

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

HON N.F. MOORE (Mining and Pastoral - Leader of the House) [5.00 pm]: I move -

That the House do now adjourn.

Prostitution – Adjournment Debate

HON NORM KELLY (East Metropolitan) [5.00 pm]: I shall make a constructive speech to the House tonight on some of the questions I asked in the House today and yesterday about prostitution in this State. Initially the questions were centred on the practice of the starting stalls in Kalgoorlie brothels, and referred to comments by the Attorney General in this place in December last year. At that time the Attorney General gave an undertaking on behalf of the Government about the traditional use of starting stalls, where workers stand either in front of the brothels or in the rooms but are on display to the public. According to the Attorney General, that traditional use in Kalgoorlie was to be maintained. I quote from *Hansard* of 8 December last year, when Hon Peter Foss said -

I have discussed this with the Minister for Police and it is his intention that, and I undertake on behalf of the Government, the regulations will exempt "as a place in view of a public place" the Kalgoorlie starting stalls.

The Attorney General gave that undertaking but the Government has failed to honour it, because there are no regulations exempting the Kalgoorlie starting stalls. That is the reason for so much fear and confusion about how prostitution will continue to operate in that city.

My question today was about the starting stalls, whether the Minister for Police had discussed with the Attorney General the failure to honour this undertaking, and the result of any discussions. In answer to part (6) of the question the Attorney General said that the undertaking would be honoured. It can be assumed from the answer that the workers in Kalgoorlie are free to revert to their traditional practice of using starting stalls and being on view to the public. I appreciate that the Government has said it will honour the undertaking, so I expect any workers in Kalgoorlie who display themselves in this way will not be subject to any police action or charges for doing that. I hope the police in Kalgoorlie take note of this response from the Government today and do not impose upon workers operating in that manner in Kalgoorlie. Already insufficient information has been given to those workers, and too much heavy-handed police energy has been directed towards them. It appears from anecdotal information I have received so far that there has been some abuse by certain police when using these new powers granted to them by this Government and the Australian Labor Party when they passed the Prostitution Act.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: Can you be more specific about the abuse and give examples? It is a serious matter to accuse police officers of abusing powers.

Hon NORM KELLY: Exactly.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: You should not make generalised statements like that.

Hon NORM KELLY: I can understand why the ALP is so concerned about how the police may be using the powers which the ALP helped obtain for them in the first place.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: You have made an accusation; back it up.

Hon NORM KELLY: I have been receiving anecdotal information and that is why I have couched my comments in those terms, because I intend to follow through on this and get further details on which actions have been occurring. In the responses to my questions today I have discovered that the police have not provided any information to sex workers as to how the new laws will work. I find it bizarre as it has been a number of months since the police first received assurances from Parliament. The police have not distributed information regarding the obligations and limitations of the sex workers or on the new police powers in respect of their work. I can understand that the police may, in trying to legitimately exercise the new powers that they have, offend sex workers. On the other hand, the workers may not be aware of what the new powers may be. It is easy to understand that the workers may be in fear and are going underground in an attempt to evade police scrutiny and surveillance so that they can carry out their work unhindered. There are grave fears in the industry that, by driving workers underground, more sex workers will go missing - and we have already seen that occur in a few cases - and that there is a potential for a rise in the level of sexually transmitted diseases because the police have been unable to provide workers with clear direction as to whether the carrying of condoms can be regarded as evidence of an offence by a worker. The workers may decide that they will not carry condoms or they will not carry as many condoms as they would normally.

It is clear that the Government and the Australian Labor Party have been very shortsighted as to the effect of these new laws. I note that Dr Gallop has stated that the ALP will introduce reforms into Parliament. That

seems bizarre, as the ALP had the opportunity to force legitimate reform this year, but it backed down. It would appear that the only way it has to achieve reform is to give the police more draconian powers. The powers do away with the need to obtain warrants for searches, whether by day or night. The powers allow entrapment and full body searches under the guise of looking for drugs while it is conveniently forgotten that such powers are available to police officers under the Misuse of Drugs Act.

These are a few of the concerns which we expressed during the debate and which seem to be coming to light now that the Act is in force. I noticed that the Commissioner of Police, Barry Matthews, revoked the containment policy on 4 August. The Government commented previously that there was no containment policy or there were no documents that could be described as showing a containment policy. I will be interested to find out exactly what the Commissioner of Police has revoked, how the commissioner has relayed the decision to workers in the industry in order to make them fully aware of the revocation, and how clearly he has instructed his officers to ensure that they are operating within the law and not causing undue duress to people working in the industry. Those are just a few of my concerns. I am happy to meet with the Commissioner of Police tomorrow to allay, hopefully, some of these concerns. I wanted to point out to the House my concerns about what is occurring in the industry.

Homeswest Waiting List – Adjournment Debate

HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan) [5.10 pm]: The waiting list for Homeswest housing has concerned me for some time. On 29 July, an article by Melissa Stevens was published in *The West Australian*. It followed on from an article that had been published a week earlier that dealt specifically with the problems women's refuges were experiencing in trying to help women get access to Homeswest housing. These women face long waits for housing. The article in *The West Australian* attributed to me the statement that the number of people waiting for housing could be as high as 25 000. That elicited a response from the Minister for Housing, who attacked me and claimed that I had said that the waiting list contained as many as 25 000 names. However, the article in *The West Australian* states -

Opposition housing spokesman Ken Travers said he believed the number of people waiting for housing, based on the number of applications, could be as high as 25,000.

The Minister for Housing said that I did not know what I was talking about, that I was completely wrong and had things out of context. However, when he attacked me, he got it slightly wrong. He suggested that I was wrong when I said that 25 000 names were on the waiting list. The article makes it clear that I said that 25 000 people were waiting for homes. The minister says the figure of 25 000 is untrue. How did I arrive at it? I asked questions in this place, which were answered on 14 March 2000, and was given a breakdown of the Homeswest waiting list. The answer stated -

One bedroom applicants under 55 years*	=	3965
Pensioner aged 55 years and over	=	1869
Family with 1-3 children	=	7324
Family with 4+ children	=	657

In arriving at the figure of 25 000, let us assume that the applications for one-bedroom houses comprise one person. I remind members that in many cases the applications could be a couple applying for a one-bedroom house. Let us also assume that the number of applications for families with one to three children consist mainly of single parents with one child. In that case, there are at least two people for each application in that category. Those 7 324 applications quickly become 14 648 people. The next category of application is families with more than four children, of which there are 657 applications. If the applicant is a single parent with four children - there could be five or six children and two parents - the figure then becomes 3 285 people.

Hon Greg Smith: How many of those applications are from people living in a two-bedroom house who want to move into a three-bedroom house?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: If the member knew anything about Homeswest, he would know how hard it is for tenants to get a transfer. This list shows the people waiting for Homeswest housing. There are 23 767 people waiting for homes, even if we take the barest minimum of the number of people contained in the applications on the waiting list, which is 1 233 people short of the figure mentioned in the newspaper. I said the figure on the waiting list could be as high as 25 000. I did not say it was 25 000. It is already 23 767. We could look at the couples. We need only 30 per cent of the single-bedroom house applicants to be couples to crack the 25 000. We need only 2.2 people per family in the one to three-children category - two parents and one child, or whatever - to be over the 25 000. I stand by the figure of up to 25 000. If I did anything, I underestimated how many people are waiting for Homeswest housing in this State.

I am also very cautious of using the waiting list figures. The history of waiting lists is that they fluctuate severely and often bear no correlation to the number of houses that are built. A range of factors come into play. One of the key determining factors, and one of the key priorities for Homeswest, should be the waiting time for Homeswest housing. I agree with the Minister for Housing that waiting time is one of the crucial areas. The absolutely crucial area with regard to waiting time must be the priority list, as any member who has had any dealings with people who are seeking Homeswest housing would know - Hon Ed Dermer is nodding, and I know that a number of my colleagues in the lower House are also well aware of this fact - because it is so difficult for people to get on to the priority list. People need to be able to show that they have no alternative housing other than the public sector. It is not an easy exercise to get on that list.

Hon E.R.J. Dermer: They need to be desperate.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Ken Travers is quite capable of making a speech. He does not need Hon Ed Dermer to give us a running commentary on his views.

Hon E.R.J. Dermer: I was getting excited, Mr President.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Ed Dermer can get excited in a few minutes after Hon Jim Scott has finished his comments; he is next.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: In a limited time debate, I agree with you totally, Mr President.

Earlier this year when I asked the question - I think the date was as of 30 January - 237 applicants were on the priority waiting list. The article of 29 July in *The West Australian* to which I referred earlier indicates that 292 people are on the priority waiting list. The article mentions that only 12 879 people are on the general Homeswest waiting list. We all know that is wrong and that is the number of applications. Mr Joyce from the Ministry of Housing claims that the average waiting time for people on the priority list is 102 days. That is about 14 and a half weeks. Last year, the policy of Homeswest was to house people within eight weeks. These are people who have no alternative housing other than the public sector. Mr Joyce's comment about 102 days caused an amazing response to my office. A number of people contacted me to express their grave concerns about that fact. People in the Fremantle area have been told that the waiting time on the priority list is 12 months.

Hon Greg Smith: Fremantle is a long way for you to walk!

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I know, but when we raise these issues, people ring us from all over the State and we need to represent them. The waiting time in Rockingham is well over 12 months. I did a bit of ringing around and spoke to some of my colleagues in the lower House who deal with these matters. When I spoke to people in the office of the member for Girrawheen, which is a low demand area, they said they are lucky if they can get people into housing in about eight weeks; it generally takes two to three months to get housing for people on the priority list. People who are in the most desperate need have to jump through hoops to get to that stage, yet in many cases and in many regions in Western Australia they are waiting for up to 12 months. That is an absolute disgrace. It is also placing immense pressure on other areas of the system.

A number of the youth groups that deal with youth homelessness have sent faxes to ministers and members about the number of people for whom they cannot find housing in youth refuges; and the same thing is happening in women's refuges. The reason is that women's refuges cannot find permanent accommodation within the private or public sector when people are ready to move on. Those families are staying in women and youth refuges, clogging up the system. People cannot get the resources and responses they need. It is incumbent on the Government to do something about that. The Government removed the eight weeks' waiting period last year. It was a disgrace. Its own figures indicate the waiting time is now 102 days, or 14.5 weeks. Numerous people have contacted me from across the State, and from talking to other members I have found the problem is more widespread than stated by the Government and covers a lot more regions.

Transperth Bus Fleet – Adjournment Debate

HON J.A. SCOTT (South Metropolitan) [5.20 pm]: In the early part of 1998 when this House discussed the new Transperth bus fleet that would be purchased from Mercedes-Benz Australia Pty Ltd I had been made aware by a number of people that the Mercedes company lacked a decent gas technology. A number of people from the industry expressed concern that Mercedes would not be able to meet its requirement to provide the promised first delivery of five out of 133 buses. For instance, one of its competitors, Renault Bus Australia, stated -

The CNG fuel technology offered by Mercedes Benz however is, in our opinion, outdated and unreliable technology as it relies on a carburettor fuel system whereas the Transcom system, as fitted to the Renault buses, is a highly controlled and developed injection process leading to greater operating benefits and fuel savings as well as contributing to extended engine life and a cleaner environment.

I had a number of such statements, as well as verbal advice from different sources. As a result I asked a number of parliamentary questions about Mercedes' ability to provide these buses. On 11 June 1998 I received a response to a question I had asked the former Minister for Transport, Hon Eric Charlton, about Mercedes' ability to provide this technology. He said he would obtain an answer from Mercedes, and I received this letter from Mercedes-Benz Australia. The letter reads -

Dear Jim

Further discussions Mercedes-Benz confirm that we will provide electronic fuel injection CNG engines during 1999.

Like all Mercedes-Benz products, this CNG engine has been extensively trialed with tests going back 3 years. It should be understood that Mercedes-Benz do not release unproven technology hence the extended testing period for new releases for cars, trucks or buses.

By the end of 1999 I heard more rumours that Mercedes had a problem supplying these buses, and some of its people would be in Australia to speak to Transperth and the minister about its failure to deliver these buses. I asked a question of the Minister for Transport, who confirmed he was meeting with Mercedes-Benz. Part of the minister's answer reads -

I am meeting with Mercedes-Benz on Thursday to discuss the buses and we will discuss with the people concerned the five compressed natural gas buses that were intended to be delivered. I will be interested in their remarks.

I interjected and asked, "Will they be delivering them or not?" The minister answered -

That is what I have just said. We will finalise the arrangements when the representatives arrive on Thursday.

On 18 November 1999, following the meeting, I asked another question -

Now that the minister has met with representatives of Mercedes-Benz to discuss the deal to purchase buses, will Mercedes-Benz still provide the five compressed natural gas powered buses; and, if so, when?

I also asked whether these buses would use multipoint sequential fuel injection technology, and some other questions tailed on from that.

The main part of the question was answered in this way -

I have held discussions with Mercedes-Benz and reaffirmed that the State Government will have five new CNG buses.

Members should note that I said "buses" not "engines". It continues -

The multipoint fuel injected gas engines will be subjected to rigorous independent testing at a facility capable of certifying that the engines meet the stringent Euro III standards. The engines will also be required to meet essential performance parameters.

It was soon after this time that a spokesperson from the Department of Transport - I think it was Brett Inchley - said on radio that the buses would not be delivered in 1999, but that they would be delivered in the first half of this year. Of course, they still have not been delivered. That was partly the basis of the question I asked earlier today. I asked the Minister for Transport for an answer today. Obviously we will not get those buses in the first half of this year. In fact, it does not seem like we will get them at all. I have been told that Mercedes-Benz is unable to provide this technology. As I have claimed numerous times during debate in this place, it does not have the technology, which was denied ad nauseam by both Hon Eric Charlton and Hon Murray Criddle.

Today the minister said that Mercedes-Benz engines are now being trialed. What he did not say, and what I think is reality, is that although they may be Mercedes-Benz engines, the gas technology is not Mercedes-Benz technology. The minister is not telling us the whole story, and it is time he did. Mercedes-Benz got this contract on the basis of being able to provide those buses. As I was informed in a letter and as was supplied by way of answer to a question in Parliament, these engines had been extensively trialed and are not just now being tested.

Hon M.D. Nixon: Could there be two types of technology - converted petrol engines and converted diesel engines?

Hon J.A. SCOTT: I was assured in answers to questions and during debate in this place that these engines would be ready, initially, in 1999 and then in the first half of this year. It does not matter whether there are two types of technology. The minister is now talking about engines, but Mercedes-Benz was talking about buses, as was the minister. I challenge the minister to show us that Mercedes-Benz has its own gas technology ready to go on a

Transperth bus at this time. I do not believe it has, and I would be most surprised if it had. In fact, I think it is looking for other technologies from other companies to use. I challenge the minister to deny that as well, because it is about time we got some truth about the engines being tested when we were supposed to have had buses. We have been led down the garden path on this. We have already seen a peer review of the report by the expert reference group, which supposedly found that diesel buses were cleaner in terms of greenhouse gases and would be more cost-effective than compressed natural gas-powered buses. In fact, the peer review has torn that to shreds. It is about time we had some truth on this matter. We are talking about a massive contract. It is time for the minister to come clean and let us know exactly what is happening, and not give us some waffly answer that throws us off the track all the time and does not provide any real truth. It is similar to the earlier debate about the failure to say whether a contract had been let on the Leighton development. One cannot get a straight answer from this minister any more. That is a real shame, because I had a great deal of respect for him. However, I am gradually and grudgingly changing my mind about this. It is time he told us what is going on with these buses. If there are alternative-technology CNG buses out there that will save the State \$80m through their cheaper running costs and will reduce the amount of air pollution and so on, we should be getting them and not messing about trying to protect Mercedes-Benz, which clearly did not have the technology in the first place.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 5.30 pm
