

## FITZROY RIVER BRIDGE

### *Statement*

**HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral)** [9.08 pm]: I had not planned to get up tonight, but Hon Tjorn Sibma prompted me in some ways with his point. Sometimes we in the opposition set our expectations a little low with the answers we receive from the government, but I will provide some encouragement and counsel to the Minister for Transport, in particular, about the preparation of responses that might assist the community.

In answer to a genuine question I asked about the opening of the Fitzroy River Bridge, a comment was made about me. It was entirely incorrect, and I think an explanation is entirely worthwhile for the record. In some respects, quite frankly, I personally do not care. Some responses are quite childish, and I think it reflects poorly on the minister, rather than me. I asked about the likelihood of the bridge being opened to traffic by the end of November—there is a rumour on the grapevine that that might be achieved, and it would be very good if that were the case—and to heavy transport in December. The response was —

It has been noted widely that the member has constantly criticised the progress of the work on the bridge, and, in turn, the workers.

That is entirely untrue. I will quote a comment that I made in an opinion piece in *The West Australian* just over a week ago, in which I said —

Close to my heart is the flood response in the Kimberley and the construction of the new Martuwarra Fitzroy River bridge. The contractors are pushing this project hard, but the State is failing businesses in the east Kimberley through lack of consultation.

There is absolutely no way that that could be considered a criticism of the work of Main Roads Western Australia or the contractors. It is, in fact, quite the opposite; it was a compliment about that work.

There seems to be a strange process by the Minister for Transport that I do not understand, and that is why I am standing tonight. The East Kimberley community and the business community, in particular, have not had adequate consultation. A community forum was going to be held by Main Roads. One member of my staff had kindly offered to travel to Derby from Broome to be part of the forum because, unfortunately, I could not be there, but the forum was cancelled and no explanation was given. I speak to people in Kununurra, and there has not yet been open consultation with them about the likelihood of the bridge opening. It might be that the bridge is opened in time for the wet season, and that would be fantastic. I just do not understand why we cannot get an answer that says that the likelihood is that it will be.

It seems that some other game is being played. Is it politics? I hope not. I do not feel that I am important enough to say that we are wrong or something. That would be incredibly trivial. Or is there a desire for the government to be a white knight wearing a hard hat and a fluoro jacket and riding into the sunset and announcing some opening at its own discretion? Think about the community and the need for contingencies and planning. If there is a high likelihood of the bridge opening in time, please let the community know as soon as possible so that the trucking industry and the people who play a vital role in providing logistics in the region can plan with a degree of certainty. People will forgive the minister if something goes wrong and there is a delay of a few weeks, but she should at least give a general outline and be open.

I come back to the point that Hon Tjorn Sibma made: the government should show some respect when dealing with these questions. I am not talking about showing respect to me or Hon Tjorn Sibma as we do not need it. As parliamentarians, we are not here for the respect of the government. We understand that we are in an adversarial system. We will quite happily take the slings and arrows of any criticism or argy-bargy that goes on in this chamber, but please show respect to the community, be more open and present as much information as possible so that people can get on and plan for their future.