

GRAIN FREIGHT NETWORK

Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

Has the federal government responded to the state government's request for assistance in saving 1 000 kilometres of the grain freight network?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question and I understand his concern on this issue. I regret to inform the house that when the state government approached the federal government to help us deal with the \$400 million bill to rescue our rail network after the botched privatisation undertaken by the previous government, an answer came back from the commonwealth in language we are becoming used to, and it was a very clear and resounding "no". The federal government says, "We're very pleased to see that you've set up this great infrastructure group and you're doing very good work, but sorry; we can't help you because this is not a federal responsibility".

That has left the state government a bit puzzled. In 2004, it was considered to be a federal responsibility to assist South Australia with its grain network; I think some \$15 million was given to assist the South Australian government to keep its Eyre Peninsula grain freight system on track. We heard just last year that the federal government was prepared to assist the Tasmanian government buy back from privatisation. In Tasmania it was considered to be a relevant federal issue. There have been some very interesting examples of late in which the federal government has been prepared to step out of its traditional boundaries. Yesterday we discussed the \$40 million it is giving to school bus contractors in New South Wales and Victoria to put seatbelts on school buses. School buses are not a traditional area of federal government activity. We heard that \$40 million was to be given to the Tasmanian government for the Mersey hospital.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: That is not a traditional area of responsibility for the federal government.

Mr M.J. Cowper interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, member for Murray!

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: We are talking about a grain rail network that services the biggest export grain industry in this country, and yet that is not considered an area for federal government endeavour. The reality is that this is in Western Australia, and Western Australia does not count as far as the federal government is concerned. I am pleased to report that we are receiving far more interest from federal Labor. Although it has no direct electoral advantage to gain from this, it is prepared to look at it because it can see the fairness of this issue.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Which shadow Treasurer is looking at it - Julia or the other guy?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I thank the Leader of the Opposition very much for interjecting, because it gives me the opportunity to once again quote what the member for Warren-Blackwood, as he simply was then, said during the debate on this privatisation. He promised that privatisation would deliver operational efficiency and flexibility, lower freight rates, higher capital expenditures, a network extension, on-rail competition and market growth. The only thing he got right is that it will have lower freight rates. It will have no freight rates because there will not be a rail line there. I suggest that members opposite get on to Mark Vaile and tell him to take notice of Western Australia.