

TAXI INDUSTRY — PORT HEDLAND

Statement

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [9.49 pm]: I rise to speak about a meeting I had with Kristi-Anne Spoljaric, a representative of the Port Hedland taxi industry. I believe she operates three taxis out of Port Hedland. The reason that I wanted to speak on this subject tonight is that those who have been observing the media may have seen that the taxi industry in Port Hedland took industrial action last week. It is a very unusual circumstance when taxidriviers take industrial action, simply because they are self-employed and the moment they take any action, they will not have income, and we know that the taxi industry, across the board, has struggled in recent times for a range of reasons.

The situation in Port Hedland has got so out of hand because of some of the antisocial behaviour and some of the challenges that taxidriviers face on a nightly basis. In an unusual display of solidarity among the taxidriviers, they felt that they needed to do something about this situation, and they did not provide services for a number of days, which obviously had implications for the town. A number of people rely on taxis because of the need to commute around the town. This action was not taken lightly. It resulted in a meeting with, I believe, senior representatives of the police and the local member, Kevin Michel, and they discussed the issues in the town.

Let us just focus on the industry and the challenges facing these drivers, many of whom, as I say, are struggling. I was told that one of the drivers had three windows smashed in one night. This is not a good situation. There were other examples of juveniles walking past the cars and making comments that they wanted free rides and if they did not get free rides, the driver would be targeted. They would tap on the bonnet and make threatening gestures and so forth. These are a very frightening situations for our drivers; in fact, drivers have been assaulted. This is not a good situation. There is intimidation, threats, rock throwing and the use of catapult-type devices—shanghais or gings or whatever they call them. My point is: this is what has been going on in Port Hedland.

What do the drivers want? The drivers do not want a lot. They have only three demands. It is not as though they are taking industrial action to seek higher rates of pay or better conditions—no. They simply want to have more police delivered into Port Hedland. They simply want to see better street lighting in some locations, and they simply want to see the shrubbery cleared around some of the drains, which are used as hiding places for these juveniles who seem to think it is a sport to attack drivers.

A government member interjected.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: Just listen, please, member. The issue here is simply: this is all that the drivers are asking for. This is a matter that the state can show some leadership in, and I think the state is on notice. We cannot allow this antisocial behaviour and juvenile crime to continue in the north of our state or in our regions. We cannot tolerate it. A comment was made that police tried to empathise and feel sympathy by saying, “Look, we get attacked as well.” But that is a very different situation. When a police car has been attacked, the car is repaired by the state of Western Australia, but when a taxi is attacked, it is an additional cost on the taxidriviers, who are living on the edge of their seat trying to make a living, every time they have to repair their taxi. It is an additional cost to their insurance and an additional risk to their business. I will stand up for the taxi industry in the north. The government has been put on notice because the industry is saying that if no progress is made on these demands over the next four weeks, there will be further industrial action. It is pretty simple: more police, some additional lighting and some tree removal is needed. We can sit here and ask whose responsibility it is. Get more police in there and end the lawlessness that is going on in these towns. That is what we need to do. Kevin Michel, do your job as a local member and stand up and speak up.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon NEIL THOMSON: I hear from people out there who say that the local members are afraid to speak out on these matters. I do not know whether they have been told to keep silent. We have a few local members here. In fact, there are five members of the government who represent that region. Three or four of them are sitting here. Let us stand up for the taxi industry and see some progress.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon NEIL THOMSON: All I am asking for is some progress over the next four weeks. That is all I am asking for. Members opposite have an opportunity. Do something about the problem.