

PEMBERTON, SALE OF MILL HOUSES

992. Mr OMODEI to the Premier:

I refer the Premier to the issue of the Pemberton mill houses raised in this House yesterday. I know that the Premier has informed himself of this subject.

- (1) How does the Premier expect the tenants of these houses, many of whom are now unemployed as a result of the Government's forest policy, to pay \$90 000 to \$95 000 for their homes?
- (2) Will the Premier admit that the Government, which owns the land these houses are built on, has the discretion not to charge the tenants for the land component?
- (3) Will the Premier support the call from the Liberal Opposition to charge these tenants only the cost of the homes, which would be about \$30 000 to \$35 000?
- (4) Does the Government now intend to take these people's homes as well as their jobs?

Dr GALLOP replied:

- (1)-(4) I will ignore the last question, because it is typical of some of the matters that have been raised by the member about the forest policy of this Government.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Dr GALLOP: Our Government has invested a huge amount of money to make sure that the transition from old-growth logging, which is an important policy for the future of Western Australia, is managed with sensitivity to the individual interests and needs of the people affected. Make no mistake about that.

No decisions have yet been made on how these houses will be dealt with. The Government is examining all options. Indeed, the cabinet subcommittee on forests, of which I am not a member, has had some discussions on these matters, as the Minister for the Environment indicated to me in question time yesterday. The forest policy implementation office released a community survey aimed at finding out if there is a market for the houses among the existing tenants.

Mr Barnett: It has the government logo on it, so do not blame the office. The Government released the survey.

Dr GALLOP: I said who it was.

Mr Barnett: No, the Government did it.

Dr GALLOP: The Leader of the Opposition is very negative, and increasingly his colleagues also say that he is nasty. That is revealed by the sorts of interjections and contributions that we get from him in this Parliament on a daily basis.

Mr Barnett: Let's talk about people's homes.

Dr GALLOP: Let us talk about them. The consultation process has been designed so that tenants will be spoken to individually following the distribution of the questionnaire, and two project officers are in Pemberton undertaking those consultations today. To give tenants an idea of the possible market prices and to assist them in answering the questionnaire, the letter stated that similar houses have been sold in the area for \$90 000 to \$95 000. That was an indicative figure only, based on the Valuer General's report, and was never stated to be a hard and fast figure.

Members on this side of the House recognise that that may well have caused concern among those residents. We apologise if it did cause concern, because that is the last thing in the world we want to do to people who are under pressure because of changes that are going on in their society. The two project officers are in Pemberton today to explain the survey to the residents to allay those concerns.

The Government is working on this issue. It wants to consult with the community about it. Different options are before the Government. It is our intention to work with the people on this matter. I say to the member that we had no intention to cause concern, and, if we did, we apologise for that. What we are doing is right in principle; that is, to find out the community view on that question.

The Government will consider different options to progress this matter in a responsible way. Responsibility in this issue has a number of headings. There is a heritage issue. I am sure the member would agree with that. Secondly, there is a commercial issue from the point of view of the Government as well. Thirdly and importantly, there are the individual needs of the families in that area. All those factors will be brought to bear when the Government considers this issue.

This Government stands proud on its policy on forests. We have stopped the logging of old-growth forests and we are managing the transition with sensitivity. If that survey caused concern and offence, we apologise to those people in that area for that.