

DEFENCE INDUSTRY — DRY-DOCKING FACILITIES

**The SPEAKER:** The Leader of the Liberal Party. Sorry, the member for Cottesloe! My mistake.

**773. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Defence Industry:**

Thank you, Madam Speaker. You let the cat out of the bag!

I raise the matter of our state's marine defence-industry capability and the prospect of major investment in more jobs through the Henderson dry-docking facilities.

- (1) Does the disappearance from the federal budget of \$4.3 billion of funding for a dry-docking facility in Henderson mean that the offer has been rescinded by the current federal Labor government?
- (2) If not, can the minister explain why the federal government removed that funding commitment from the budget?

*Point of Order*

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I draw your attention to standing order 75(1). It says that a minister can be asked a question "regarding matters under the Minister's administrative responsibility". I know that the Minister for Defence Industry is very keen to get his position on the record; however, the question as framed does not relate to any matter in the minister's administrative responsibility because it specifically asked about decisions of the commonwealth government. The member could have framed it in a way that related to state government affairs, but he chose not to do that.

**The SPEAKER:** Look, I appreciate the point you are making and the reference to the standing order. I think that the Minister for Defence Industry is rather keen to comment. One of the other things that standing order prescribes is that you do not ask for an opinion, but many times in this house people are asked for their opinions and do give them. I will just take into account that the minister can be asked and answer only about matters that he is responsible for. He is responsible for the defence industry; that is a portfolio that has a very close interrelationship with the commonwealth government. On that basis, I will allow the question to continue, and I will listen very carefully to how it is phrased.

*Questions without Notice Resumed*

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Minister for Energy will enjoy (3), which is —

- (3) If the dry-dock project is still expected to proceed, what has the state government done to progress the project?

**Mr P. PAPALIA replied:**

- (1)–(3) I thank the member for his question. It is interesting that it should be raised at this point. I note that the project he is referring to was a last-ditch, flimsy, transparently empty and hollow announcement by the former federal Morrison government, just before the last election. The allocated funds the member refers to were a contingent liability. Members, those of us who are familiar with projects such as Perth Freight Link and the many, many iterations of that fake commitment, which never really existed, know that in federal government terms "contingent liability" means that it is not real. There is nothing associated with that. It is a line in a paper that enables local advocates like senators or local federal members to pretend that they have made a commitment and then call upon other people to respond to that commitment. The reality is that there was never any money in the federal budget for a dry dock.

After the recent change in federal government and the commitment by the current government to acquire a nuclear-powered submarine capability, people have reflected on the likelihood of a need for a dry dock at some point. Initially, we will be having visits from in-service United States and British submarines, and they will require maintenance support from our industry players here in Western Australia, but they will not necessarily require dry docking. However, we will then acquire our own submarines some time in the early 2030s. Then, subsequently—some time down the track—there is a likelihood that we will require a dry dock to be able to dock those submarines and do deep maintenance. That is something that has been observed. I share the view that at some point that will be a requirement. I have publicly stated that that will be a requirement for the sustainment of nuclear submarines. The previous federal government put no money in the budget for a dry dock, and at the point when they made the announcement, they were talking about only the large vessels; they were not talking about nuclear submarines. If we are going to build a dry dock, it will have to be nuclear rated. It will be more expensive, in all likelihood, than the amount the opposition said. It will be a requirement for the federal government to determine whether it wants that and then fund it.