to push money through. This is the significant issue that will need to be addressed. This is the issue the government should be answering. I would ask this, President.

Several members interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: They do not like it, President. But here is a serious question: Can the Minister for Mines and Petroleum and the government ensure the Parliament and the people of Western Australia that none of the Perth Mint gold has been used for money laundering for any terrorist or illegal organisation? Can the minister and the government reassure us that that is not case? I am asking the government to reassure us that that is the case. I am asking the government to reassure us that this —

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Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I am asking for the government to give an assurance that Perth Mint has not been used for illegal money laundering by any organisation, including those that might be involved in various activities all the way up to terrorist organisations and illegal bikie gangs—all of those things. The government should be able to give us that reassurance. If the government is on top of its job —

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! That was three times. The Leader of the Opposition.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The question is: can we get that guarantee? There have been a couple of developments more recently. I do not have time to talk about the substitution of gold today, and it is not my primary focus anyway. I am interested in the accountability of Perth Mint as it processes gold and who is getting a benefit from that. It was interesting this week that we learnt of a claim that a Singapore-based company, Trovio, which was running a cryptocurrency process in Perth Mint had withdrawn it. I am less interested in whether Perth Mint or Trovio withdrew it. I am interested in if a cryptocurrency process has been operating in Perth Mint, whether the government can guarantee that that process did not allow people who should not have been able to access Perth Mint to process their money through it. Can the government guarantee that people did not use a cryptocurrency process to launder money? What guarantees are in place? How has the government overseen this organisation to ensure that cryptocurrency backed by the Perth Mint has not been used to launder money? As recently as yesterday, the Perth Mint website was still spruiking this cryptocurrency process. I thought the government might have acted very quickly. If it is true that Perth Mint distanced itself from this process prior to Trovio stepping aside, the government would have acted in a quicker manner. Some guarantees from the government that none of this process has allowed the laundering of money would be useful.

We can see the problem a mile away. The government is desperately trying to make sure that its job of oversight is ignored and that it can handball the claim to the Perth Mint board—that is, Gold Corporation's board. This government is trying to limit the political damage by finding a few appropriate scapegoats in the process. I noted the comments of the Minister for Mines and Petroleum yesterday about a staff member who had been removed. If that is chucked out there as a distraction or perhaps a subtle warning or threat to make sure no other information is released, that is possibly a reasonable outcome, but let us have some gold-standard transparency from the government. Let us have the government say this information was a problem and it is trying to make sure no more information is out there. If that is what the government is doing, it should be a little bit open and accountable.

What is the role of the government in relation to government trading enterprises? I am focused on Perth Mint because it is topical, but there are plenty of other government trading enterprises I could focus on, which is my point today. The government seems to be simply focused on whether it gets a dividend from a government trading enterprise in a particular year, it decides it cannot or it decides to put it off for its own budgetary purposes and political convenience. That appears to be this government's focus when it comes to government trading enterprises—not proper oversight, not making sure they run with the gold standard of both transparency and performance that this government seems to promise before elections. The government needs to be overseeing the performance of all these agencies. It is fine for the government to say, "I tell you what, Water Corporation, we are a bit short this year, instead of giving us \$300 million in dividends, give us \$600 million." The board of Water Corporation will say okay and tick that off because it cannot say no. We will have a good debate about that and I very much look forward to the Government Trading Enterprises Bill 2022 getting to this house. We will have a very good debate about the government's role over government trading enterprises. I simply put that out there.

This year, the government is slightly embarrassed by, once again, the budget surplus that it is looking at. It predicted a \$1.7 billion budget surplus because it was assumed the iron ore price would correct. We are three-quarters of the way through the financial year and the iron ore price is still mid \$US120 today. The government is embarrassed that it is looking at another \$4 billion-plus surplus this year. What does it do? It says to the government trading enterprises, "Tell you what, guys, keep your money in your account because we are a bit frightened about it coming into our account. We do not want to put \$4 billion-plus in our surplus because we have had six and six in the last two years." The government boasts to the eastern states that it has all this money. Guess what? The eastern states then say we do not need as much GST. The Premier jumps up and down and says they are attacking our GST while, at the same time, another billion dollars is donated by resources companies that will not be in the budget bottom line. The Premier goes and lectures the eastern states about how he is a good money manager. He is embarrassed that he has

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all this money sitting there. He has the government trading enterprises withhold those dividends for a year because he is embarrassed about the riches pouring into his money bin.

The government does not provide proper oversight of government trading enterprises. Let us have a look at what happens in the Perth Mint. The Gold Corporation Act 1987 currently manages the oversight of the Perth Mint. The act establishes the Gold Corporation, which is the board that oversees the Perth Mint. Let us have a look at section 6 of the act, bearing in mind that the Perth Mint is not the first GTE that will be rolled in under the Government Trading Enterprises Bill, but noting that many other GTEs have similar sections. Section 6 of the Gold Corporation Act 1987 has a couple of key provisions. Subsection (7) states —

For parliamentary purposes, or for the proper conduct of the Minister’s public business —

- (a) Gold Corporation shall furnish to the Minister all information in the possession of Gold Corporation relating to the business of Gold Corporation or a subsidiary; and
- (b) the Board shall ensure that the Minister shall have and may retain copies of any documents requested.

The minister has a direct power to ask for information including documents and to make copies of those documents. Section 6(9) states —

For the purposes specified in subsection (7) the Minister may —

- (a) request Gold Corporation to furnish information to the Minister;
- (b) request the Board to ensure that the Minister is given access to information; and
- (c) make use of the staff of Gold Corporation or of any subsidiary to obtain information and to furnish it to the Minister.

Under section 6(7), the Gold Corporation should, for parliamentary purposes, which includes asking questions—I will get to that in a minute—or seeking information, furnish to the minister the information. Under section 6(9), the minister can ask for anything. Section 6(10) states —

Gold Corporation shall comply with a request under subsection (9) and make staff and facilities available to the Minister for the purposes of paragraph (c) of that subsection.

Gold Corporation is by statute obliged to provide the information sought by the minister. If the minister asks questions, the Gold Corporation, which is the overseer of the Perth Mint, must supply answers. What can the minister ask for? There is a reference in section 6(9)(b) to “documents requested” by the minister. Section 6(11) states —

For the purposes of this section —

document includes any data that is recorded or stored mechanically, photographically, or electronically and any tape, disc or other device or medium on which it is recorded or stored;

Just in case members are wondering how “information” is defined, because the minister may request Gold Corporation furnish information and section 6(7)(a) states that “Gold Corporation shall furnish to the Minister all information” in its possession, section 6(11) continues —

information means documents or other information relating to the business of Gold Corporation or a subsidiary of Gold Corporation being information, as so defined, specified, or of a description specified, by the Minister;

The minister can say, “This is the information that I want.” It is defined in the act. The minister can ask for any information. The definition of “parliamentary purposes” is interesting. The minister can seek information for parliamentary purposes. Section 6(11) continues —

parliamentary purposes means the purpose of —

- (a) answering a question asked in a House of Parliament; or
- (b) complying with a written law, or an order or resolution of a House of Parliament, that requires information to be furnished to a House of Parliament.

The Parliament itself can ask for information. This house can ask for information. It might not have escaped members’ notice that I gave notice of a motion earlier this week that this house should, through the minister, seek information from Gold Corporation. I will be very interested to see the government’s enthusiasm for that motion and for the release of information appropriately requested by Parliament. I would think that would be in everybody’s interests. Given the furore around the Perth Mint and the embarrassment it has caused the government, one would think that the minister, and various parts of government through the minister, would be actively seeking to find solutions to the problem. I will refer to the questions I have asked in Parliament this week to give members an indication of that. Yesterday, I asked —

- (3) Has the minister used these sections —

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That is section 6(9) and (10) —

of the establishing act to access any other information in relation to the Perth Mint since 2021?

The answer was no. The establishing act allows the minister to ask for any information that the minister wants. Has the minister asked for any information under this part of the act at any point? Has the minister checked? Obviously, ministers will have briefings and meetings with various departments and GTEs, and they would expect, at the time, that those GTEs will be filling them in on all the pertinent issues. They would expect that at that time. Ministers have the power to ask for all sorts of documents, bearing in mind that that has been a part of the act for a very long time. Ministers tend to trust the chairman of the board and the CEO when they come in for a meeting, sit in the ministerial office and say, “Nothing to see here; we are doing very well—profits are good” and all those things. That is probably the standard response for the most part. However, we are not in ordinary times. We are not in a situation in which the board is simply ticking over the management, particularly in the case of Gold Corporation, without any significant issues arising that could dramatically embarrass the government. The government’s response to that has not included seeking any documents under the act. I have asked whether more minutes have been sought to be reviewed. This is at a time when AUSTRAC is investigating potential money laundering by illegal organisations into the Perth Mint, perhaps using cryptocurrency as a tool to do so. There was certainly quite a prominent case of a bikie associate walking into the Perth Mint and buying gold. Under those circumstances, where has the government oversight been? How has the government made sure, for the people of Western Australia, that the Perth Mint has been run in an adequate manner? I suspect the government is running to the hills away from this issue. The government is so frightened of proper scrutiny that it is going to say there is nothing to see here and wait to see what AUSTRAC does in a few months’ time, rather than take proper oversight of its own entity.

This government has not managed its entities particularly well. We could talk about its departments, but I will run out of time for that. This is a trend in this government. Gold-standard transparency was promised. Whether I am talking about what is going on at Griffin Coal or in the energy system or at Perth Mint, it is not gold-standard transparency. It is not an open and accountable system that allows either Parliament or the people to have confidence in the functions of the government. The standard that has been applied here needs to be lifted dramatically, but I doubt it will happen.

Visitors — Manning Primary School

THE PRESIDENT (Hon Alanna Clohesy) [10.29 am]: I welcome Manning Primary School to the public gallery of the Legislative Council.

Members: Hear, hear!

Debate Resumed

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [10.30 am]: This is more than a storm in a teacup.

Several members interjected.

Hon Sue Ellery: Is it terrorism? Can you do better than that?

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I am happy to take constructive interjections and I am always interested in the interjections from the most senior government members represented in this chamber, and the Leader of the House is someone whom I have gone on record as saying I respect. On that basis, out of that affection and that respect, I provide this counsel across the chamber. Do not speak too soon. Members should not speak too soon on investigations they have no involvement with and no oversight of and that have arisen solely because of governance failures that have occurred under the McGowan administration. Before members venture into this too expeditiously, they should hold themselves back. Their position might be vindicated but we do not know yet. What is evident is that the Premier has not taken this issue too seriously.

This matter has been in the public domain for two or three weeks. The Premier was running deflections and denials. He did pop his head up to talk about Ed Sheeran during this crisis, one of his few useful contributions to public discourse over the last month, but that effectively represents the issues he places emphasis on and the kinds of matters that would cajole him out. I thought he was under protective custody in the first few days because he could not be found. The “Eddie Everywhere” of Western Australians politics could not be found for the first few days of that *Four Corners* report, Leader of the House.

It might strike members with some interest that I am not here to talk about the Perth Mint. I am here to talk about this excellent and timely motion—the kind of motion that we are compelled to bring to members’ attention on almost any given non-government business Thursday when we are so lucky to be on the roster. I do it because behaviour starts at the top. Behaviour is modelled at the top and, unfortunately, there are some otherwise, I think, people of talent in the cabinet and certainly aspirants to join the cabinet who are having the very worst behaviour modelled to them as the standard default behaviour. There is an old saying that the fish rots from the head down and I think

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this government is becoming quite whiffy. It really, really is. It is almost stomach churning, but we will get there as we go.

I want to focus on the second limb of this motion in particular, which refers to the government's lack of ministerial accountability for its failure, because I think this is the behaviour that is modelled to an exemplary—I mean that ironically—standard by the Premier. Nowhere has the government distinguished itself more disgracefully than in its administration of the health portfolio over the last term and a half. The system was run down under Hon Roger Cook, so I did not envy the new minister, Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson, in taking that up, but she took up the challenge with some relish. However, I have been disappointed in somebody who I otherwise thought to be an intelligent capable and energetic person. I still hold out hope for that. The standard of the McGowan government is best exemplified in the headline of an article in *The West Australian* on 28 February this year: “Minister pins blame on board over PCH backflip”. This is the standard of the McGowan government and this is why we bring motions of this construction to this chamber. It is not because we are searching for evidence. It is because the evidence is so overwhelming.

Hon Dan Caddy interjected.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: This is a story that the minister wrote herself, honourable member for the following reasons. I will read it to the member since he is so interested —

The Health Minister has been forced into an embarrassing climbdown after incorrectly claiming a dedicated resuscitation team was already in place at Perth Children's Hospital.

Amber Jade-Sanderson had to backtrack on the position she took on Friday with the spotlight firmly on the State's struggling health system after the Coroner's report into the 2021 death of Aishwarya Aswath at PCH.

What is telling is the minister's reported remarks —

Ms Sanderson ... said she was “disappointed” with the Child and Adolescent Health Service board after being incorrectly told on Friday a so-called “supernumerary” resuscitation team was already working at PCH.

I am not one to suggest that the advice coming from a department should always be accepted at face value. I have worked as a ministerial staffer, state and federal, and I understand how information and messages can be wrong, but the minister should have been particularly alert and hypersensitive to this issue. She should have gone over it and double-checked or triple-checked that what she told Parliament previously and what she had told the media so breezily was absolutely 100 per cent verified truth. It was 100 per cent wrong. We all make mistakes. We are all fallible. But is this kind of mistake in this kind of context acceptable? Does it reflect a minister who is discharging her responsibilities seriously? Does it represent the excuse? Does that represent the highest standards of ministerial accountability, particularly after the Premier made that courageous statement upon his first swearing-in of the cabinet in 2017 that he would run an open, transparent and accountable government? In every dimension, in every portfolio, but particularly in health, that has been run away from at a million miles an hour.

Is there any excuse, though, for this error? When opposition members or crossbench make errors of fact and are called out—I think it is fair to call people out when they get things wrong—they are castigated, derided and humiliated, but understand this: largely speaking, it is the effort of one particular individual. The government has all the resources of government, all the resources of agencies and an enormous Praetorian Guard of political advisers. I referred to the most recent tabled paper concerning ministerial staffing in the McGowan government from late last year and approximately 250 ministerial staff were on the books, which represents about a 25-person increase since 2017. I was very interested to note the office-by-office breakdown of staff. When I looked at the minister and her blaming this on errant advice that she had received from the board, I thought: Well, is there any excuse? Was there somebody in the office who could have double-checked or triple-checked that to make sure the minister did not go out and mislead the public and embarrass herself because she is not a person who should be embarrassed? She is a capable person, but it is a difficult portfolio. Nevertheless, I was shocked to discover that there are 17 staff in her office. Not all of them have policy roles, but that is a pretty healthy entitlement. She has more members of staff than there are members of the shadow cabinet! That is a very sad situation, I can assure members. But if members opposite hold us to the highest standards, guess what? I am going to hold them to higher ones than they are demonstrating. I think some of them have given up and do not care anymore. It is very unfortunate. The senior leadership of the McGowan government—I include the Leader of the House in this—should be demonstrating higher levels of accountability and higher standards of competence than they currently are. This situation in the health portfolio is certainly more than a storm in a teacup. I think the government is going to need a bigger cup!

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [10.40 am]: I am going to start by reading out the answer to a question on notice that I received after about four months of waiting. I will start with the question. It was a very reasonable question. It was —

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- (1) Since March 1997 to the financial year ending 30 June 2022, how many new social houses (not including refurbishments of existing housing) have been constructed for the Housing Authority and Department of Communities in the following regions:

I outlined the regions in my electorate —

- (a) Kimberley;
 - (b) Pilbara;
 - (c) North West Central; and
 - (d) Kalgoorlie?
- (2) for (a) and (d), listed against each electorate, how many of those were constructed in the financial year 2021–22?
- (3) for the same period how many new spot purchases have been made of existing houses for social housing for each region listed?
- (4) for the same period how many new spot purchases have been made for the purposes of social housing?

In light of the incredible surge in rental costs and the number of homeless people in our community, it was a totally reasonable question about the inability of people in our regions to have their most basic need met—the provision of housing. Initially, it was a question without notice. Fair enough; it was put on notice to the department, and it was given the Christmas period and January to work out the answer. The gold-standard transparency of this government is in the answer given to me —

The Department of Communities ... data reporting system has changed multiple times throughout this period. As such, this data would require the manual review of files. Given the level of agency resourcing required to provide this information, it is not deemed a reasonable use of government resources.

However, if the Honourable Member has a more specific question, the Minister will endeavour to provide an answer.

Several members interjected.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: Seriously, the obfuscation, avoidance and lack of transparency of this government! It was quite a reasonable question, but the government did not even try to answer it. It did not want to be exposed for its failure to deliver on social housing in the regions. If I had asked the same question about other regions across the state, I am sure I would have got the same answer. This government has failed to deliver. Fortunately, the Australian Bureau of Statistics keeps a list of housing completions. I have been able to go through the data on what is called public sector housing to get an idea of the record of this government. If it were not for third parties like the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the building approvals process, we would have no idea. This government comes out with press release after press release stating that \$2.4 billion is going towards social housing—or whatever the figure is. It is throwing it out there like it is confectionery to create some sort of drama. The minister can put out a press release, but he cannot deliver social housing in any meaningful way for our community. We are now seeing the crisis in Western Australia. Fortunately, those third parties have shown evidence that this government —

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon NEIL THOMSON: Fortunately, those third parties have shown evidence that, year on year, this government has delivered in the order of 40 per cent fewer public sector houses, the vast majority of which I assume will be social or Government Regional Officers' Housing houses, when compared with that delivered by the Barnett government.

Several members interjected.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: I get some impression that there is a failure to deliver. I speak to people on the ground. I am passionate about this. I speak to people who are on the waiting list. Members on the other side can say what they like, but, at the end of the day, it is about what happens on the ground. It is about those people who cannot get a home and have to live in a tent.

Several members interjected.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: For the sake of *Hansard*, I am getting constant harassment from that side because they do not want to know the truth. The truth is that this government has failed to deliver on social housing and we now have a crisis. Why has this happened? We have the most dysfunctional agency put together called the Department of Communities. We have the most dysfunctional government trading enterprise cobbled together after the

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machinery-of-government review. We used to have three separate bodies operating in distinct areas. Was that perfect? Maybe not, but it was a lot better than what we have today. We had a situation in which LandCorp focused on regional land delivery. It did a much better job. We saw the amazing work in Karratha that happened during the Barnett government era. We are now struggling to get land released in areas like Kalgoorlie, where it is dribbling out. We have a shortage of land. We see a failure to deal with difficult-to-develop brownfield sites, such as the East Perth power station, whereby secret deals were done behind the scenes, but two years later, it all fell over. This government cannot deliver a thing. We used to have a standalone Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority that had a sole focus on ensuring that those difficult-to-develop sites delivered the sustainable density outcomes that were needed in the city, such as affordable apartment developments close to transport nodes. Instead, this government is focused on cutting ribbons and trying to deliver those huge civil projects in an overheated market and is not doing the strategic planning that needs to be done.

This government enterprise called DevelopmentWA has lost its way. I have information. People talk to me on a weekly basis about the failure of the previous arrangements in the Housing Authority when it had joint ventures to deliver social housing. We are not seeing the same delivery. I will get to the bottom of it, notwithstanding this government's lack of transparency and inability to provide an answer to the most simple question about how many social houses have been built. This government does not want transparency. It does not want its failure in the area of housing to be highlighted. It does not want to see its failure with the machinery-of-government changes, which has resulted in unworkable departments that cannot do their core business. They do not even know what their core business is.

The challenge we have today is that the government has this absolute sole focus on building up its coffers with dividends so that it can cut ribbons, instead of focusing on the sustainable outcomes that we need.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon NEIL THOMSON: It is about making sure that those entities have the right focus. If DevelopmentWA has a profit focus, it has to be the right focus. It should be dealing with the lands to be developed by the private sector and making sure that that is occurring. Instead, everything is spread like butter across these three agencies without the right focus. That is the kind of gold-standard transparency that is happening in DevelopmentWA!

It is no surprise that we have the challenges with Gold Corporation. Our ministers are so distracted by keeping information from the opposition and the public. They are not prepared to stand on their track record. That is because their track record is one of abysmal failure. There has been a 40 per cent reduction in the amount of social housing. I dare opposition members to present those numbers in a chart to show how many social houses have been built in Western Australia during the term of this government vis-a-vis during the term of the Barnett government. I dare them to present the data. That is their job.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon NEIL THOMSON: I dare them to present the data and be honest about their failure. They do not want their failure to be exposed. That is why I get the sorts of response that I have had to the most basic questions about social housing construction in my region.

Hon Kyle McGinn interjected.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: For the purposes of *Hansard*, a member for that region keeps interfering. Dribble keeps coming out of the mouth of that member on a constant basis.

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [10.50 am]: I had intended to wait a bit longer so that I could respond more broadly to the issues raised in this motion, but I could not understand much of what the last speaker was saying —

Hon Neil Thomson interjected

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon SUE ELLERY: Even when I did listen, I could not understand the point the honourable member was trying to make, so I will make my contribution now. I will start with the motion generally and the question of transparency. It is entirely reasonable, and it should be the case, that a good opposition will use all the tools available to it to apply scrutiny to the government of the day, whether that is through parliamentary questions, questions that are asked in estimates committees, or whatever. It is entirely reasonable that opposition members will use every opportunity available to them to forensically examine the things that are on the public record, get other things on the public record,

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use the media, and do whatever else they need to do. What is not reasonable is to trash the reputation of an organisation when a number of external and certainly internal reviews are already in place.

We have been told that what we have here is the spectre of WA Inc. WA Inc was about the elevation of personal and public interests melded together with no external or independent review. It was about personal advantage to the disadvantage of the public resources. It was about political and business leaders melding their personal and professional responsibilities to the detriment of the state. There is absolutely nothing like that in the public debate about the Perth Mint. We have the spectre of WA Inc. On Tuesday, in the Legislative Assembly, the Leader of the Opposition, Shane Love—the alternative Premier—said that we have serious criminal matters. What do we do when we have a serious criminal matter? We ring the cops. What has Shane Love done? He has written to Jim Chalmers or Anthony Albanese asking for a royal commission. Today, in addition to WA Inc, we have the spectre of terrorism. What will be next? Will it be intergalactic warfare?

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon SUE ELLERY: Two very serious external reviews are underway of matters that will be examined. I will talk about those in a minute. Let us not overreach. Let us not over-egg the pudding. Let us deal with the facts and forensically examine those reports when they come back and do what we need to do in response to them. In the meantime, enough of this kind of heady breathlessness about what we are dealing with.

Under this government, the refreshed management and board of the Perth Mint is working through all the issues of historic regulatory noncompliance. That includes those that existed during the eight years in which opposition members were in government, and which they did not even find, let alone try to fix. That includes the United States' Model State Commodity Code, which had been overlooked by former governments, including the former Liberal–National government. In addition, this government has invested \$34 million to address systems and processes to fix those historic noncompliance issues.

The Perth Mint is a very important part of the Western Australian economy, not just because it employs 600 Western Australians, but also because of the support it provides to our gold industry, whether that be a lower cost base because of the lower transport costs associated with the refining that it does, a lower level of carbon emissions associated with that transport, or better liquidity because of Perth Mint's strong balance sheet, which allows for mine site payment or payment inside three days once assaying has been completed. In the event that Western Australian and interstate gold miners had to find a new refiner, that would increase their costs and create cash flow difficulties. Every time opposition members trash the reputation of Perth Mint by raising the spectre now of terrorism, they put those jobs and that service at risk.

I now want to turn to a number of other matters. That includes the appointment of the new CEO just under a year ago. That was a milestone in the overhaul of the leadership team at Perth Mint. That has included new heads of the refinery, treasury and risk and compliance areas. The new CEO's team is working to address the legacy issues. Perth Mint is prioritising activities to progress its fully funded anti–money laundering counterterrorism financing remediation program through the engagement of additional staff. An independent audit has been ordered by the regulator, the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre, and is expected to be completed later this year. It would be inappropriate, never mind ridiculous, to call for a royal commission while that is underway. The Perth Mint welcomes that audit, and it will support and inform its ongoing efforts.

In respect of international funds transfer; the Perth Mint is committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act and is working with AUSTRAC to prevent, detect and respond to financial crime. Under that act, the Perth Mint is required to identify customers who purchase bullion valued at \$5 000 or more. In fact, the Perth Mint goes beyond that and obtains information on any individual who spends \$2 000 or more on bullion. The Perth Mint does not accept cash payments in the shop. It assesses all individuals who make purchases in the shop in accordance with guidance from AUSTRAC. Perth Mint is not legally obliged to ban customers, but it takes steps to ban certain individuals from undertaking further transactions when deemed appropriate as an additional AMLCTF measure. If the Perth Mint suspects that a person or transaction is linked to crime, it will lodge a suspicious matter report. Due to the tipping-off provisions in that act to which I have just referred, the Perth Mint cannot reveal to anyone, including Hon Dr Steve Thomas, whether it has lodged a suspicious matter report. Therefore, no, I cannot give Hon Dr Steve Thomas a guarantee, because Perth Mint cannot tell me and it cannot tell the member. That is because it has to follow a formal process.

In respect of the model state commodity code, which was designed to protect citizens in the United States when the Perth Mint identified that some of its products might fall within the remit of that code, it took immediate steps to deal with that issue. The issue was noted in the Perth Mint's 2021–22 annual report, which was tabled in state

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Parliament in September 2022, and it has been listed as a contingent liability in line with the Perth Mint's reporting requirements. This is in addition to the minister publicly commenting on this issue in state Parliament last year.

I did want to make another comment about transparency, and I want to read from *Hansard* of the Legislative Assembly of 14 March 2023 comments made by Mia Davies, the member for —

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Central Wheatbelt.

Hon SUE ELLERY: — Central Wheatbelt; thank you. It states —

I compliment the government for the changes in the budget estimates reporting of the Water Corporation to make it more transparent. When we were in government, I found the then process to be a very strange way to report. Again, if we seek to improve accountability mechanisms, that is one thing this government can take credit for.

Who was saying that? It was the member for Central Wheatbelt. The member goes on to state —

In the estimates process, instead of just a one-line entry with very little detail, people will see more information in the budget papers and the information will be available through annual reports. I think that is a step towards good practice. I would not like anyone to say that when something positive has been done, we do not acknowledge that as part of our role in opposition.

I thank the member for those comments. I want to address another thing that has been bouncing around a little bit in media coverage over the last few days. That is the comments by Hon Peter Collier about Banksia Hill Detention Centre and what the government is doing there. I found myself in an extraordinary position in which it looked to me like Hon Peter Collier, on behalf of the Liberal Party, had become an apologist for prison rioters. Therefore, I looked at the comments that he made as reported on 1 January 2023 by Finbar O'Mallon of Australian Associated Press. I am sorry; I will make sure that I get the correct reference for *Hansard*. It states —

WA shadow corrective services minister Peter Collier blasted the way Banksia Hill was being run.

“The only vehicle that they’ve got is to riot,” Mr Collier said on Sunday.

“What a sad indictment of our corrective services facilities.”

Mr Collier said Banksia Hill was being used for punishment ...

That is correct! It is because they have been found guilty of a crime. I do not remember Hon Peter Collier making those comments back in 2013 when Hon Murray Cowper or Hon Joe Francis were the Minister for Corrective Services and there were riots at Banksia Hill. Guess what happened when there were riots and the youth detainees trashed their cells at the youth detention centre? They had to be moved to an adult prison to keep them safe. Do members know what happened at that time? If I turn to May 2013, Hon Joe Francis, the Minister for Corrective Services at the time, talked about the job of prison officers. He said —

It is a tough job being a prison officer. Prison officers deal with the most dangerous people known to society. That is why they are behind bars—because they are dangerous.

What a quantum leap! It is like that episode of *Seinfeld* when everything is the opposite. We now have a longstanding member of the Liberal Party saying that the only vehicle detainees have got is to riot. He somehow commented that it was a bad thing that Banksia Hill was being used for punishment. I never thought I would see the day when a Liberal Party shadow minister would actually be an apologist for the kind of activity that has gone on in Banksia Hill when exactly the same things happened in 2013. The respective minister at the time, Murray Cowper, got himself into a bit of bother because he said that the riots were entertaining. He was not the Liberal Party's finest contributor; I have to say. He was a pleasant fellow, but not the finest contributor. I am not sure many on the other side would actually disagree with me on that, but, of course, they cannot. He said it was entertaining and got himself in a spot of bother. Joe Francis stated the obvious: they are there because they have committed a crime and are dangerous. It is a dangerous place to work, because they are dangerous. They were moved into an adult prison to keep them safe and everyone else safe because they had trashed their cells.

In the minute and a half I have left, I want to defend my very good friend Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson. Health jurisdictions, not just in this country, but around the world post-COVID, are under extraordinary pressure. I know the work she is doing is outstanding. I commend her. She asked for information about the implementation of the roster in writing. She got it in writing and went out and reported it. Then they said to her, “Oh, actually; that’s not true.” What did she immediately do? She went back out and said, “I’m sorry; I have been misled.” She expressed disappointment in that. I, and frankly everyone who has been a minister, has been in that position from time to time. I say to opposition members: go your hardest and apply your most forensic skills—do some work; that would be good—but let us stop with this heady breathlessness and over-egging the pudding.

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HON JAMES HAYWARD (South West) [11.05 am]: I stand to make a contribution to this motion. Last week I got in trouble with my mum. Nobody wants to be in trouble with their mum. I am going to tell the chamber what happened as I think it may be of some relevance. As I usually do, I drove up from Bunbury, arrived at my mum and dad's place and then emptied my car, took the plastic bottles out and put them in the recycle bin. It turns out that the City of Canning has recycle bin police. I did not even know they existed to be honest. They come around, and guess what they do? If the recycling is right, they put a gold star on your recycle bin to say that you have done the right thing to the highest standard. Unfortunately, mum was a bit grumpy with me because when I threw my recycled bottles into the bin, I left the caps on. I thought I was doing the right thing by putting them in the recycle bin, but the City of Canning is quite pedantic about how these things are supposed to be done. Anyway, mum did not get a gold star, and she was warned that she could not continue to dispose of plastic bottle top lids into the bin.

When she told me this story, it immediately made me think about the idea of gold-standard transparency. The idea that it is not just, "We will get it almost right", as I did—I threw the plastic bottle into the recycle bin with the lid on thinking that that was fine; gold-standard transparency is a step higher. It is the ultimate reward for something that is exceptional. It is far better than just an average performance. It is worthy of a gold star. For this government to claim that it is anywhere near a gold-star performance when it comes to accountability is nothing short of smoke and mirrors. It is a deception.

Opposition and crossbench members ask questions every day of the week that are stonewalled and not answered. Responses are given that are nowhere near what we would describe as gold-star transparency. I just want to pick up something on the Perth Mint that the Premier said in the other place during a matter of public interest. He stated —

The gold has always been alloyed. That has never changed. What changed was the component of silver, versus copper and lead, in the gold sold to the Shanghai Gold Exchange.

The problem is that it is actually not quite right. In response to the questions that I put to the minister, he confirmed that the Perth Mint made a decision to output gold at 99.996 per cent. He admits that previously it was at 99.992 per cent. That is a reduction in gold. There is no question. The Premier stood up in the other place and stated —

The gold has always been alloyed. That has never changed. What changed was the component of silver, versus copper and lead, in the gold sold to the Shanghai Gold Exchange.

That was not gold-standard transparency. If the Premier honestly believes that there is no problem with that because he says the standard is 99.9 and it never went under that —

Hon Martin Pritchard: Nine nine.

Hon JAMES HAYWARD: Nine nine; thank you. I accept that that is the case. However, if there is nothing to hide about the fact a decision was made to save some money, he should simply say that. I do not understand why he will not. The Premier says that there is no issue. There is nothing to see here. There is nothing to worry about. It is a storm in a teacup. Why does he not just come clean and tell us about the decision that was made? Surely a decision was made after the 2017 election as part of the budget savings initiatives that the Premier and Treasurer were putting in place. One of the things that they do is put pressure on those enterprises to return more money to the government, which is clearly what has occurred. More money was returned to the government, although it is very difficult to get anybody from the government to admit that that was the case. The *Four Corners* report identified around \$600 000 of savings a year, but I am yet to get anybody from the government to confirm what, if any, savings were made by this reduction in gold content. The Premier says in *Hansard* that the gold has components of silver, copper and lead. That is not gold-star transparency. We already know that the gold was watered down—not that that is the right term, but it was reduced—and there was an increase in silver, copper and potentially lead to make up the last part of the gold; albeit, the gold itself may never have fallen under the world-standard for gold at 99.99 per cent. There are questions that need to be answered. The problem is that, at some point, the truth will come out. There is no doubt about it. My advice is that the government would be better to come clean with those things and deliver the gold-standard transparency that was promised.

I have also asked a lot of questions about a .50 calibre rifle that the state government purchased for a media stunt back on 22 March 2022. The government put on a media conference to talk about the urgent need to update the state's gun laws, which are old and probably due to be updated. But the premise of the media conference was to come along to a show-and-tell to see the guns that had been seized off the streets. A pile of weapons was there and the star performer was the .50 calibre sniper rifle. Later on we found out—we were tipped off, and the Minister for Police admitted it—that the gun had been purchased. It cost \$8 500 to buy the gun. The Commissioner of Police of the day said—I use my own words to interpret what he said—that those things should not be allowed on the streets; they are not for domestic use; and we have to get them off the streets. The reality is that they had not seized the gun; they had bought the gun and then announced that they planned to end its availability in Western Australia. There

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are only 20 of those guns in the state, and the police already know exactly where they are and what they are being used for.

We later found out—thanks to the National Shooting Council, which did some digging and, under a freedom of information request, turned up—that the range used to fire the .50 calibre on was not authorised for that type of rifle. We also found out that the Army, the tactical response group and the Air Force had concerns about the safety of the demonstration. A Warrant Officer Class One said that he considered the activity to be extremely unsafe and that it would pose a serious risk to property and persons. Here we have the state government running a press conference about gun safety, using a firearm that is not authorised to be used in that location. The government was warned about that by the Special Air Service Regiment, the TRG and the Air Force. They all said not to do it, to go and do it somewhere else, and that it was not safe. The government pushed on with the demonstration and the RAAF had to close airspace to 18 000 feet for fear of a ricochet from one of these things. That is absolutely ridiculous. That is our police minister, Premier and police commissioner running a show about gun safety. There is no gold-star transparency in that. I have asked who fired the shots, but the government will not tell me. I have been told that it was not a member of the TRG because they refused to do it! Where is the gold-star transparency? The government members promised it. It is about time they start delivering.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan) [11.14 am]: I was not going to make a contribution today, but the self-righteous contribution of the Leader of the House motivated me to open my mouth, and I would like to respond to a couple of comments that she said but also to support this very, very valid motion from the Leader of the Opposition.

The Perth Mint saga is a disgrace, quite frankly, and the manner in which the government has handled it thus far shows that more questions have been asked than answers provided over the last two weeks. I am sure, as time plays on, that those answers will be provided, or I would like to think that they will be provided, but the chair of the Perth Mint hiding from public debate in this area for over two weeks simply does not assist the process.

With regard to the comments of the Leader of the House that somehow there was a bit of overreach on the part of the Leader of the Opposition because the words “terrorism” or “terrorist” were used in his contribution—give me a break! We sat here for two years defending the integrity of this institution and had the Premier of the state calling us terrorists on a consistent basis. We were terrorists! We were corrupt because we did this awful thing—including the President of this place—to defend the integrity of the Legislative Council, and we were labelled terrorists. If there was ever an instance of overreach, it was that nonsense. Of course, the events over the last week in particular show just how ridiculous that is. How on earth can the Corruption and Crime Commission finish its investigation into that incident, almost 12 months ago, and the Attorney General not know? How can that happen? Yet, we are terrorists because we were covering up corruption. As I have said on numerous occasions, and all other parties other than the Labor Party agreed with me on this, we were not terrorists; we were protecting parliamentary convention. We were protecting the integrity of the Parliament. It is called parliamentary privilege; that is what we were doing. It has existed for 800 years since the Magna Carta. Somehow the Labor government of Western Australia is above parliamentary privilege, so do not get all precious about being called terrorists. You want to sit there while the Premier goes out day after day calling us terrorists. Do not come in here and say how terrible it is and that it is overreach.

I noticed some comments that were made in the other place about Corrective Services. The government thinks it is on to Corrective Services and some comments that I made about Banksia Hill Detention Centre. Exactly the same talking points were used in the Legislative Assembly yesterday as the Leader of the House used today. She is sitting there with the talking points that have been provided to her. She thinks: “Oh, we’ve got something here because Hon Peter Collier said that the only vehicle for these juveniles was to riot.”

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: No! To coin one of the Leader of the House’s comments, I sat in silence while she opened her mouth, and I expect the same respect.

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: No; I am not taking interjections.

With regard to Banksia Hill, I did make those comments. They were part comments. The Leader of the House took high offence to the fact that I said the terrible thing that they had to be punished and that it was punitive. The reason I said that is that Banksia Hill is purportedly a rehabilitation facility. Do not ask me; go and have a look at the Banksia Hill website. Go and have a look at its annual reports. Go and have a look at the *Hansard* from the annual report hearing less than a month ago. I specifically asked the officers from Banksia Hill: are you a punitive institution or a rehabilitation institution? Guess what they said? They said the latter; they are a rehabilitation facility. Therefore, own goal, Leader of the House.

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Hon Sue Ellery: No.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes; it is an own goal. You really, really need to do your homework. You have to stop being so lazy and go and do some homework. It is a rehabilitation facility. We are dealing with some of the most marginalised juveniles in our society. Believe it or not, the Leader of the House is wrong; they are not all guilty. Over one-third of those in Banksia Hill Detention Centre are on remand. We do not know whether they are guilty or not. Do not come in here and label them all as guilty and say that they are criminals who need punishment and that I am wrong. The entire intent of Banksia Hill is rehabilitation. The whole point of any government intervention for marginalised juveniles should be to rehabilitate them so that when they come out of Banksia Hill, they do not go into a mainstream jail. They need to develop resilience and self-esteem in order to lead a meaningful life. That is not what is happening at Banksia Hill.

I have been consistent with my views on this. In no way do I condone or accept illegal behaviour on the part of juveniles—none whatsoever. But when they are thrown into cells for 20 to 22 hours a day, when they are not provided with any rehabilitation facilities or meaningful rehabilitation programs and that is how they react, are members surprised? I banned the cane when I was the Minister for Education; I was slammed for that, particularly on my side, but it was the right thing to do. We have gone past the point whereby we smack our kids as punishment. We try to develop meaningful strategies so that children learn. We are not doing that at Banksia Hill. If we were doing that at Banksia Hill, why did 353 of them try to self-harm in the year before last? Why did over 200 try to self-harm last year? What do we do? Rather than saying “Let’s try to look at what we’re doing here”, the minister carts them off to Casuarina Prison. That is what he does. He says, “Isn’t it terrible that the pesky little shadow minister comes out and says that it’s a last resort and it shouldn’t be a punitive institution.” It is not Pete who is saying this, it is on the government’s own website. The website says that Banksia Hill Detention Centre is a rehabilitation facility. That is exactly what it should be.

As a former minister for education, the Leader of the House should know that we have a wonderful group of schools in our society called Curriculum and Reengagement in Education schools. A lot of those institutions deal with kids who have been to Banksia Hill and develop meaningful programs that stem the tide of their illegal behaviour. Let us not forget that these kids do not come from “mum and dad with a white picket fence and a dog” homes. A lot of these kids come from very marginalised societies, particularly Aboriginal kids who come from the north. We take them down from north, shove them into a cell for 20 hours and expect them to be angels. They will not be Bambis when they come down and hop into Banksia Hill. If the government is going to mock me for having that attitude, go for it, but I know that I am on safe ground on this. I am a lifelong educator. If we are going to change the lives of those kids, we have to provide meaningful rehabilitation. Government members can slam me all they like, I do not care what they say, but those kids need meaningful rehabilitation or members will find that some of these kids will take their lives. Those who survive and come out of Banksia Hill will end up in a mainstream jail. At the moment, in our muster in our adult prisons, one in four youths from Banksia Hill have gone to a mainstream jail. Surely as a society we are better than that, but the government is going to give those kids an enduring life of incarceration, and when they finally get out, they will just be repeat offenders.

I make no apology whatsoever for saying that it is the only vehicle. They are so frustrated, disillusioned and destroyed. They have no self-esteem and they feel “what else can we do?” Rather than lambast these kids and me for the fact that the government is not doing what it should be doing—it is not doing what the government’s website says the institution should be doing; it is not providing meaningful rehabilitation—perhaps look in the mirror. That is called ministerial responsibility. That is what it is. Responsibility rests entirely at the feet of the Minister for Corrective Services, as it does for the Minister for Police, with the 3 367 police who accessed mental health support last year. According to the minister, they are leaving the force because of other opportunities. They are not; they are leaving because they are disillusioned. Service industries are crumbling. Rather than fiddle like Nero and make ridiculous comments about the opposition, go and look in the mirror. If they looked after these kids and our police force they would find that we would not have mass resignations and those kids would go out and lead meaningful lives.

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.24 am]: In the short time I have, I will try to address some of the hogwash that came across from the other side about some of the stuff that was said. I feel a little bad today, because the opposition leader, Hon Dr Steve Thomas, must be carrying a lot of the workload. He seems to be the only one who puts up motions on Liberal business and it seems to be same motion over and again. Today he tried something different, but he still managed to turn it into the same stuff he has been saying for six years. It has not changed from the day we took government in 2017, and it is the same again today. I have only a short amount of time, so I will go to the comments made by Hon Neil Thomson because they are quite easy to dissect.

Obviously, Hon Neil Thomson does not get out to Kalgoorlie very often, nor does he look when he is there because Hon Neil Thomson only goes out with the Leader of the Liberal Party, Libby Mettam, to get the grabs that he wants. He does not take notice of what is being done by the local member, Ali Kent, who has done a fantastic job

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working with the Minister for Housing. Land has been released consistently in Kalgoorlie and for some reason, Hon Neil Thomson has no clue about it. It perplexes me when on one hand Hon Neil Thomson says, “You don’t do nothing; there are no projects, no housing, no nothing”, but on the other, says, “You’re just cutting ribbons.” What do we cut ribbons on? When we create a project and open something, that means we have achieved something!

Hon Neil Thomson is also in conflict with his leader, Hon Dr Steve Thomas, because Hon Dr Steve Thomas says that we are hiding dividends within departments but Hon Neil Thomson says that the dividends are being hidden in government coffers. Maybe Hon Neil Thomson should talk to his leader, because he is in absolute opposition to what Hon Dr Steve Thomas said in his opening speech. I know for a fact that there have been land releases in Kalgoorlie because Minister John Carey, the member for Kalgoorlie, Ali Kent, and I released some land near Pringle Village. Hon Neil Thomson knows about that fantastic project for independent living for seniors. There were more land releases near the golf club. Seriously, it is a shame that Hon Neil Thomson only ever goes out for a little media grab, a photo here and there and jumps on the ABC, playing on his phone the whole time while Libby Mettam is trying to execute some sort of argument around the gold issue. Unfortunately, when she was asked what she would do, she said, “McGowan is not doing a good job.” She would be asked again, “What would you do if you were in government?” and she would answer, “McGowan is not doing a good job.” Once again, there is no detail and no plan. The opposition is simply trying to stretch paper cuts. It is grabbing hold of paper cuts and trying to rip them open.

It is disgraceful to see Hon Neil Thomson constantly whistling up fuss over things with negativity. I have said in this chamber before: stop bringing negativity. Hon Neil Thomson is talking down our region so much and it is disrespectful to the constituents of the Mining and Pastoral electorate. I feel ashamed that the best the Liberal Party can offer in the Mining and Pastoral Region is negativity. That is all it seems to bring to this chamber. We constantly have negativity coming from Hon Neil Thomson whilst the local member, Ali Kent, is out there fighting and delivering on the issues that really matter in the goldfields, not just media grabs, and not just coming into this chamber and talking down things such as our gold industry. It is an absolute shame. I did not see Hon Neil Thomson standing shoulder to shoulder with mining companies talking about the gold issue, maybe because they were not going to stand beside him and say something negative, because they understand how important the gold industry is in Western Australia. Over 31 000 employees are directly and indirectly engaged across Western Australia, and that is all the member can worry about. I see the little puppet hands over there—okay, that was really offensive. I feel very offended by Hon Neil Thomson! Like I said, we will get some picture books for the member so he can understand things a bit better. *Play School* is one of the greatest TV shows to watch, and a lot of things are not in writing, so that might be a bit easier for Hon Neil Thomson because apparently when the minister gives detail, he does not understand it.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.