devastate Pinjarra's business community. We bring to the attention of Parliament the stated views of 1395 local electors on this matter.

We therefore respectfully request that the Legislative Council ensure that the State Government maintains the Pinjarra Courthouse and related services and the Murray Districts Hospital.

And your petitioners as in duty bound, will ever pray.

[See paper No 1482.]

STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE

Report on Proposed Amendments to Standing Orders Incorporating Sessional Orders Adopted 10 April 1997

The President tabled the second report of the Standing Orders Committee, and on motion by Hon J.A. Cowdell it was resolved -

That the report do lie upon the Table and be printed.

[See paper No 1479.]

MINING INDUSTRY FATALITIES

Urgency Motion

THE PRESIDENT (Hon George Cash): I have received the following letter addressed to me and dated 31 March 1998 -

Dear Mr President

At today's sitting, it is my intention to move an urgency motion under SO 72 that the House, at its rising, adjourn until 9.00 am on Tuesday, 26 May 1998 in order to urgently consider the failure of the Government to stem the fatalities in the Western Australian mining industry.

Yours sincerely

MARK NEVILL MLC
Member for Mining & Pastoral Region

In order to discuss this matter, it will be necessary for at least four members to indicate their support by rising in their places.

[At least four members rose in their places.]

HON MARK NEVILL (Mining and Pastoral) [3.40 pm]: I move -

That the House at its rising adjourn until 9.00 am on Tuesday, 26 May.

The present Court Government is reaping the harvest of poor safety policies during its period in office. Deaths in the mining industry are increasing at an alarming rate. The record over the past four or five years illustrates that every measure designed to improve safety in the mining industry has been either removed or watered down. One of the most disturbing moves, predicted in 1994, was the removal of constraints on working hours. Extended shifts are now commonplace. What are the results of these changes? The current average working week for underground miners was increased from 37.5 hours a week in 1993 to 56 hours a week. Workers at the Otter mine at Kambalda, operated by Henry Walker Contracting Pty Ltd, work 12 hour shifts, five days on and four days off. That is equivalent to 56 hours a week underground. That is too much. It is too risky and is contributing significantly to the problems we are experiencing in our mining industry, particularly the underground mining industry. Eltins workers at the Long mine also work 12 hour shifts, eight days on and four days off. Again, that is a 56 hour working week. The Revenge mine also has 12 hour shifts with nine days on and five days off, which is a 54 hour week.

Working underground is extremely dangerous and enervating. I worked underground for six years in mines and shafts. It is a hot, dusty, dark environment. People are working on uneven floors with heavy equipment and explosives. There is a lack of lighting and a capacity for rock falls. It is a dangerous cocktail to have people working an average of 54 hours a week underground. Those lessons were learnt long ago, but this Government has reversed many of the protective procedures put in place. We now have open slather in the mining industry, except in respect of air leg miners - we were fortunate enough to have an amendment passed in another place in their case.
The Government has also changed the rules relating to workers' compensation. Its main interest was in reducing the cost for employers because they saw this as a major burden. Workers' compensation payments made employers focus on safety in mines. Workers now have limited capacity to take action and it is difficult for them to get workers' compensation. They are unrepresented in conciliation conferences, unlike the insurance companies, which are represented by very experienced clerks who, in most cases, know as much about workers' compensation claims as lawyers. It is a very uneven contest. Many of the miners who go into these situations are frightened. Their claims are frustrated and they often find that their weekly payments are stopped and no investigative procedure is launched. Often important steps, such as x-ray soft tissue injuries, are not taken because they show deterioration in the spine. Instead, they are given some physiotherapy and analgesics and, because the treatment is not thorough, claims cannot be made. As a result, employers are under less pressure to ensure a safe workplace.

This Government's deliberate policy to exclude unions has been a retrograde step. Unions are an essential element of safety in mines. Prior to the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984 the unions were the safety watchdogs in the mining industry. This Government's actions have ensured that many minesites are unionised, particularly those operated by WMC Resources Ltd and it is one of the companies in the most trouble at the moment.

Last Friday I had the privilege of touring Alcoa, which is 40 per cent owned by WMC. It is amazing to see the difference in approach to safety in the two enterprises. WMC's operations are typical of those in the underground mining industry. In contrast, Alcoa regards its work force as its best asset, followed by the resource, and profit comes further down the line. It also has a low staff turnover and a strong focus on quality. It does not have the training problems experienced by some in the underground mining industry. It has a culture that encourages the reporting of dangers, risks and problems. It welcomes its employees reporting those problems. The culture in the underground mining industry is the opposite; workers are discouraged from reporting dangers and risks.

WMC does not value its work force as its prime asset. In the past 12 years it has used mass retrenchments as a management tool to repress its workers. Following the 1986 retrenchment program, the company said it would never undertake such a program again, but it has done so on a regular basis. That sends a clear message to the work force that it is not valued. It will be very difficult for WMC to change that culture. The company has done some first-class work in developing safety procedures with its elimination of fatalities task force, but translating that into action in the workplace is very difficult because of the culture it has developed. In addition, it does not have control of its work force as a result of extensive contracting out.

Unlike Alcoa, WMC has a very high staff turnover. Again unlike Alcoa, it has a poor safety record. The crib rooms provided by Alcoa are excellent, but WMC's lunch rooms are rudimentary to say the least. In many cases contract workers are encouraged not to take lunch breaks. At WMC sites and other mining sites, an underground truck operator will work a 12 hour shift, driving six or seven kilometres down a decline with half a metre tolerance between the rock walls and the truck. That is like driving down a tunnel from Kalgoorlie to Perth. At Alcoa all the earth moving equipment operators are rotated on a shift every four hours for safety reasons. The culture at Alcoa of Australia Ltd is exactly the opposite to that at WMC Resources Ltd. Alcoa has a completely unionised site; it is not afraid of the union on its site; it works with the union and has a good relationship with it. WMC is against unions; it has an anti-union culture; it is afraid of unions; it has no capacity to work with unions. The push over the past five years to get rid of unions from minesites has prevented them from doing their job of making mines safe working environments; it has had the opposite effect and made them more dangerous environments.

The emergence of contractors has also contributed to the problems, particularly in underground mines. The principal employer is responsible for the work force; for example, with WMC and other companies. I mention WMC because it is the biggest mining employer, but notwithstanding that, there are real problems in the organisation. With contractors there is a much higher turnover of staff. There is rotation of staff between minesites where they do not know the intricacies of the particular underground mine in which they are working, which a permanently based work force in a mine would know. Using contractors often involves increased travel, which puts extra stress on people before and after their 12 hour shift. An added problem these days is the much younger and inexperienced work force. There is also intense competition between contractors to get the job. There is no doubt that it puts pressure on their capacity to undertake safety and training in the mining industry.

This sort of cocktail of free market policies has not been put together or executed well. It has contributed to the depressing and deteriorating situation in the underground mining industry of today. The Government is not doing enough to address the situation, which has really been allowed to drift. I see no real remedial action coming from this Government. What we predicted in 1994 about the problems with extended working hours and writing the unions out of the Mines Safety and Inspection Act has proved correct. We are now seeing it in the fatalities statistics from the mining industry. We cannot say that this run of fatalities is one of those random blips in fatalities, as we had in 1989 when five miners were drowned at the Emu mine. That happens from time to time. This run of fatalities is too sustained and is a reflection on the Government's policies. I call on the Minister for Mines to look fundamentally
at what we have done in the mining industry and reconsider some of the Government’s policy initiatives. What has come out of them is to no-one’s benefit.

HON HELEN HODGSON (North Metropolitan) [3.54 pm]: I am pleased to see that this issue has been raised as an urgency motion. During the past three weeks I have been waiting to hear what the Minister in this place has to say about the report handed down in January of this year. The report on the inquiry into fatalities in the Western Australian mining industry was handed down on 8 January 1998. My understanding is that the report was brought down a day early because on that day there was another fatality.

Hon N.F. Moore: Your understanding is wrong.

Hon HELEN HODGSON: The report is an analysis of some of the issues that have come up in the mining industry. It highlights some major problems. I found very illuminating the list of submissions to the inquiry contained in appendix F.1. It contains some of the specific issues people raised when they attended the inquiry, particularly about the culture of the mining industry, training, reporting of hazards and the role of the Department of Minerals and Energy. Looking at some of the things people brought to the attention of the Government through this inquiry, the report does not go far enough. The recommendations in the report do not give any proposed courses of action. It says that we will get the Mines Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Board to look at this and we will get the Department of Minerals and Energy to see if it can do something else. There are no funding allocations or anything in the report to say where this will go.

I will give some examples of what was raised in the inquiry about experience in training. An occupational safety and health educator said that there was no clear, formal path for miners to ensure that experience is retained. A geotechnical engineer referred to the development of local knowledge and on site knowledge as the best on the job training for the work force. The report indicates that because of the contract system and the short term contracts that mining contractors have with mine operators there is no opportunity to develop career paths or to ensure that people have proper training. The report indicates that hazard reporting is actively discouraged. A contract shift boss said that there was no consultation between contract management and employees at the face, that hazard reporting was actively discouraged and that people were verbally abused when they reported hazards. Another employee said that hazard reporting was not encouraged by management. A contract employee said that reporting hazards was actively discouraged. He was told, "You do things my way, or it's the highway." It is clear that a culture is operating which says that because productivity is the be all and end all, employers do not want employees to rock the boat by reporting hazards.

Only since the most recent fatality on 19 March in Kambalda has the public become aware of the appalling record of WMC Resources Ltd and Eltin Underground Operations Pty Ltd in this field. The fatalities have been reported as they have occurred. However, at no stage does the report of the inquiry highlight the key offenders. We now know that this was the fifth fatality at this company’s mines in the past 12 months; that is, one of 13 mining deaths in Western Australia since April 1997. Mining deaths in this State are running at more than one a month. That is comparable with the disgraceful situation we discussed last week of deaths in custody. What are we doing here? We are allowing this situation to continue and are not taking the leadership role that the Government should take in monitoring this situation.

The other problem is that we are focusing on deaths because we can count them and they cannot be covered up. However, the problem is that in the mining industry deaths are the end of the line. We start with incidents which lead to accidents which may ultimately result in people dying. It is not until we have the deaths that we have any action being taken. Anecdotally I have been told of cases where machinery has been repaired and obviously from the nature of the repair the damage has been caused by a rock fall or collision, but no incident reports have been lodged because that is considered to be against the culture of the mining industry. There is no hazard report and nothing officially is done about it. Who knows where those sorts of incidents might lead? They may well ultimately lead to more deaths. Workers are afraid to make complaints through fear of losing their jobs. That is indicated by the nature of some of the comments in this report and the fact that the bulk of them have been made over hotlines or in situations where complaining workers will not be identified.

The other aspect that this report has not addressed is the role of the Department of Minerals and Energy. I would like to know what is the role of the DME. Is it to provide a service to the mining industry or is to ensure that regulations and so forth are followed? Where is the separation between the two? We hear of inspections being very rarely carried out without some notice being given to the mining company, and we are given good reason why that is the case. We are told that if they simply turn up, they might travel miles and find nobody is there to show them what is going on. We also hear anecdotal evidence from people who know when mines inspectors are around because they are shifted from one rock face to another and know that the area where the hazards are will not be shown to the mines inspectors. That just shows an example where work practices that may be very convenient and make the job easier for the mines inspectors probably do not help them to monitor safety. We have also got evidence at page 52
in this report of inspectors being involved as consultants to mining companies. Is that not a conflict of interest? Why is a mines inspector providing consulting services when two days later he may have to turn up and say, "Excuse me, we have had a complaint about safety on your site"? How will the mines inspectors handle that? That is a blatant breach of the conflict of interest rules.

There are other issues in respect of work practices of DME that do not encourage safe working practices. It is my understanding that the number of prosecutions relating to the number of incidents and accidents involving breaches of regulations is quite unacceptable. There is not a problem with any lack of regulations. My copy of the safety regulations runs for 252 pages. The regulations are in place, but obviously they are not working. Why are they not working? Anecdotally we are told it is because there is no real means of enforcement. We have not got the means of ensuring that the shift bosses, the mine operators, and ultimately the mines inspectors are actually out there and enforcing the regulations. It may be that is what it takes. It may need the Government to come down heavily on people who breach the regulations and launch prosecutions to ensure that the culture is changed. Hit them where it hurts, in the hip pocket. If prosecutions are the only way to make sure we can deal with the problems in the mining industry, then that is the way we should go. It is time that the practices and the processes of the mining industry were reviewed and an assurance made that breaches will be followed up properly. Ultimately, hopefully, that will lead to a safer mining industry.

HON KIM CHANCE (Agricultural) [4.04 pm]: The background of this motion has been referred to as the report of the task force. It might be useful to add that the Minister initiated the inquiry by the Mines Occupational Safety and Health Advisory Board. MOSHAB then designated the task force to report in September 1997. The task force found that the incidence of underground fatalities from rock falls was unacceptable and that the underground mining sector had failed to adequately control the risk of exposure to rock falls. I thought it important to make the point that the Minister has had a report since September 1997 which states that the underground facility performance of the mining industry is poor and is acknowledged to be poor. The task force stated that our underground operations management is inadequate to prevent fatalities underground and little is being done to control the situation.

What has happened in the dynamics of the underground mining industry which has led to that situation? The report goes some of the way to answering that question on page 6 where it notes that there have been substantial reductions in serious injuries underground, and that is acknowledged. However, it highlights the fact that there has been a marked increase in underground fatalities over the past three years. One of the figures which is not in the report is the fact that we had 10 fatalities in the past 12 months. The point made in paragraph 5 of page 6 was that the increase coincided with the industry's transition to contract, in which contractors now employ 70 per cent of the underground work force and 45 per cent of the surface work force. It is probably too easy to draw from those figures and that statement in the report the assumption that contractors are entirely to blame.

The report states that geotechnical advice regarding risks from natural or mining induced seismic activities, something that is important to the safe operation of a mine, appears to be ignored or not sought. We have had a look at Western Mining's operations in this context. Western Mining on 29 March this year suspended its blasting operations and if one read the articles which coincided with that suspension, one would take the view that it probably suspended the operations pending the serious consideration of the conduct of its operations since the last fatality; but the last fatality was 10 days earlier. That in fact was the second fatality at the Eltin Western Mining contract at Junction Mine. It was the second fatality in that mine in four months, and the sixth fatality for Eltin in under 12 months, but subsequent to the fatality on March 19, Western Mining suspended its blasting operations. As I said, most of us took the belief that that suspension was due to that blasting accident. In fact the suspension was on 28 March, and there had been two other blasting incidents in Western Mining mines; one day and two days prior to that suspension. The suspension probably had nothing to do with the fatality on 19 March at Western Mining's Mariner underground mine in which a face was charged and fired without anybody checking the

Hon KIM CHANCE: The report did not draw that conclusion.

Hon KIM CHANCE: No, I said it was probably too easy to draw that conclusion, certainly the report did not draw that conclusion.

Hon N.F. Moore: Good.

Hon KIM CHANCE: The prime responsibility always remains with the principal employer, the mining company. It is the mining company which makes the choice of contractor and it is the mining company which remains responsible for the way in which the contractor conducts its operations, both underground and on the surface, while they are on the company's lease. One specific example of this responsibility is found in page 19 of the report where it states that geotechnical advice is not used at all at 33 minesites in Western Australia.

Hon Mark Nevill: We put forward an urgency motion two years ago in respect of support systems.

Hon KIM CHANCE: The report states that geotechnical advice regarding risks from natural or mining induced seismic activities, something that is important to the safe operation of a mine, appears to be ignored or not sought. We must have a look at Western Mining's operations in this context. Western Mining on 29 March this year suspended its blasting operations and if one read the articles which coincided with that suspension, one would take the view that it probably suspended the operations pending the serious consideration of the conduct of its operations since the last fatality; but the last fatality was 10 days earlier. That in fact was the second fatality at the Eltin Western Mining contract at Junction Mine. It was the second fatality in that mine in four months, and the sixth fatality for Eltin in under 12 months, but subsequent to the fatality on March 19, Western Mining suspended its blasting operations. As I said, most of us took the belief that that suspension was due to that blasting accident. In fact the suspension was on 28 March, and there had been two other blasting incidents in Western Mining mines; one day and two days prior to that suspension. The suspension probably had nothing to do with the fatality on 19 March at Western Mining's Mariner underground mine in which a face was charged and fired without anybody checking the
mine to ensure that everyone was out of the area. A miner was working in a rise but was not advised of the intended blast - they forgot to tell him. Luckily, nobody is believed to have been injured. The contractor at that mine is Byrnecut and the Department of Mines and Energy is investigating the serious incident.

Again, at another Western Mining open cut mine at Leinster, a charge was set and fired in an open pit after the blaster miner was found down the pit. The miner was not advised that the blast was about to occur. I am told that the Department of Mines and Energy does not propose to conduct an investigation into this serious incident, but will rely on a report being sent to it by the mining company. It is reasonable to draw the assumption that the suspension of blasting operations by Western Mining was not as a consequence of the blasting fatality of March 19, as appeared to be claimed by Western Mining. In fact blasting was suspended by Western Mining on the Saturday to allow for an examination of the procedures.

That is the procedure which resulted in the last two incidents. However, WMC continued its blasting operation when the procedure was checked. In fact, WMC has the unenviable record of having 59 fatal accidents since its operation began, which is three times higher than the figure for the next poorest performer.

All members of Parliament have responsibilities for mine safety in the general mining safety law and regulation creating function of Parliament, and that responsibility is reflected in the motion before the Chair.

It is true that underground mining is, and probably always will be, a high hazard work environment because of the association of working in unstable ground and a number of controllable factors. Hon Helen Hodgson outlined the safety culture as indicated in submissions made to the task force inquiry. I do not intend to go through those areas, but it is certainly true that a non-safety culture operates, perhaps covertly, within the mining industry. In this culture, people raising safety matters on a minesite can be verbally abused. It is not necessarily company policy, but a pro-production mentality can be found in the mining industry which causes some people with responsibility for the safety of others to work actively against a safety culture. Hon Mark Nevill gave a good example in the differences between Alcoa's and WMC's operations, highlighting an active safety culture at Alcoa's minesite.

Hon N.F. Moore: How many underground mines does Alcoa operate?
Hon Mark Nevill: It does not matter whether it is underground.

Hon KIM CHANCE: Mining is mining. How many underground mines are at Leinster?
Hon N.F. Moore: Read the report - that was where the problem is.

Hon KIM CHANCE: My colleague Hon Julian Grill recently identified three factors relating to the current fatality figures; namely, the exclusion of unions from the industry, the increased involvement of contractors, and extended shifts worked underground. I have time to briefly deal with only one of those points.

Historically, unions have played a pivotal role in the safety culture of both opencast and underground mines. Safety has suffered in the alienation of unions. My colleagues Hon Mark Nevill and Hon Julian Grill gave warnings in the goldfields in this regard a long time ago; sadly, they have yet to be heeded.

HON N.F. MOORE (Mining and Pastoral - Minister for Mines) [4.14 pm]: This motion is based on a false premise. I have considered the figures on fatalities in the mining industry. As this Government is being blamed in the motion for a so-called significant increase in fatalities, I have considered the number of people who have died in mines since 1993. The total number is 36, and the figure for the preceding five years was 50 fatalities. The average number during the last five years of the previous Labor Government was 10 fatalities a year; namely, 50 fatalities in total. During the time of the coalition Government the total number of fatalities is 36, at an average of 7.2. At the same time, the number of employees in the mining industry rose from 22 000 in 1988 - the point at which I took the last five years of the Labor Government into account - to 42 000 in 1997. Therefore, a reduction has occurred during the time of this Government in the number of people who have died per annum. I refer to an average, with the figures cited compared to the time when members opposite were in office.

Hon Mark Nevill: Why not read the report?

Hon N.F. MOORE: Hang on. I listened to the member opposite silently.

The mining work force has increased dramatically from 22 000 to 42 000 employees.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: They are part time employees.

Hon N.F. MOORE: Let me get this straight: Hon Mark Nevill exaggerates the situation. He ignores the fact that when his Government was in office, an epidemic of deaths occurred in the mining industry. However, the Liberal
Party did not move urgency motions and other procedures to blame members opposite for that situation. We said that the then Government had to sort out those problems.

Hon Kim Chance: That is what we are doing.

Hon N.F. MOORE: At least Hon Kim Chance had the decency to say that I initiated the report to which Hon Helen Hodgson referred. I directed the Mines Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Board to conduct the inquiry. That tripartite body, which contains representation from unions, employers and the Government, set up its own task force to carry out the inquiry. Unions were involved in that process and signed off on the report. That tripartite body report made a number of recommendations on my initiative. I have already announced publicly the Government's response to that report which is being implemented very rapidly indeed. In fact, it is my absolute requirement that it be implemented this year. For members to say that somehow or other deaths in mines are as a result of the Government's problems is absolute rubbish!

Hon Mark Nevill: Pull out the underground figures!

Hon N.F. MOORE: Hon Mark Nevill should know better because he knows about this industry.

Hon Tom Stephens: No-one knows it better.

Hon N.F. MOORE: Let us consider the record: In 1988, 10 fatalities occurred; in 1989, 18; 1990, five; 1991, 11; 1992, six; 1993, seven; 1994, four; 1995, eight; 1996, seven; and in 1997, there were 10 fatalities. The figures go up and down, and this has nothing to do with unions or contractors because the average figure has reduced while all the "dreadful changes" took place, as members opposite described them.

Members opposite talked about hours worked. The report on which the member placed a great deal of emphasis did not draw any relationship between the hours worked and the number of fatalities in the mining industry.

Hon Mark Nevill: I did not mention the report - you would know that if you had listened.

Hon N.F. MOORE: The other day following the recent fatality, which really upset me, I spoke to WMC Resources and Eltin Ltd very severely, and this was the first time somebody had spoken to them from a government perspective. They now know where I stand. The last fatality occurred in a mine about which the member's colleague Hon Julian Grill had argued about extended hours. That mine operates eight hour shifts. Hon Mark Nevill should get his facts right before making allegations about the causes of these problems.

In individual cases, some inexplicable circumstances arise by which people are killed, and these have nothing to do with culture, hours of work or contracts. The reasons for the accident are known only by the person killed, as people die in circumstances which nobody can understand.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich interjected.

Hon N.F. MOORE: Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich should mind her own business - she does not know what she is talking about!

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich will get an opportunity to speak if time permits.

Hon N.F. MOORE: The member spoke about the exclusion of unions. During the last five years of the Labor Party's term in office, when 50 people were killed, and far fewer people worked in the industry, the mining industry was union dominated. It is claimed that the Government has excluded unions, which is not the case - employees have simply walked out of unions. In fact, there is hardly a unionist left at Hamersley Iron as people have left of their own volition.

Hon Bob Thomas: They are coming back.

Hon N.F. MOORE: Robe River has the same deal and members should consider that operation's vastly improved safety record.

Hon Mark Nevill: Why not focus on the underground mining industry?

Hon N.F. MOORE: Hon Mark Nevill and Hon Helen Hodgson should acknowledge that the report indicates that apart from fatalities, which are as serious as can be, the overall safety level within the mining industry has improved dramatically.

Hon Mark Nevill: The incidence of major accidents has increased.

Hon N.F. MOORE: The point that the overall safety level within the mining industry has improved dramatically is conveniently ignored by members opposite.
Members then referred to the engagement of contractors. Again, the report does not state that contractors cause deaths; it states that a correlation exists in relation to the timing of contract labour being hired, but it does not draw the conclusion that contractors are responsible for deaths in the industry any more so than any other form of employment. Hon Mark Nevill needs to get his facts right in that regard. He has not bothered to read the report; he has his blinkered vision that if the industry had no contractors, everyone belonged to the union, everyone worked eight hour days, and mines inspectors stood behind every underground miner, no deaths would occur. That is not reality. The record in the mining industry shows that, on average, as a result of the changes which have taken place since we have been in office, the number of fatalities has declined. The safety record of the industry has improved dramatically. The Opposition ignores the facts.

Hon Mark Nevill: Are you proud of the deaths?

Hon N.F. MOORE: I am not proud of one death. When I was a little boy in Bullfinch the man who lived next door to me was killed in a mine. I know the grief and tragedy suffered by not only his family but also the town. I know what it is like. One death is one too many as far as I am concerned. Hon Mark Nevill should not blame me or the Government because people are killed in the mines. If his argument is to be consistent he and his colleagues must take responsibility for the 50 deaths in the last five years his Government was in office. Will he take responsibility? I do not know who the Ministers were during that period.

The PRESIDENT: If the Minister addressed the Chair rather than singling out members it would be helpful to me.

Hon N.F. MOORE: This is a very serious and emotional issue, Mr President.

The PRESIDENT: That is why I asked the Minister to address me.

Hon N.F. MOORE: I am a bit emotional about Hon Mark Nevill's raising the matter in the House today. I know that when he was Minister for Mines Jeff Carr almost tore his hair out in exasperation and frustration over this issue. He was probably the Minister when 18 people died in one year. He did all he could to remedy the situation and so is this Government. To suggest this Government has no concern for the safety of miners is absolute rubbish; in fact it is outrageous. I take serious exception to his suggesting that is the case because it is not true. Hon Mark Nevill is saying that the Government is getting rid of unions and making people work longer without giving them a choice. People are choosing to work longer hours and are choosing not to be members of unions. That is a simple fact of life irrespective of whether Hon Mark Nevill likes it.

We hear his diatribe about WMC Resources Ltd. Every time members on that side of the House get a chance to attack Western Mining they do so. On this occasion I have also attacked that company - because of its safety record, not because of its politics. The Opposition attacks Western Mining for political reasons more than anything else because it has a different culture from that which they support. They should examine the fundamental issues. Hon Mark Nevill referred to Western Mining's crib room. What does that have to do with fatalities underground? It is nonsense and it is totally discredited by the facts.

Hon Helen Hodgson regularly used the word "anecdotal". The report to which I referred is the collective views of a tripartite group. It ignored many of the anecdotal comments because they are not of any substance.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: They are true; I read that report.

Hon N.F. MOORE: I congratulate Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich. Does the report have only three-letter words?

The PRESIDENT: Order! The Minister.

Hon N.F. MOORE: A vast amount of what the member was saying was anecdotal evidence and was dismissed by the tripartite committee. It came to its conclusions and its recommendations are being implemented.

HON GIZ WATSON (North Metropolitan) [4.26 pm]: I add the concern of the Greens (WA) about events within the mining industry. I refer members to page 48 of the Report on the Inquiry into Fatalities in the Western Australian Mining Industry. Chart No 8 clearly demonstrates that the number of deaths is increasing. I am at a loss to understand to what the Minister referred. In 1994 the fatality rate per 1 000 employees was 8.3; in 1995, 0.85; in 1996, 1.02; and in 1997, 1.75.

Hon N.F. Moore: I am talking about when the Opposition was in government.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! This is a very serious subject. We must hear Hon Giz Watson in silence.

Hon GIZ WATSON: If this report is to be believed, the figures are increasing on a pro rata basis, contrary to what the Minister said. I examined this report very thoroughly and I highlight that the Department of Minerals and Energy
has shown an unwillingness to address the criticisms of the department including intimidation, workers feeling fearful of making reports to the department and allegations of favouritism towards large companies over small operators. We will not get to the bottom of the issue unless those matters are addressed very urgently by the department. I will leave my comments at this point to allow another member to speak.

HON MARK NEVILL (Mining and Pastoral) [4.27 pm]: The Minister’s comments show that he has not learnt anything in the time he has spent as the Minister for Mines. All the arguments he dismissed show that he does not understand some of the factors that contribute to the situation. He asked what Alcoa had to do with Western Mining. Obviously they are very different mining operations.

Hon N.F. Moore interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, Minister!

Hon MARK NEVILL: I was talking about the way Alcoa values its work force. The culture within its work force and the way Alcoa treats it is very different from the culture Western Mining has developed over many years. As I said, the three lots of retrenchments reinforced the views of the people who work for Western Mining. Quite a few of the directors and a number of other people in Western Mining are personal friends of mine. However, that does not deter me from making some unpalatable comments from time to time about whether the company is right or wrong. It has nothing to do with politics. It has everything to do with fatalities. The main problem in the mining industry in the past three or four years has been the underground mining industry. As the statistics to which Hon Giz Watson referred clearly show, the rate of deaths is increasing. If the Minister thinks he does not have a problem he is not doing his job.

Hon N.F. Moore interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The Minister will cease interjecting.

Hon MARK NEVILL: The biggest change in mine safety was in 1984 as a result of the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act. The serious and minor accident rate has been decreasing for all those years. The fatality rate has decreased and in recent years it has plateaued. In isolation, figures for the underground mining industry probably reflect most accurately that the rate of serious injury causing someone to be off work for 10 days is increasing. The industry has problems and the Minister must put the telescope to his other eye.

None of the factors I mentioned is the cause of the situation. I said that they all contribute to it. Their alleviation would mean that we were working towards a safer environment. The length of time people work, the role of the unions in the mining industry and workers’ compensation premiums all have a bearing on the safety of the work environment. Considered in isolation they may not mean much.

The Minister must realise that he cannot wish this problem away; he must address it.

Hon N.F. Moore: I am not wishing it away.

Hon MARK NEVILL: The crib rooms at Alcoa compared with the crib rooms in the mining industry demonstrate the difference in the way the companies value their work force. The Minister should look at them so that he understands what I am talking about. Obviously we are on different wavelengths. The Minister and this Government have a problem, although it is obvious from today’s debate that they do not understand that.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.

ORDER OR BUSINESS

HON N.F. MOORE (Mining and Pastoral - Leader of the House) [4.29 pm]: I move that Orders of the Day Nos 1, 7, 8, and 9 be taken, in that order.

Points of Order

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Mr President, at the completion of urgency motions, the next order of business is motions without notice and then motions and orders of the day.

The PRESIDENT: Members, usually at 4.30 pm on a Tuesday, I indicate that an hour having elapsed since the start of business, leave of the House is necessary for a particular debate on a motion that is being discussed to continue. That did not happen today because we finished less than a minute before 4.30 pm. The Minister is entitled to move his orders of the day. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to move something, he is entitled to do that when there is a break in proceedings.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: What then do I make of the order of business shown on the Notice Paper, which shows that at the conclusion of urgency motions, motions without notice are the next item of business?