

## **MERREDIN WATER TOWER**

### *Grievance*

**MS A.E. KENT (Kalgoorlie)** [9.59 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Transport, and I thank the minister for taking this grievance. I rise to grieve about the condition of the Merredin water tower, an issue that the minister is well aware of. I would like to begin by acknowledging Hon Darren West, a member for the Agricultural Region, who has been advocating on this issue for many years.

For members who do not travel along Great Eastern Highway often, the Merredin water tower is an iconic landmark on Great Eastern Highway. It is also known as the Kalgoorlie Bitter tower because of the advertisements on its face, which advertise the beer that was produced in the Merredin brewery from 1928. At 50 feet tall, it is the tallest structure in Merredin. For most of my constituents, it pretty much marks halfway to Perth or halfway home. It is also a symbol of the development of the goldfields. The water tower was built in 1893 as part of the Eastern Goldfields Railway project to provide water for the steam trains. The tower's water was pumped from the dam at Merredin Peak into a 40 000-gallon square tank. Because of the purity of the water from the rock catchment, the water tower continued to be used long after the town was connected to the goldfields pipeline. It was still in use until steam trains were withdrawn from service in the mid-1960s. Since then, it has become an iconic tourist attraction for people passing through Merredin.

The Merredin water tower is now 130 years old. With age comes ageing and a need to safeguard the integrity of the structure. In 2021, WA Labor committed \$50 000 to repainting the iconic signage. As I mentioned earlier, Hon Darren West was instrumental in securing this commitment for the local community. The refurbishment of the Merredin railway water tower is a key community priority, and the Shire of Merredin has been working with the Public Transport Authority to progress these works. Pioneer Park, which is just underneath the water tower, recently underwent a \$1.8-million upgrade, which included new car parking, recreation spaces and landscaping. As part of this project, a mega-flow drainage system was also installed, further opening up the space.

WA Labor has a long history of getting things done in regional Western Australia. The refurbishment of the water tower would complement these works and provide an important entrance statement to the town. I am sure many people travelling to and from Kalgoorlie will take the opportunity to stop there.

I ask the minister to provide an update and advice about what the state government will do to ensure that this significant landmark is retained and improved.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The minister for—I do not know whether it is transport or tourism. It sounds like both.

**MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport)** [10.02 am]: It could be. That is a nice segue.

I thank the member for Kalgoorlie for the grievance that is, of course, also on behalf of Hon Darren West, who has been working on this issue for a number of years. I would like to acknowledge the work of upper house member Hon Darren West and the member for Kalgoorlie.

Many residents of Kalgoorlie, particularly the member for Kalgoorlie, know and love the water tower. They see it as they drive along Great Eastern Highway. It is an iconic landmark in the wheatbelt. By way of background, the tank has been maintained by the Shire of Merredin since the 1970s, through a community purpose licence agreement from the Public Transport Authority. As the member mentioned, it is a significant heritage site and is listed on the municipal inventory. In recent years, it became obvious that the tower had seen better days and significant repairs were needed. As a result of these concerns, an independent structural inspection was commissioned, and it deemed the tank structurally unsafe, which therefore presented safety and heritage risks for the Shire of Merredin and the PTA.

Recognising the importance of the tank to the community, our government announced in December 2019 that the PTA would fund the necessary repair work to the tank. Hon Darren West has continually expressed to me and in the other chamber the overwhelming community sentiment for the water tank to be retained and to be an iconic tourism structure. Hon Darren West sought feedback from the local community and campaigned significantly on this.

The Shire of Merredin prepared a scope of work for the tank refurbishment, in consultation with the Public Transport Authority, and a tender process was undertaken. Since the government first announced that it would provide funding to refurbish the tower, the tender process—like many tender processes around the state—came back with a cost well above the initial estimate. We initially committed \$50 000 to the project, but the tenders came in well over that. This was in part due to heritage concerns and safety risks identified in the contract scoping. The other complexity, of course, is that it is a unique little project in regional Western Australia. We know that the price has gone up, but it is a community concern. There is a desire to retain it in the future, not only for heritage and historic values but also for tourism values.

I am pleased to announce that the government will agree to fund the full refurbishment costs of the tower. The new estimate is significant—in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. We will work with the Shire of Merredin to see

whether it can contribute to the project, and we expect it to contribute, but we will be funding the majority of the costs. We will work with the shire to determine how we will preserve the tower in the future.

It is clear that community sentiment supports retaining the Merredin water tank. It helps to identify the region and will support tourism in the future. We are very pleased to be able to support the local community. PTA resources will help fund the retention of the water tank and implement the commitment given by Hon Darren West.