

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE  
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO BUILDING RESILIENCE AND ENGAGEMENT  
FOR AT-RISK YOUTH THROUGH SPORT AND CULTURE**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
WEDNESDAY, 11 MAY 2016**

**SESSION TWO**

**Members**

**Ms M.M. Quirk (Chair)  
Dr A.D. Buti (Deputy Chair)  
Mr C.D. Hatton  
Ms L. Mettam  
Mr M.P. Murray**

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**Hearing commenced at 11.08 am**

**Mr RON ALEXANDER**

**Director General, Department of Sport and Recreation, examined:**

**Mr GRAHAM BRIMAGE**

**Director, Strategic Policy and Regional Services, Department of Sport and Recreation, examined:**

**The CHAIR:** On behalf of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, I would like to thank you both for your interest and appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in gathering evidence for its inquiry into building resilience and engagement for at-risk youth through sport and culture. I am Margaret Quirk; I am the chair of the committee. On my right is Dr Tony Buti, who is the deputy chair and member for Armadale. On my left—she will be back in a minute—is Ms Libby Mettam, member for Vasse; on her left is Mr Mick Murray, member for Collie–Preston; and on his left is Mr Chris Hatton, member for Balcatta. The committee is a committee of the Parliament and this hearing is a formal procedure of Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house itself. Even though the committee is not asking witnesses to provide evidence on oath or affirmation, it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. This is a public hearing and Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings available for the public record. If you refer to any documents during the evidence it would assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record.

Before we proceed, would you please respond verbally to the following: have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to a parliamentary committee?

**The Witnesses:** We do.

**The CHAIR:** Did you receive and read the information for witnesses sheet?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness at today’s hearing?

**The Witnesses:** No.

**The CHAIR:** We have some questions to ask you today, but before we do that do you want to make an opening statement?

**Mr Alexander:** Yes, I would like to do that. We thank you for the opportunity to put our comments forward. We will try very hard not to tell you what you already know. We may have a bit of trouble resisting that, particularly with what we see as the value of sport and recreation. Over the years we have been able to eke out some extra dollars for programs like KidSport, which I am sure you have heard plenty of in Parliament one way or the other, and some of those programs. We find it an arm wrestle from time to time with the funding of chronic disease versus prevention. For all the value of prevention and the view that people know the effect it has, when it gets down to all those issues, understandably, to some degree, it loses out. But we see many, many opportunities to involve our community in good things that stop them from being isolated in the community, and also to develop a range of very worthy skills that are not always available to them at school and in other

environments. We look forward to discussing what works, the gaps and the issues you have put before us.

**The CHAIR:** While we are on funding—it is not strictly restricted to youth sport—last week the minister announced something called SilverSport. That is a pilot project being done in five locations: three in the regional areas—two of which are in her electorate—and another two in the metropolitan area. What is the process by which you decide where these sorts of works are done?

**Mr Alexander:** With a pilot study you look to handle the different demographics: outer growth metropolitan councils, which we find a particular area of focus and would like to discuss more with regard to their growth and funding needs in this sort of space; inner city; and then of course regional. You look at the different demographics to do that. I might add that areas like Northam and those sorts of areas, in checking out where you need some emphasis that is certainly one.

**The CHAIR:** From what you are saying, you would have thought there would be a greater focus on outer metropolitan. I think there are none in the northern suburbs, from recollection.

**Mr Alexander:** Kwinana is where we picked up the outer growth metropolitan. We were down there with Mayor Adams the other day discussing the program with them, and they had a range of seniors involved from the badminton club talking to them about it and how it would work. So we have picked up the outer growth areas.

**The CHAIR:** I think you have answered the question the best way you can.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Can I just follow on from the question? The pilot centres in Northam and wherever in the regions —

**Mr Brimage:** Kalgoorlie was the other one.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** — is that funded from your budget or from royalties for regions?

**Mr Alexander:** No, from our budget.

**The CHAIR:** We had better get back to youth, but I just could not resist the temptation. The same criteria would obviously apply to the funding of youth programs?

**Mr Alexander:** Yes, absolutely. It is like the south east metropolitan and the focuses there with some of our programs where we are using Communicare, or up in the Mirrabooka area where we partner with Edmund Rice. We look for the areas of need.

**Mr Brimage:** With SilverSport we are trying to apply the same principle of our means testing, in a sense of keeping that focus on folk who would not normally be engaged in physical activity and also those who are more challenged financially.

**The CHAIR:** There are a few of them in the northern suburbs, but I will not go on. The other thing in this regard is just a general question in terms of participation in sport. I am getting an increasing number of kids coming in who are going to some sporting carnival or interstate thing and are expecting donations. I do not know if my colleagues are as well. There is quite a limited criteria of funding from the state that they can get, as I understand it. It has to be an approved event or what have you.

**Mr Alexander:** It does, because there are a lot of events on. If the state paid for all the travel, including to the United States for basketball carnivals and all those sorts of things, we would not be putting money into the participation side. There is some money that goes to national travel, but we also, to some degree, allow the sports associations to determine the funding in their greatest area of need. With travel there is a limited budget for it.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Ron, you mentioned partnering with Edmund Rice or Communicare or whatever. What about the education department or individual schools? I am just thinking that when I was going to high school in Kelmscott many moons ago, organised sport was much more a regular

occurrence than I think it is today. If you compare state government schools in years 11 and 12—the public schools—versus Trinity and Aquinas et cetera, it is just chalk and cheese when it comes to sport. I know you are not responsible for the education department, but is there any thought of trying to get some synergies there?

**Mr Alexander:** I think there was a watershed year in 1996 when there were issues in schools and hours, and when a range of teachers largely decided that when school finished they would go home. Part of the contracts in private schools include an after-hours commitment. That was a watershed year when a lot of things changed, when, I guess in fairness to teachers, they were expected to stay back without any extra pay. That is when there was a lot of change in regard to schools. It is hard to fill that gap. Also there is a crowded curriculum. I have been to speak to successive directors general about the importance of sport, and I have had the comment, “Yes, Ron, exactly the comment you’re making about key areas—everyone comes and puts their issue forward.” But we would argue that sport and recreation is one thing that gets people moving in the school environment. It enables restless people to actually expend some energy and learn some skills, and then to also have the capacity to transfer over to community clubs is pretty vital. There has been an ongoing arm wrestle in the education system with regard to time, because everyone expects the education system to solve the problems of our world, but I believe, if you had a look at the records, the time accredited to sport and recreation has been squeezed, not necessarily to the benefit of our community.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Could I just ask a couple of questions on that? Again, I have to say I come from a background in education, and as with drama, as I said earlier, the skills being taught to children in primary schools—the embedding of throwing, catching, kicking, fielding et cetera—have changed over three decades. If children do not leave a primary setting with confidence to use their body well, they are not in front of things and are always catching up. Do you have any reflection on that?

[11.20 am]

**Mr Alexander:** I think that is an accurate description of what happens, because when you have less and less physical education teachers involved at primary school, you have generalist teachers who may not have the knowledge and the skill set to impart what is required to young children. Then if you want to go and take a class of 30 young children aged nine or 10 to play a game of soccer and the ball is going on the road and your lesson is not well organised, you have less and less desire to do that, so the commitment falls away. You are 100 per cent correct.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** That has just been demonstrated this week in a news article, I think it was yesterday, about the percentage of young girls who cannot throw by the time they leave year 6—I think it was 27 per cent who could not throw a ball.

**The CHAIR:** They were just throwing like a girl, that is all!

**Mr Alexander:** I am going to leave that alone!

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** But I do have a concern myself, so thanks for that.

**Mr Alexander:** Look, it is difficult, but in an ideal world, you would have the time set aside and you would have good lessons, but also take some homework home because, as I mentioned before, the education system is meant to solve all the problems of the world, where the education system can set some homework for things happen after school. You may be aware of the program Nature Play, which is in place now, that started with Richard Louv. We brought him over from the US and he was talking about getting kids out to the woods a little bit more often and them not being subject to house arrest, where there is a white van going past every street and you have got to lock your kids up. There is the importance of doing something after school hours, and having something set, whether it is to go down to the park and play, because more often now children are not necessarily playing together with loose supervision. If they are down the park and the parents are

100 metres away keeping an eye on them, they have arguments over who is going to bat first or who is going to bowl or whose turn it is, and all those sorts of arguments are doing all the good things established in a skill set, which helps them be resilient. So, the more we can support organisations like Nature Play, which we have now set loose from the department and created as a not-for-profit, the more we can deal with those sorts of things where the community is not just expecting government to do everything for it. We have another pilot program going called Street Champions, and we are currently in three locations. We provided some resources to 50 addresses. We are looking for someone who is prepared to develop walking programs for people in the morning. Just 50 leaflets with, “Meet down at the local park and we’ll go for a walk”, just to start getting some streets and homes taking a bit of responsibility for energising their own exercise. We would all like more budget, but in the space where we are, we are not looking like getting it, so we are looking for more and more ways in which we can have the community take some responsibility.

**The CHAIR:** This is a recurring theme. Is there more demand or is your budget being tighter and tighter or a bit of both?

**Mr Alexander:** We were getting \$5 million from some proceeds from the TAB. It is less than that now. There is great competition in that space, so there is up to \$3 million less available. We have just got \$700 000 from the federal government where we had a range of Indigenous development officers in place, so we have had to let five Indigenous sport officers go simply because we do not have the budget to replace them. Nevertheless, we still have a good opportunity to do good things. We are just looking for cleverer ways to do it.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Just one or two observations and a couple of questions. I do not know whether it is just me or I have been more aware, but I notice more kids on the ovals at schools in recent times. Is there any measurement of whether that is a reality or whether it is just me driving past at the right time? I am not too sure on that.

**Mr Alexander:** Sorry, I thought there would be fewer kids on the ovals, because they are putting big fences around them, but I will not get stuck on that too much!

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** That is something I have seen as I go to the schools, and I think that is good. The other thing is about the “it doesn’t matter if you run last” problem. I certainly have a theory that that causes problems further down the scale and line, where finally they have to face the reality that they cannot get around the problem and they cannot get past it. The system that was at schools for a long time was about, “Okay, you get a ribbon if you run last; it does not matter as long as you went out there.” But life is not like that, and when these people come across real crises, they cannot handle them, because they never had to handle losing or not being on the sporting team.

**Mr Alexander:** Are you referring to the fact that it is a little bit like not keeping score?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Yes, exactly that—those things. The other thing is one of the figures that was given to me some time ago was that of kids who get into trouble, 70 per cent have never played organised sport. Is there any truth in that statistic?

**Mr Alexander:** I am not familiar with that statistic, but I think it probably refers to what my dear grandmother used to say; that is, “Idle hands do the devil’s work.” Part of what we all know is that if you are engaged in music or arts or dance or sport or recreation, you are occupied doing something worthy, you are learning skills and you are making friends, and you are less likely to have time on your hands to start looking for a bit of action. It is the engagement theory, which we know works. The more you can get people into those sorts of things, the better. That is what we try to do in all sorts of ways. There are approximately 5 000 sporting clubs that make every effort, and we have a whole range of programs where we fund them and they have their own funds and capitation fees where they do good things and try to make sure that people are engaged, even down to alcohol programs—you know, responsible service of alcohol—and all those sorts of things we are trying to put in place.

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But I guess one of the problems at the moment that we see is the increased issues with suicide rates, particularly in regional areas. That often occurs through isolation—children being isolated or not being confident to go. So, we are looking at ways in which we can get those sorts of people engaged in our community, as well some of the offenders you are talking about. As we well know, if people have a stake in the community, they are part of a club or part of some organisation, part of a repertory group or whatever it might be. They have a stake in the community. With someone who has participated in community events, it is well documented that they are less likely to get involved in antisocial behaviour. So investing in arts, culture, sports and recreation, which governments do, is exactly that; it is an investment.

**The CHAIR:** That is just a segue to your annual report. You have said sport and recreation programs are a cost-effective way of reducing youth crime, so apart from physical education keeping youths off the street, what other social benefits are there; and, in terms of cost effectiveness, have you got figures that you can produce in that regard?

**Mr Alexander:** Yes, look, I think we have. You know, we build the social skills of communication, teamwork and respect. That is important. Certainly, if you are involved in sport, there are organisations you have to get involved in. You have to get your kit together, you have to be there on time and you have to persevere and have some determination. All those sorts of things go together. You have an appreciation of being healthy, so that is another one. You get opportunities, sometimes, in the workplace. I moved houses recently and was looking at some of my references for the first job I had when I started at 15, and it was from the East Perth–Highgate football club from the club secretary. I was sort of an immediate connection with —

**The CHAIR:** Was that on papyrus?

**Mr Alexander:** No, it was not, thank you very much, but I think it was written with a nib—no!

**The CHAIR:** Sorry!

**Mr Alexander:** You do get those networks. They do help you and you learn some of the things and have positive influences that create somewhat of a social hub. It also brings families together. What we are trying to do with KidSport is not just provide \$200 vouchers to children, we are trying to encourage the parent, the parents or guardian to also come down to the club where they meet other people, where they might be isolated. Just trying to get people into a community environment helps those people. And then, we perhaps try to get them to do a one-hour coaching course, when we cannot get them to do a three-day one or whatever, or to be the assistant treasurer, where they actually learn a little bit about finances, which might then help in their own home environment. They are also places where you can get some information and education to people in an informal manner.

[11.30 am]

**The CHAIR:** Obviously, you are doing the work with Edmund Rice, but what are the identified impediments to getting CALD kids involved?

**Mr Alexander:** We, a number of years ago, made \$600 000 available; one of my colleagues, Kim Ellwood, is behind us listening to this so she will probably have a wry smile on her face. But after a year we hardly got any of that money out the door, and then we sat down to look at where it was going and where it had gone to. What we discovered is, firstly, the applications were too complex. Secondly, we were asking them to acquit. The acquittals were quite difficult, so we went back to the drawing board and pruned all those back to what a person could understand. Also, I can remember being a bit dismissive of the words “substantive equity”, which for those who maybe are not quite sure is to actually go out and find the people who, firstly, do not know the funding is there; secondly, do not know how to do the application; and, thirdly, do not know how to acquit it. Of course, when we do fund them for the first time and they do not acquit it, governing departments then say, “You’re not getting funded again. That’s it; you’ve had your chance.

You can't do it properly." So our guys did a terrific job in that. The following year, our allocation went out in the first half of the year; we were shot for money. They got it. Some of those sorts of things you take for granted and you think you put something on a website and people actually see it. Well, they do not. That substantive equity is still, I think, live, and getting to those people is still fairly critical.

**Mr Brimage:** Just while you are gathering your thoughts, on the first strand around education I just want to also mention that whilst we cannot influence the picking up of the basic movement skills in all primary schools, what we have done is gather all the evidence, which is compelling, that you will get better education outcomes if kids are physically active. So we actually have saturated the education sector—government, independent and Catholic—with that information and we are happy to provide a copy of that to the committee.

**Mr Alexander:** Can I say that what we have left you with is just some of our working notes, and maybe when we have a moment, I can get my colleague Graham just to quickly whip through some of the things we do which are critical in training up some of the CALD group in leadership—for example, getting some of the Muslim young people trained in leadership to actually draw people into good things—and also providing traineeships to the CALD group to have them become a development officer with some of the larger sports so they can actually start directing some of those groups into those sorts of pursuits.

**The CHAIR:** Your department does not have to do it all; for example, I know Subi is very active in my area in terms of developing CALD and Aboriginal kids, so you do not actually have to do it all but you have to exercise the leadership, I suppose.

**Mr Alexander:** And also try to provide some resources in that area, because, as I mentioned, there are 5 000 clubs and if we can better use those clubs as social hubs, that is a good thing.

**The CHAIR:** You have talked about the Aboriginal Indigenous development office going. What impact does that have generally on getting Aboriginal kids involved?

**Mr Alexander:** They know where to make the contacts and so that makes that a bit more tenuous. Having people who are connecting up with their areas of diversity is of great assistance. It just makes that a little more difficult in having those people connect up with your department and other areas, but then that is when you need to find other ways of doing that. We can employ people, but at this stage we are not positively employing people. There are people leaving for reasons of lack of salary to pay them. It is a bit difficult when you lose \$700 000 in that area.

**The CHAIR:** The SD6—since you have very kindly provided us with one—identifies some funding uncertainty as a challenge, stating that in the future state government policy across several portfolios in coming years may impact on the level of funds available to the sport and recreation industry. Could you expand on that? Also, I think the same report identifies some problems in terms of data collection.

**Mr Brimage:** I will start with the data collection part first. Traditionally, all the states, territories and the commonwealth government, partnered up with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, have done national surveying and population surveying to identify participation levels. ABS, because of budget cuts at the federal level, has withdrawn out of providing that partnership, so the endgame is that the source of that data will no longer exist. It is okay up until 2014 and then it is going to taper off at 2015 and probably the most recent. The Australian Sports Commission have initiated their own data collection process now. That first data at a state level and territory level will be available in October. The dilemma is that is a new starting point. The continuity and minor variations in methodology will mean it is a new starting point. Yes, it is useful, but that interruption is not helpful in terms of trying to maintain trends over a long period of time.

**Mr Alexander:** On the funding side of it, I think generally successive governments have funded the sport and recreation department reasonably well. We are just in a different space where everyone is

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having a bit less budget. But where it has affected us perhaps a bit differently is that the TAB account has taken a dive of \$2.5 million or \$3 million, and in our space \$2.5 million or \$3 million —

**The CHAIR:** Has the member for Collie–Preston stopped betting?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I certainly have tried to cut back! Sorry about the dividend that is not coming anymore!

**Mr Brimage:** It is less a function of the volume. The function is the margin because it is such a competitive market.

**Mr Alexander:** What the Crowns and all these are doing is returning something like 96 cents in the dollar to just try to have customers on their books and outlast other organisations.

**The CHAIR:** So these private mobs are not paying anything?

**Mr Alexander:** They are paying more money back to the customer. So, to compete, others have to do the same.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** On that basis, if the TAB was sold you would expect that you would receive less money, would you not, unless the government mandated it as part of the sale? But that would make it less attractive as a commercial operation. It is not only the racing industry that maybe has concerns about the privatisation or the selling of the TAB; it could severely affect the amount of money you are receiving.

**Mr Alexander:** I think that is, as we know, a political decision. But I think the racing industry gets something like \$30 million a year, and sport and rec was getting \$5 million. There has been a change to that circumstance; nevertheless, we have clever people at the sport and recreation department. Sport, and certainly the clubs, runs with people. If you have people on the ground, they can work out ways to engage people. Engaging people and getting them to turn up to sport and also be involved in recreation activities is so important for people to be out and about and socialising and learning all the skills that they can get from that, and also developing support networks, because people start recognising when someone is not turning up or they are not well or they have got different behaviours, and it is where you do get support when you are in community organisations, be they sport or other.

**The CHAIR:** You did mention Muslim kids. Is there any specific program or is that picked up through things like the Edmund Rice program, or are you getting any money? There is quite a lot of money available from the feds for this, but I know there is not a lot of take-up in Western Australia.

**Mr Alexander:** I will get my colleague Graham to make a couple of comments, but the answer to that is yes, and through other means other than just the Edmund Rice Centre and Communicare, but also local government. Late last year, I attended old Parliament House. Prime Minister Turnbull called a meeting particularly with regard to violent extremism and there were 30 people from around Australia there to meet with the Prime Minister and George Brandis, the Attorney-General. I was the only person from the sport and recreation sphere. Most of them were from the Australian Crime Commission and the police agencies and the Federal Police as well as the Army et cetera.

**The CHAIR:** They are very good at sniffing out the dough.

[11.40 am]

**Mr Alexander:** I would have to agree with that. But I was there to put the case for prevention, largely saying that what community organisations do is engage these people, make them feel a part of the community where they learn good skills and meet new colleagues. It was largely about catching them and finding them. Our premise was that if people are engaged and are feeling part of the community and not isolated from it, they are less likely to be subjected to those activities, but I think the major focus was to find them. Again, that is what we get in our space all the time; we

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understand it. It is a bit like a number of years ago we got, from the dark side—from Treasury—salami cuts. They decided to cut \$800 000 out of the sport and recreation department from the then Physical Activity Taskforce, which was doing some great work. So that became a casualty; that has gone. That was something that linked up all the different government agencies, the Heart Foundation, the cancer foundation and those things. So, we get that; that happens in government. But the health department is engaged in chronic disease and they have a lot on their plate. How they handle physical activity, I suppose, does not become as important as chronic disease. So we just think some of those areas really need a focus.

**The CHAIR:** Do we have any programs that have been funded by the commonwealth to combat violent extremism that you rate?

**Mr Alexander:** In the sports setting?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Alexander:** No.

**The CHAIR:** As I understand it, there are in other jurisdictions.

**Mr Brimage:** I think some of the resources from that went into particularly Western Sydney where you have a large enclave sort of circumstance.

**The CHAIR:** But some would say that is shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted.

**Mr Alexander:** One of the things they were trying to find out from us, because Western Australia has less action in that space if you like, was what was different from some of the areas particularly in Sydney, Lakemba and those sorts of areas. A couple of us started talking to our colleagues in here. Some people had formulated a view that they were getting involved in sport and recreation and that was a good thing, but we are not silly enough to think that was the entire difference. We believe it does make a difference. One of the things that was started I think 14 or 16 years ago was what was loosely called the “salt and pepper” policy out of Housing, where they peppered people around the community, not just in particular areas. Speaking to the policy officer from Housing, her view was that that was something that had been successful. Stephen Bowman, who is the head of the Edmund Rice Centre—he is the CEO there—was the first one who alerted me to that. When I was going over to this exercise in Canberra I took the opportunity to go and talk to some of my colleagues in that space. He was talking about the range of things that were of good value, but he mentioned the salt and pepper policy that results in those people having other colleagues, not just people from their own diverse group. People like that—I do not know whether the committee has time to interview those—but someone like —

**The CHAIR:** Yes, we are going up to Edmund Rice. Any other questions, anyone? We have already concluded that we will probably have to get you back at the end of the inquiry.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I have one. You talked about areas being fenced off and hard to get at. What input do you have into planning for the future in some of these new suburbs et cetera, where there has been criticism of the planning processes because recreational areas are down in the gully where you cannot build a house and then they say, “Well, that is public open space”? Then we get to an area where there is no green grass area—whether be it Astro or grown grass—for people to play those types of sports on. It has moved over to where there is a walking trail down along the gully, and that is two and a half hectares so that suffices under the planning situation.

**Mr Alexander:** Honourable member, you are singing our song. We started, Graham, five or six years ago, talking to Eric Lumsden who funded us to look at the public open space and regional open space. There has been a range of documents that have been embedded in planning 2031 that have been led by us, in collaboration with Planning and other agencies, about public open space. There have been unintended consequences of Bush Forever, where you are meant to have 10 per cent space for active and passive recreation. Of course, if you get a drainage swale in there,

you get overhead powerlines and you get Bush Forever, suddenly it has gone. There has been some work done on that. Gail McGowan, who is now director general of Planning, is also doing some good work in that. There has been some good public open space recently allocated up at Alkimos, but it is a continuing issue that we have to make sure the provision of those spaces is adequate in those areas where you drive up Marmion Avenue and see great swathes of roofs and not perhaps the area there.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I know we have to finish —

**Mr Alexander:** We can provide some of those documents, too, if you would like to see those.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Yes, please.

Ron, I think a few years ago Curtin University—I think you funded the study—came up with there being a dearth of public open spaces in the outer metropolitan area; my area was one of them. It is a real problem. I am interested in the documents you talked about, but also I find it puzzling how high schools and even primary schools that are white elephants for six months of the year have beautiful ovals, gyms et cetera that are not used by community organisations that are dying for recreational facilities. In my area we had civil warfare between the rugby club and the football club because they had to share the same area, where there was —

**Mr Alexander:** Could you imagine if we were all in business together and we had one lot of business that had beautiful recreation gyms and ovals and that were well-manicured, but then to provide for some other of our business we would create, just outside those centres, more basketball courts, tennis courts and open space because someone decides it is a risk for children? Surely there is a way in which we can better utilise those spaces. There must be 15 reports on shared use of facilities, and a bit of work is being done down in Armadale by Ray Tame. I meet regularly with the outer growth metropolitan councils because that is the area of need we see particularly in the community that perhaps is struggling with the number of people they get in there. They are experimenting with taking over the programming of a school after certain hours, after the school has registered what they require. Then they get involved in mowing the lawns and doing those sorts of things. But how many private and public schools are there in Western Australia? There are 800 or so. One could argue that the principals make those decisions. So, 800 different principals make those decisions, and if a gym door gets left open or the rubbish bins are full they may decide it does not work for them. I would have thought that if local government was given the responsibility to program schools after the schools have booked what they need after-hours, we might start to get to somewhere. I think we believe that until that day arrives, it will not be happening.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Ron, can I recommend a report to you? The Labor Party's full-service schools discussion paper; it might be interesting reading.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Can I just make a comment? If you ever want to start a shit fight, just go to a school and say, "We're going to share your facilities with the public." All the interest groups come out, and it just becomes unworkable. Unless there is some legislation put in, it will not happen.

**Mr Alexander:** This suggestion is made time and again; people make comments and then it just floats into the ether. One would have thought that some serious consideration to local government having that opportunity might actually be a good thing or be proven to be a bad thing; one of the two.

[11.50 am]

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Some very interesting points there; I agree with it, too. Public open spaces: some councils, and possibly shires too, are rationalising their open public spaces and closing down some of the smaller parks and having a more central park maybe a couple of kilometres up the road, or a kilometre or two. Of course, some parks are so small —

**Mr Brimage:** Pocket parks.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Yes, pocket parks. I can see why they are closing down; they are not irrigated, for one, or they are too hard to get to to mow and so forth and they are not utilised. What do you think about that? Any thoughts about closing down the local park that services maybe four or five streets of kids coming home to play after school?

**Mr Alexander:** I think with the pocket park side of it they have realised the error of that, and that is not, as far as I am aware, happening anymore. But in the retrofitting of that, they have a certain water allocation and they have to make the water allocation work.

**The CHAIR:** That is a major issue.

**Mr Alexander:** Given a drying state, that is an issue, so they are making the best of what they have. I know the water department works very closely with local government to assist them as best they can.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** So you are keeping an eye on the accessibility of young people to get to a green space; you keep an eye on all that?

**Mr Alexander:** We do, but we meet regularly with local government because local government are arguably our biggest partner because they are delivering so much. We proactively work with them, and we get plenty of active feedback as well.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Do you think opening pathways up for cyclists is going to enable more access to local facilities like that?

**Mr Alexander:** I think that is one in play at the moment, but we will see. One hopes there are not too many accidents on pathways. Anything that makes people more mobile helps.

**Mr Brimage:** Whilst there are some grim parts to the equation, there has been significant progress made in terms of liveable neighbourhoods policy reviews and getting those to be more practical. There are different issues by virtue of the urban form of Perth and the population growth in the last five to 10 years in particular. There are different issues in inner, middle and outer, and each has their own complexities. As Ron said, with water we have made monumental headway over a five to seven-year period in trying to deal with that circumstance of a drying climate and the water efficiency that goes on the retic. I think there are some real pluses, as well as some issues to still be resolved.

**The CHAIR:** We are looking like we are running out of time. Ron, you have forced me, now, to have to move faster than I normally would, which is an excellent thing because Parliament starts at 12 noon. But I think we have resolved that we will probably need to get you in at the conclusion of the inquiry, just to round everything up.

Thanks for your evidence today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days from the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. Thank you very much; I am sorry we left you a bit short of time, but we will be keeping in touch. Thank you.

**Mr Alexander:** We sincerely appreciate the opportunity, and I thank you for listening to us. I would also like to thank my colleagues at the back of the room—Claire Cummings, Kim Ellwood, Ben Armstrong and Nicola Johnson—who helped us put a range of information together.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

**Hearing concluded at 11.53 am**

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