

WESTRAIL, ARTWORK

344.Hon TOM STEPHENS to the Minister for Transport:

I have arranged to pass a copy of the Auditor General's financial management control issues report to the minister. I draw the minister's attention to page 32 of that report in which, under the heading "Westrail Artwork", it says that the collection was first catalogued in 1988. The 1999 stocktake could not locate 24 per cent of the original collection. I also draw the minister's attention to his answer to a question on 4 May. I asked the minister to table a list of the artworks owned by Westrail. The minister replied by thanking me for notice of the question and said that provision of the information would require considerable research, which would divert staff away from normal duties. Will the minister now give an undertaking to this House that before the House rises tonight, he will make -

Hon N.F. Moore: Come on. What a twit you have turned out to be.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The member should listen to this. I ask the minister to treat the question seriously.

Hon Peter Foss: It is a demand.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Will the minister give an explanation to this House before it rises this evening, by way of ministerial statement, of how that answer can be anything other than a breach of the privileges of this place? Will the minister recognise that, in his answer, he claimed that too much work would be required to table information contained in a catalogue that revealed that 24 per cent of Westrail's artwork had been lost?

Hon Peter Foss: You are making a statement. You are not asking a question.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Will the Minister for Transport recognise the gravity of the situation that he is in, yet again? Will the minister recognise that he has the opportunity to avoid the need for a motion along the lines of that which I have supplied?

The PRESIDENT: Order! Will the Leader of the Opposition get on with the question. The question has about six parts so far. I have forgotten what the first three were and I doubt whether the Leader of the Opposition can remember them either.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I will go over them.

The PRESIDENT: Go over them concisely and do not put in too much unnecessary information.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Do not get excited, Mr President.

The PRESIDENT: I will not get excited, but I will tell the Leader of the Opposition -

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Mr President, you do not need to raise your voice.

The PRESIDENT: The member should not speak to the Chair like that if he does not want me to take appropriate action.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Indeed, Mr President.

The PRESIDENT: Right.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The President has asked me to repeat my question. The question is this. I draw the Minister for Transport's attention to page 32 of the Auditor General's report contained within the report tabled in this House last week, which stated that a collection was first catalogued for Westrail in 1988 and that the 1999 stocktake could not locate 24 per cent of that collection. I also draw the minister's attention to the question on Thursday, 4 May, in which I asked the minister to table a list of the artworks owned by Westrail. The minister's answer was that the provision of this information would require considerable research that would divert staff from their normal duties. Will the minister give an undertaking that before the House rises tonight he will make a ministerial statement explaining why that answer does not represent a serious breach of the privileges of this place? Specifically, how is it that the minister came to claim to this House that the tabling of a catalogue that existed - it might have been embarrassing, but nonetheless it existed - would make too much work for the Government and that was the basis upon which the minister claimed to the House that it should not insist on an answer? It is a simple question.

The PRESIDENT: If it is a simple question, finish it.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Will the minister make a statement to the House before the House rises to explain what appears to be a prima facie breach of privilege?

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE replied:

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344.Hon Tom Stephens; Mr Tom Stephens; President; Hon Murray Criddle

The question contains a substantial number of demands. When I have given consideration to that I will supply the member with my view of the situation. It is obviously late in the day.