

**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

*Amendment to Motion*

Resumed from 6 November after the following amendment had been moved by Hon Bruce Donaldson -

That the following words be added to the end of the motion -

but regrets to inform Your Excellency that the Government is failing in its administration of the State of Western Australia.

**HON MURRAY CRIDDLE** (Agricultural) [12.01 pm]: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the amendment. I am pleased that the Minister for Agriculture is here because I want to talk about the administration of the drought package. I have had communication from people in our electorate about what guidelines will be implemented and whether those people can access documentation so that they can apply for the assistance announced by the minister. I hope that everybody understands what must be done for the people who want to apply.

Hon Kim Chance: That has been determined by the department, and I believe the forms are available now.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: When I rang the agency I was told that the forms would be in the post at some stage. I would like a copy of the rules and regulations. Members who represent the Agricultural Region and their electorate officers should receive the forms because obviously they will receive queries about applications.

Hon Kim Chance: Farmers can also access that information on the hotline.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I have circulated that number, but perhaps it should be circulated even more. The minister might bear that in mind.

Hon Kim Chance: The number is 1800 198231.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I thank the minister for that information. It was a particular request from some of the women in the wheatbelt, who have already said it was useful.

As the minister knows, we visited the agricultural region on a couple of occasions and received feedback. One of the guidelines for the assistance grant of \$6 000 is that people who have accessed the exceptional circumstance funding will be exempt from October 2002, which will limit the scope of the assistance package. That will have an impact on some of the people who have been very seriously affected by the drought. I ask the minister to reconsider the matter. I know that another \$1.6 million is available if the EC funding is extended. It seems to me that some of the people who are in most difficulty will have already accessed EC funding.

Hon Kim Chance: They will not be excluded if they are only eligible. They are only excluded if they already have the money.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I understand that. I think about 50 per cent of applicants in the northern wheat belt area have the funding.

Hon Kim Chance: It is a very small number of applicants.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: It is 20 or 30. I think approximately 45 applications were sent in from the most seriously affected people. I have had an indication that that criterion is likely to cause difficulty. As it becomes more apparent that it is causing problems, the minister might reconsider the matter.

Hon Kim Chance: We are happy to look at that on a case-by-case or appeal basis.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Something must be done about it. The water proposals seem to be a repeat of an announcement. The minister said they were outside the \$6.8 million. On reading the information on the package very closely, I agree, bearing in mind that the \$1.6 million will be operational only if the EC program is extended, which I understand is highly unlikely. Only two small areas may be extended unless farmers in the Gascoyne seek help, who are in difficulty now. That would make a large difference, but it is outside the scope of the agricultural area. There is some concern about whether the \$1.6 million being made available will be effective.

Hon Kim Chance: It is too early in our planning process to say that. We thought we should make provision. That is all.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: We are not dealing with enormous amounts of money. It will probably affect a maximum of 500 farmers if they can access anything at all under the criteria. It is not an enormous package, although, as I said, it is a step in the right direction.

Two other issues arose strongly as we travelled around; firstly, education assistance for parents of students who attend private education. I will refer shortly to the gap in the funding that is available. The Leader of the National Party, Max Trenorden, has written to the federal minister and will write to Minister Carpenter about the difference between the amount of assistance for parents of students attending regional boarding colleges and students attending private schooling. As the Minister for Education said in Geraldton the other day, if young people do not have an education these days, their future opportunities will be limited. He even announced that computers would be installed in Highbury College. It will be interesting to see how he keeps tabs on them. He suggested they should be allowed to be taken home.

I will read a letter, which is a serious attempt to obtain consideration for students outside the metropolitan area. Obviously it is about assistance to isolated children and it reflects the situation across the State, bearing in mind that unfortunately a serious dry period is developing in the Gascoyne region north of my place with the obvious invasion of emus and so forth in that area. The letter reads -

I wish to draw to your attention the increasing differential in the cost of accessing public school education in country areas of Western Australia compared to the cost of access in more populated areas.

In many cases children living in remote or isolated areas are required to board at a country Residential College in order to complete their secondary education. However many families are finding it increasingly difficult to fund the "top up" amount required to send their child to a country Residential College.

Members will understand that would be a problem when there have been two or three drought years. The letter continues -

The "top-up" amount is the difference between the hostel boarding fee and available State and Commonwealth assistance payments for boarding. The ability to fund this gap is even more difficult given the drought conditions extending across much of the State's Eastern Wheatbelt.

I should add that it extends across all of the eastern wheatbelt from Mullewa to Ravensthorpe. I have seen that first-hand on more than one occasion this year. To continue -

The Country High School Hostels Authority in Western Australia has advised that its annual boarding fee for 2002 is \$6,662.00. The maximum available assistance for Isolated Children to help meet this boarding fee is made up of the following:

These are the assistance packages available at present -

- A basic boarding allowance of \$4,211 provided by the Commonwealth Government;
- An additional boarding allowance of \$988 (subject to an income test) may be payable by the Commonwealth;
- All recipients of the basic Assistance for Isolated Children allowance are eligible for the State Government Student Boarding Away from Home Allowance, currently \$661.50 per year (Western Australia).

That allowance may vary across Australia. To continue -

There is therefore a gap of between \$800 to \$1,790 per child (depending on whether or not the family qualifies for the additional boarding allowance) to attend a country Residential College in Western Australia. This is in addition to other costs associated with having children at a secondary school, including school fees, books, extra-curricular and sporting activities and excursion costs.

The National Party in Western Australia believe that children living in isolated areas who are required to board at a Country Residential College to complete their schooling have a right to access public education at the same cost as their peers living in more populated areas.

This letter urges the federal Government to review the boarding allowance to make up that difference. It also indicates that the National Party will be writing to Hon Alan Carpenter on that issue.

Education and small business were at the forefront of all the issues that came up on our trips around the State. Small business is the other matter that was not addressed in the package that the minister put forward recently in his announcement of government assistance. I can assure the minister that small businesses right across the State, which employ apprentices and the like and keep young people in the area, are vital to our community interests. If they leave the towns, we will not see them returning to some of those regional areas in the future. Not only is small business battling with a lack of opportunity for business, but it has the burden - as my wife tells me regularly - of paperwork that is thrust upon them when they are filling out the various forms to comply with government regulations such as taxation, workers compensation and the like. That is a burden they do not need,

but with which they must comply. Small business must be given due consideration in any package that is put forward because it is vital to country areas.

I wanted to address a number of other issues that concern the administration of heavy haulage permits and accreditation. I looked up some of the information on the department's web site. This has become a difficult issue for people to handle, especially those who must be accredited now to access overwidth or over-mass permits and the like. It says clearly that hauliers, especially heavy hauliers - those over the as-of-right limits of 19 metres or 42.5 tonnes - will have to be accredited to access the permits. SP Hay Pty Ltd indicated that one of the reasons for overwidth transport in the transportation of hay is that the minimum allowable width without a permit is 2.5 metres, whereas nowadays the machinery used is 2.7 metres. We have some enthusiastic law officers - police and transport officers. I used to tell transport officers to be very lenient when they were measuring loads. Some of them get a little overzealous when it comes to infringements. The fines have increased substantially recently. I notice in the package the minister announced yesterday that there would be some leniency when transporting hay because of the requirement to shift hay from the coastal areas - the better-off areas - to the drier areas. That needs to be put in place immediately. Those issues came up when I was the Minister for Transport and we immediately resolved them. The issue of overwidth permits must be dealt with immediately. In the longer term, we need to address the issue of permits to ensure that they are dealt with in a reasonable manner.

I was talking to one of the officers who deals with permits. He said that once people are accredited, they could get permits for particular road networks around the State. However, many people are not accredited. I was talking to such a person yesterday who told me straight out that he would not participate in the accreditation program because he had to sign off on tests that go into personal issues and the way he conducts his life; for example, when he had his last drink and the like. If members read some of these requirements relating to fatigue management, I am sure they will understand the difficulties that people have with them.

The permits for general access vehicles carrying overwidth loads may be accessed by people who are accredited. The accreditation scheme will come into operation on 31 March 2003. It was to be 1 July 2002, but that has been extended. Various things need to be put in place, but the guidelines for overwidth vehicles indicate that vehicles carrying a load greater than 2.5 metres wide require a permit from Main Roads or the Police Service to allow them to travel on the road network. The permit may cover a single trip between specific locations or be a permanent endorsement that allows travel on nominated routes over a set time. The indication from the people whom I rang was that permits could be issued for a 12-month period. However, a person in Geraldton told me that he has to reapply consistently for permits for various loads. That is not in line with what I have heard from officers in the department, and I would like the minister to clarify that.

There has been a lot of confusion over transport accreditation permits and fatigue management recently. The National Party organised a meeting in Geraldton, which was attended by about 25 people. The instructions need to be simplified, so that people can understand what the policy is all about. Some of the people who left that meeting said they would not participate in the accreditation scheme. Obviously that will not be allowed because accreditation will be mandatory in Western Australia from 31 March 2003. The criteria in the policy guidelines, which I got from the Internet today, indicate that -

Period and single trip overwidth permits will be issued for the carriage of certain divisible products provided the conditions detailed in this policy are met

Permits will only be considered where the road can safely accommodate the wider load.

That is reasonable enough. It continues -

Maximum width of 3.1m. Loads shall be placed and secured in such a manner that overall width is kept to a minimum.

Permits for the overwidth carriage of divisible items will only be issued for the carriage of products that are inefficiently or unsafely . . . carried with a maximum vehicle width of 2.5m. The approved product list is shown at Paragraph 2.3.

Those issues are dealt with in the policy guidelines. There is also an indication that some of these vehicles that must have a permit will not be allowed to travel at night. If that policy is adopted, it will place an enormous added cost on transport. Therefore, consideration needs to be given to this issue. I cannot see any real difficulty with a vehicle that is 3.1 metres wide travelling on a road that is part of the network. Consideration must be given to those permits that will be given for overwidth loads.

The accreditation process also includes fatigue management. What a complicated issue this is! I know that fatigue management has become one of the real issues for the National Road Transport Commission. I will give the House some idea of the criteria required. Under the trip scheduling practice, the driver must be given at least

24 hours notice to prepare for working time of 14 hours or more. The working time must not average more than 14 hours per 24 hours over a 12-day period. The maximum consecutive periods of working time exceeding 14 hours are zero. The guidelines for people who are scheduling a trip are very strict.

Under the trip rostering practice, the driver must not exceed 168 hours working time in 12 days. The driver must have at least one day on non-working time in seven days, or two in 14 days. These practices will place restrictions on the road transport industry. The heavy transport industry has not been responsible for many serious accidents. By and large, it has acted responsibly. The way in which the organisations and trucking contractors have carried out their work has been very good. The issue that I have with a lot of these requirements is that they will impact on the small operator - the fellow with one truck - and the large trucking operators will certainly have an advantage when it comes to complying with quite a few of these matters.

Under the drivers health practices, the driver's health must be assessed regularly by a suitably qualified medical practitioner - every five years until the age of 40 years, every two years from age 40 to 60 years, and every year over the age of 60. The medical assessments are to be conducted in accordance with the standard set by the National Road Transport Commission. The criteria go on. People have rung me and said that they do not want to get involved in accreditation because it will impinge on their lifestyle and the way in which they conduct their business.

The fatigue management audit matrix also sets out the workplace conditions. It states that appropriate seating and sleeping accommodation must be provided at the depots, there must be ventilation in drivers' cabs and so on. All these issues will need to be addressed by the trucking companies and trucking operators. It is certainly getting to the stage at which it is a very complex and complicated business. We are imposing so many rules and regulations on the way in which people in private business can operate that some of them are giving up and saying, "That's enough for me. I've had enough of it and I'm off." I do not think we can afford to see that happen, especially with the small operators who are so necessary in regional Western Australia.

I refer to the application process for permits. Multi-combination vehicles consist of all combinations of vehicles that exceed 19 metres in length or 42.5 tonnes. They are the ones that will need to access the permits. There will be a list of roads to be utilised. Another issue that should be recognised is that written rural local government agreements for the use of roads under their control must be put in place. However, Main Roads has the right to issue the permits.

A notice signed by Mr Rob Giles has just been released. It points out that all these things must be in place by 31 March, after which time operators who are not accredited will not be able to operate permit vehicles. People must understand that. It will have an enormous impact if, come 31 March, people are not accredited. That was exactly the point made to me on the phone yesterday by a fellow who said that if he signs off on many of these things, he will become responsible further down the chain. It is interesting to consider this chain of responsibility. First of all, who is responsible for the amount of load that goes on a truck? The weight of the grain from different wheat farms might vary substantially, and when a truck pulls into a paddock to be loaded, the volume will not necessarily match the volume that was loaded onto the truck the previous time. I know that the trucks loaded at our place can legally carry about 50 tonnes. However, there can be a substantial variation, and the penalty for going over the load limit is severe. Whose responsibility is it further down the chain? The issue of whether it is the responsibility of the truck owner, the truck operator or the farmer must be sorted out.

Last night in this House we talked about insurance and the like. When these new practices are in place, we will need to know who is responsible for the amount of load that goes on a truck, and the ramifications that are likely to flow from it. Another matter has disturbed me. I have been told by various sources that when a truck that is overloaded goes into the Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd facility, CBH will not be allowed to unload that truck at its facility. I have placed a question on notice that the minister will receive next week. There are two aspects to this issue. The first is that the load should be taken off when it arrives at the CBH facility, because that will get the overloaded truck off the road and reduce the danger to other people. The other aspect relates to asking a CBH officer for a document that is a private document. There are a couple of aspects to that which I do not like, and I hope that it does not go very far down the chain in being implemented.

Hon Kim Chance: Absolutely. This is a challenge that has been before us on previous occasions, as you would be aware. It seems to me that a person would require a warrant to obtain that information.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I agree with the Leader of the House. I can remember a famous incident that occurred probably 20 years ago when a weights and measures officer entered the local weighbridge office and wanted to see some documents. He was told to go away. There was no way he could make anybody disclose the information. I was glad to hear that, and I believe that it should continue to happen.

Hon Kim Chance: Without a warrant the evidence would not have been admissible even if the officer had obtained it.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: If legislation is put in place, obviously things will change. If the minister comes across such an incident in the future, I hope that he might have a word in the ear of those people who are trying to put in place such measures, because they would not be acceptable to me, the farming industry or any other industry for that matter.

People have asked a number of questions about the requirements of accreditation, standards and the like. The web site that I saw today indicates that standards are currently being signed off and it refers to July 2002. If this legislation comes into effect in March 2003 and the standards are not signed off, there will be a problem because people will not know what to do. The web site indicates that operators will have various options, but we need to know what the standards will be. The position needs to be clarified on the web site. It indicates that standards are currently being signed off by Main Roads and industry working groups, but getting accreditation across a truck fleet takes time, although a single truck operator might be able to do it quicker.

Hon Kim Chance: It is an involved process.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Absolutely. The web site says that in the case of a single owner-operator a free system is being developed that will be implemented to meet the accreditation requirements. Operators will still be responsible for paying audit fees. I would have thought that if we were about to enter such a process a system would have been put in place. Those issues of accreditation and introduction need to be addressed.

A seminar was recently held in Mingenew, but a number of them will be held around the State on the back of the seminar that was run in Geraldton. That is a good idea because the questions of accreditation, standards, fatigue and permits need to be easier to address.

Geraldton Meat Exports Pty Ltd is situated at Greenough near Geraldton. It put a proposition to the office of the Leader of the House and I believe it has ended up with the Minister for State Development through the local development commission. I urge the Leader of the House to give serious consideration to the application. The owner is talking of expanding the beef chain at a cost of about \$1.5 million. There are two ways in which he can do it: there is an industry incentive scheme and a regional assistance program. This is an opportunity to maintain the company's staff of about 110 people. Earlier this year it closed down for a period. The company needs continuity of staff, because it has got back into operation and at present is using about 80 staff. Although some of the staff took leave, others left the area. It is vital in the slaughter industry to have skilled employees. Some of the people who have returned are taking time to get their skills back. The lost opportunity means that the work force must crank up again. The people of Geraldton also lost an opportunity. The wage bill of the company is about \$3 million a year, and the effects of that flow on to the trucking and other industries. The situation therefore needs serious consideration.

Our Government assisted the Narrikup abattoir, and the then Opposition had some difficulty with that. However, the vital issue here is that the goat chain in that area needs to be maintained for various reasons. It will cut down the cost of transport and it will enhance local employment prospects. I will certainly support any assistance that can be given to keep the operation in that locality and keep it viable by putting in a beef chain for 12 months operation. The company is talking about the lower end of the beef market, dealing with cows and the like for hamburger meat and so forth. It could also deal with goats and other animals from the pastoral area. The operation would be very valuable and should go ahead. The proposition is being put to the federal Minister for Transport and Regional Services Hon John Anderson, who has a copy of the program. I have also spoken to Hon Wilson Tuckey, who has his views with which I do not agree. We must make sure that local operations, especially when they are suffering from the difficulties of drought, have every opportunity to keep going.

Another issue I want to touch on is that of school buses. There is a major problem in country areas. The Leader of the House said the other day that he thought the issue had been solved. I am sure that is so from the Government's point of view. A meeting was held in Belmont at which the issue of perpetuity was voted down. I have always said that that should never be done, because if the issue of perpetuity is lost - as is the position with the fishing industry and its pots - once the licence is lost, people are in deep trouble.

Hon Kim Chance: Technically, fishing licences are issued on an annual basis.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I know the technical position, but I am sure the Leader of the House knows the ramifications of taking away the option of perpetuity as well as I do. The industry would not put up with it. In this case tenure for 20 or 25 years means that at the end of that time bus operators will have virtually nothing to see. I have told them many times that they should not have done it.

A number of brochures have been brought out, some of which indicate that school bus operators are joining the Transport Workers Union. One brochure refers to the country school bus service being under threat. It says -

The Gallop Government is threatening to abolish more than 50 school bus contracts in WA country towns. . . .

Drivers have become so concerned about the statewide threat to the bus service they have sought the help of the Transport Workers Union.

Public servants reviewing the free rural bus services have thrown up the possibility of less pay.

We all know that school bus operations have been safe and reliable. Bus drivers are just like parents to the children; they mother and father them.

Hon Kim Chance: They do a wonderful job.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Their conduct has been very good. The idea has been put forward of relaxing safety laws, stopping school buses being used for community activities and taking contracts off local operators and handing them to larger, city-based operators. Certainly that could happen if one operator owned a heap of buses. That would be a disaster for a country region. I do not think anybody wants that to happen. That would be brought about by people being put in severe financial difficulties in selling off the contract.

The brochure also states that contractors' pay rates will be reduced by 20 per cent. I would not have thought that there would be any possibility of that. However, we are talking about the composite rate. Currently the Government is talking about \$1.2 million more. In my view it should be about \$6 million, because there has been no rise in that rate. We suggested the composite rate when I was the minister. We dealt with it in three different areas across the State, so a graduated scale was more applicable. Obviously fuel, tyres and services are more expensive in some areas than in others.

Hon Kim Chance: The composite rate model also provides for higher payments to be made to people travelling on poor roads, which is very important. As far as I know, the composite rate is strongly supported by the bus operators.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: It is. The previous Government talked about that, and I am glad the current Government has taken it up. It seems to me that the rate is being squeezed at every opportunity. I understand that some meetings have been held in the past few days, at which people did a lot of nodding. However, there has been no action to meet the requirements. These private operators would not join a union unless there were a problem. Obviously the minister must have been involved in a meeting recently.

Hon Kim Chance: There was a very large one in Merredin.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: A letter I have contains a summary of how the meeting was conducted. I will read the headlines of the issues that were discussed, because I do not want to misquote the minister. The rates generally and the composite rate model in particular were discussed. The consistency of departmental advice was discussed. I know it is a real challenge to point that particular part of the department in the right direction on some of these issues. It has a long history of being controversial, to say the least.

Hon Kim Chance: In relation to the consistency of advice, the word "discussed" is a very conservative description.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Yes, it is very conservative. I know it well. I had some stern words to say when I was involved with the department. The previous Government appointed Tim Shanahan, who did an excellent job. It is just a pity that he did not have the extra month to finish off his recommendations, because he was a very fair operator.

Another issue discussed at the meeting was the contract tenure; that is when the 20 to 25-year terms come into play. The changes in the contract status also have caused a lot of concern. The life run of the buses has caused a great deal of angst. Seatbelts and a couple of other issues to do with the future wellbeing of the operators also were raised. By no means has this issue been settled. I see that another flyer outlining a few issues was released yesterday by Max O'Dea. The bus operators are not happy and are joining the union as a demonstration. Quite a few of the operators said that they had no intention of joining the union, but they have been frustrated because they cannot talk to people. The minister has said that he has spoken to them, and I am glad he has done so. That has obviously happened since I raised the issue in the House.

Hon Kim Chance: Actually, it was a while ago. I thought I spoke to them in Merredin in July.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Maybe I do have the date here; I should have looked at it.

Hon Kim Chance: I know it rained that day.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: That could have been last year!

Hon Kim Chance: It is pretty rare in Merredin this year.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: It does not happen too often in the wheatbelt. Yes; it was at the end of June, which is about when the last shower of rain came down.

I urge the minister to take up those challenges. It would be interesting for the Department for Planning and Infrastructure to take up some of the issues. People are saying that they are losing their life savings, because if they lose perpetuity, they will not have anything to sell. That is a real issue. The talk is that some people who have ordered a new bus will lose their contract but they have had to take the bus. Compensating them for that is also an issue, so that must be given some consideration.

Last week the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality was discussed in Mildura. My colleague the member for Merredin went to Mildura and was very impressed. He said that he drove through the dusty plains of Victoria. The drought in Victoria is very serious, so we should not take that lightly. He said that the national action plan has been signed off by the other States. They are going ahead in leaps and bounds and are putting programs in place. A lot of action is taking place in that part of the country on the federal Government's \$1.4 billion program over seven years. Western Australia has not signed off on a program. Some people from the land conservation district committees in the country and the like have programs that they would like to put in place. Some of them are starting to ask themselves what is the use and why should they keep on with this sort of thing.

Hon Kim Chance: We did sign.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Actions speak louder than words.

Hon Kim Chance: Signing is an action.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Only when it is put onto paper. There must be some action in country areas. There must be some action in those areas where the salinity problem is absolutely acute. If we do not instil some confidence in those LCDs, those people will walk - or even run - away from the challenges they must face.

Hon Kim Chance: The national action plan and Natural Heritage Trust 2 issues relate only to new spending, apart from the fact that the Commonwealth cut off the NHT2 money, but we cannot do much about that. The NAP money is only new money. The \$30-odd million that has been spent on salinity is still rolling on. What is being negotiated is only the new money over the \$30 million.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I am sure they would like to see the new money that is coming to Western Australia. The trouble is that the eastern States are closer to the barrel than Western Australia. It is a long way across the border to us. If there is money lying around and the States start to spend it, there will be trouble. I am fairly sure that will not happen. However, the States will not leave money lying around. We certainly need to see some action. It disturbs me when I hear comments such as those I heard yesterday about the \$70 million that will be spent on the railway line. Was that \$70 million ticked off by Treasury? Is it in the financial program? If \$70 million can be found at the click of a finger to satisfy people about the decision for a train service, surely to goodness the most damaging issue in Western Australia - salinity - can get some sort of consideration.

Hon Kim Chance: I think we have actually found \$146 million for that.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: For what?

Hon Kim Chance: Salinity.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Well, let us see it.

Hon Kim Chance: And that is over a four-year period.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: That is a revelation to me.

Hon Kim Chance: It should not be because the Minister for the Environment and Heritage made that statement about nine months ago.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Where is it? Why do we not get on with it? I have said to the minister in previous debates that people are losing confidence. They are about to give these programs away, and that is the issue that we must address. The only way we will solve any of these issues in the country is for private operators, the farmers and the various people out there to do the work. We can put a little bit of money in, but they will make sure that the rest of it operates. The program is worth billions of dollars, not \$150 million, so they need some sort of seed capital.

Hon Kim Chance: Are you aware that the Prime Minister's undertaking to Premier Court on the occasion of the signing off of the agreement on the national action plan at the Council of Australian Governments has been welched on by the Commonwealth Government? I make no bones about that. We settled this issue in Sydney a month ago. The Commonwealth Government has welched on the deal that was done with Premier Court at COAG, who quite properly insisted that there be recognition of the State's increased prior spending.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I have heard all sorts of yarns about that. I am fed up with stories that continually give reasons for not doing things. I struck that sort of thing all through my ministerial challenges. I used to say, "Give me one reason to get on with it, don't give me 55 reasons not to get on with it."

Hon Kim Chance: Protecting the State's interests in this matter is important.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: All sorts of things are important, but let us get on with the job. If there is a problem, fix it. Salinity exists in the country.

Hon Kim Chance: We are prepared to get on with it; it is just that the Commonwealth had not acknowledged until the meeting in Sydney last week that it had welched on the deal that it had undertaken.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: The federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry came to Western Australia and told us about the whole issue during Royal Show Week.

Hon Kim Chance: Did he put our side as well?

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: No, but I did not hear the Government's side reply to him.

Hon Kim Chance: He did not lay out the whole story. He laid out his side of the story. I am sure he did not admit to you that the Commonwealth Government has welched on the deal; however, it did admit that to us in Sydney.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I am glad that the minister is saying that because we will have a bit of a sort out.

Hon Kim Chance: Yes.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: When will it be sorted out?

Hon Kim Chance: I am having lunch with the Minister for the Environment and Heritage today to make some final decisions on that matter.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I hope the whole matter is progressed and we can get on with it. As I said, decisions can be made about railways in the flick of a finger just to satisfy a few people. I have no problem with that because I wish I had that sort of leverage. Possibly one day I will stand in this place and have a bit of leverage and people will have to do the same thing for me.

Hon Barry House: I think you have too many principles for that, Mr Criddle!

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I certainly will not make a deal behind a cupboard; it will be out on the table for everybody to know about.

Hon Kim Chance: I thought everyone supported the South Perth station.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I did not even know about it until I read about it in the paper yesterday.

Hon Kim Chance: But it has been raised in debate.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I am saying that I did not hear about the station until yesterday. I will state the reasons that I believe it is a silly idea. A ferry goes over to South Perth; a bridge goes over there that carries cars -

Hon Kim Chance: I am sure Hon Peter Foss, on behalf of the official Opposition, said that there needed to be a station in South Perth.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I am not worried about that. I am worried about doing the correct thing. The fact is a boat goes over there, buses go over there and people can walk or drive over there and get back into town just about in any way they like. There are all sorts of options for South Perth. Why does the Government want to spend \$70 million on a station there, whether it be over the freeway or underground? Where will it go; overhead or underground, or will it be another blot on the riverfront? There are all sorts of issues about it, but it is just unnecessary. It would be like building a station at the bottom of this place when the central area transit buses deliver people for free. Who will get on a train to travel around Perth when they can get on a CAT bus for free?

Hon Peter Foss: I do not support the South Perth railway station either, but I did not get the opportunity to go into the details.

Hon Kim Chance: I must have misunderstood you.

Hon Peter Foss: No. The whole rail going up the freeway is stupid; not made any less stupid by a railway that takes another five minutes to go there which obviates the basic justification for going there.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: It sounds as though Hon Peter Foss and I agree once again.

Hon Peter Foss: Totally!



Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: The point I was making, so that Hon Peter Foss understands, was that \$70 million can be found at the flick of a finger when there are all these other issues around the place for which it is difficult to find any money.

Hon Peter Foss: Money for people who have already got an adequate transport service.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Absolutely, and to where the buses run anyway.

Hon Peter Foss: The only thing wrong with that transport service is the stupid line going up the freeway.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: That is one of the issues. Perth should have a total transport plan. The Government has lost the total rail and road planning system for Perth. The two issues we are dealing with now highlight that fact. Perhaps the decision makers will establish a better program for the overall benefit of Western Australia.

I have referred to a number of issues that I believe are of tremendous importance to Western Australia. I referred to the salinity and water quality seminar that was held in Mildura, Victoria, at which a very comprehensive program was discussed. The member for Merredin, who attended the seminar, thought it was very useful. I reiterate that the people who were at that seminar were getting on with the job of getting programs in place and making the most of the opportunity with the funds that they have available. The message the member for Merredin got from the seminar was that Western Australia needed to catch up very quickly to make sure that the funds flow into our agricultural regions for the benefit of the State and to combat the huge problem of salinity in those regions.

I intended to mention a number of other issues, not the least of which is the southern transport corridor. That corridor has had some mediating work done relating to the disposal of grain into the receipt point and the rail going out onto the spur. Some ridiculous stories have been told about that project. I heard talk the other day that areas around Mullewa will be in desertification. That is an absolutely ridiculous story put up as a reason for not building the rail. A number of other issues have gone right off the track. The simple fact is that the rail must be built there and if it is not built with the spit out into the ocean, it will cost something like 47c a tonne more; if it is dropped off out at Meru, it will be 72c a tonne more. The whole idea of getting it onto rail and into the port was to overcome some of the difficulties so that two-port loading would be stopped and, with the deepening of the port, ships could be loaded there. The sorts of stories going around do nobody justice. I know that the person who would be in charge would dismiss those stories very quickly. Geraldton, of all towns around the area, needs the stimulus of getting the rail under way.

Hon Kim Chance: Absolutely.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Certainly turning it around towards the ocean and getting rid of the rail would be a good start. This is an enormous opportunity to get on with the job. I understand that the minister is progressing the southern transport corridor that was announced in our term of government, and I am very pleased that she is doing that. It is an across-party decision on a very beneficial project.

I thank members for the opportunity to make a few remarks on the amendment to the motion moved by the Leader of the House. In doing so, I support the amendment.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Hon Bruce Donaldson.

*Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm*