

- (1) Is the advice I have received that the cost of the Peel deviation project has now blown out from the original estimate of \$340 million by \$120 million to \$460 million correct?
- (2) Is part of the reason for the cost blow-out the government's indecisiveness and the delays caused in getting the project up and running because of the massive increase in the cost of limestone and other raw materials?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN replied:

- (1)-(2) As I have acknowledged before today, the costs that were provided in April 2004 are not static. We provided the federal government with some preliminary cost estimates in April 2004. Even under the federal government's proposal, it was never intended that construction of this road would start until the very end of 2006. It is true that a very substantial increase in construction costs has taken place in Western Australia as a result of the economic boom. It is a fact of life that construction costs for civil construction projects have increased by around 25 per cent. Since April 2004 we have been refining the design work, which we had undertaken to do in 2004. We now have a clearer idea of the design parameters. At the same time, we have been making updated cost estimates on that project. It is an absolute nonsense to think that a preliminary cost estimate can be done in early 2004 dollars and expect those costs to hold in this type of economic environment for two or three years. Of course that is not the case. Any sound and prudent economic planner, including the federal government, would understand that. We are finalising those cost estimates. I hope to be in a position to make a final decision on the scope of works and the cost of that by mid-July, when we will make some announcements.

MINISTER FOR HEALTH

Personal Explanation - Article in The West Australian Newspaper

MR J.A. McGINTY (Fremantle - Minister for Health) [2.53 pm] - by leave: In this morning's edition of *The West Australian* I was defamed by that newspaper with a complete fabrication. I have written this morning to the editor of *The West Australian*, Mr Paul Armstrong, in the following terms -

Dear Mr Armstrong,

The article that appeared on page 4 of *The West Australian* on Thursday June 30, 2005 under the headline "No need to label food by State: McGinty" is defamatory, factually incorrect and misleading.

It states that: Health Minister Jim McGinty said yesterday he did not care whether his fruit and vegetables came from WA or interstate.

This is false. I did not say that. The question about whether I cared where my fruit and vegetables came from was never put to me.

It was never put to me by Peta Rule, the journalist who attended the press conference yesterday. My letter continues -

What was reported in your article does not represent my views on this matter.

Whenever I buy fresh fruit and vegetables, I make a conscious effort to buy Western Australian produce if it is available.

I do that because it is fresh. My letter further states -

I request that you print a correction and offer an apology for this defamatory article to be printed in tomorrow's edition of *The West Australian*.

I would appreciate your urgent response to the concerns I have raised.

At the press conference yesterday, two questions were put to me on this issue. Both questions were asked by Peta Rule, who is a journalist for whom I have considerable respect and who works for *The West Australian*. I note that the first edition of *The West Australian* did not contain the offending words to which I have just referred and did not constitute the article written by Peta Rule. They were added later for the second edition, seemingly by some editorial edict. The two questions put to me by Peta Rule were -

Minister, on another topic, what do you think of Terry Redman's private members bill to introduce state of origin labelling on food?

To which I replied -

The real villain in the country of origin debate is the National Party Minister Truss. He is the one presiding over a debate at the moment to do away with country of origin labelling. That's a recommendation before FSANZ, he is the Minister responsible for that Federal agency. I have written to him this week urging him to say he will not water down the regulations, he will toughen them to make sure country of origin becomes mandatory. Now it's very interesting that at a State level the National Party want to have a bit of a stunt to promote their credentials while their Federal colleague, National Party Minister Truss, is seeking to water down those regulations.

The second follow-up question put to me was -

Would you be expecting this private members bill for state of origin to get much support from Government?

To which I responded -

No. For a very simple reason. Food labelling I think of necessity needs to be done at a national level. Our job is to, as it has been done historically, the National Party here Terry Redman concedes that he can't do anything in respect of country of origin so he is seeking a way to bring it down to the State. Now for my part, I'm happy if I know something is Australian. It doesn't overly worry me whether it comes from New South Wales or Queensland. What does interest me and the reason we're advocating country of origin is I do want to know what country it does come from because of different standards that apply in different countries. I think by the time you break that down to states in Australia then it's taking it down to too low a level. I think the National Party are just trying to position themselves to cover their embarrassment for the behaviour of their Federal Minister. He's the real villain in the affair.

It is important to draw to the attention of the house that the question reflected in this morning's paper was never put to me and the answer does not represent my views. It is totally false and I expect to see a full apology and a retraction in tomorrow's edition of *The West Australian*.

BRAND HIGHWAY, PASSING LANES

Petition - Point of Order

MS A.J.G. MacTIERNAN (Armadale - Minister for Planning and Infrastructure) [2.56 pm]: I seek your guidance, Mr Speaker. I am concerned that this morning the member for Moore may have lodged a disorderly petition in breach of standing order 64. It is signed by T. Turner, J. Rambo and Clint Eastwood. I seek your guidance, Mr Speaker, about how to consider the legitimacy of these petitions because this type of incident undermines the process of petitions.

Mr P.D. Omodei: I know Clint Eastwood. He lives in Dandaragan!

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: It might very well be that Clint Eastwood and J. Rambo, who give their addresses as "camp", are alive and well in Gingin. However, members should be more careful about discrediting the petition process by lodging such petitions.

The SPEAKER: The staff endeavour to check as far as is possible the validity of signatures. If the signatures are found to be false, the number of petitioners is reduced accordingly.

COUNTRY AMBULANCE SERVICES

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mr F. Riebeling): Today I received a letter from the member for Wagin seeking to debate as a matter of public interest the following motion -

This house calls upon the Minister for Health to immediately boost the state government's contribution to country ambulance services.

If sufficient members agree to this motion, I will allow it.

[At least five members rose in their places.]

The SPEAKER: The matter shall proceed on the usual basis.

MR T.K. WALDRON (Wagin) [2.59 pm]: I move the motion.

St John Ambulance provides an essential and crucial emergency service throughout Western Australia. We cannot live without it, yet in many country areas, particularly the smaller country communities, the ambulance service is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. The challenges vary, depending upon the community. However, in general, it boils down to two main issues. The first issue is volunteers. Country ambulance services are staffed predominantly by volunteers. It is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit volunteers in small, and often declining, country communities. The second issue is fundraising. Local communities are required to contribute to the cost of maintaining a local ambulance service. However, again this is proving more difficult as the populations decline and community members are called upon to contribute to an increasing number of local services. The sustainability of the St John Ambulance service in country areas is an issue that has been around for quite a while. Despite the best efforts of many people, this issue has not been resolved to provide the assistance that smaller communities need. The National Party is raising this matter of public interest to highlight the importance of the ambulance service in country areas, and to raise issues impacting on the future sustainability of the ambulance service. We also want to pose some possible solutions. We want to be proactive, not reactive, and look to the future.

St John Ambulance is a community-based organisation that is contracted by the state government to provide ambulance services across the state. The country ambulance service is separated into two departments. The first is country