

HOMELESSNESS — PUBLIC HOUSING

Motion

HON DR BRAD PETTITT (South Metropolitan) [1.07 pm]: I move —

That this house —

- (1) Acknowledges that Western Australia is currently facing a housing and homelessness crisis and notes that urgent action is needed to stem the increasing priority public housing waitlist.
- (2) Calls on the government to make the most of its strong financial position to immediately address this crisis by —
 - (a) prioritising investment to significantly increase public housing stock by building fully accessible, low-carbon homes;
 - (b) immediately spot purchasing vacant homes; and
 - (c) proactively investing in and supporting innovative measures like My Home.

Last week I was pleased to give notice of this motion on social housing that the President has just read, but, as they say, a week can be a long time in politics. It is interesting that on the back of that notice of motion, on Sunday there was a pre-budget announcement by Minister Carey that made a very good start in doing much of what this motion calls for. When I was alerted to this ministerial statement on Sunday, a joke was made to me that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and I joked back that it was perhaps more like great minds think alike! Both this motion and the announcement by the minister reflect an important understanding that the evidence is that WA is facing a housing crisis and urgent action and funding is needed. I appreciate that it is not common for the opposition or the crossbench to use motions to congratulate the government, but much from this weekend's announcement is deserving of congratulations, and I am thankful that there has been a shift both in thinking and in funding. The measures that were announced are a move in the right direction. They are certainly a strong shift away from the measures that were employed over the last term of the McGowan government. I am thankful for the shift. There is no doubt that those on the social housing waitlist and those at risk of homelessness are also thankful for the measures. The Greens have been calling for the measures that were announced on the weekend for some time, including spot purchasing of houses, developing housing on state government-owned land and increasing the social housing stock.

The weekend's announcement was significant for a couple of reasons. It was a recognition that we have a housing crisis. There has been some reluctance to acknowledge this. We can look at the definition of what we mean when we talk about a crisis. The dictionary definition shows that it is a "crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending". That is probably a good summary. As Minister Carey said, last weekend's announcement was the single largest investment in the state's history. That fits with the definition of a crisis and is fundamentally trying to shift the direction and the response to something like this, which is important. It is really important that we are giving housing and homelessness the serious attention they deserve.

The first part of the motion asks the house to acknowledge that Western Australia is currently facing a housing and homelessness crisis and notes that urgent action is needed to stem the increasing priority public housing waitlist. I hope that members on both sides of the aisle can support that.

I also took from the weekend's announcement that social housing is not a dirty word. In fact, if we are serious about the Housing First response to homelessness, increasing the availability of social housing must be a key part of that. I have been frustrated by some of the rhetoric in recent months that the reason we have not been doing more in social housing is because people do not want it, and certainly do not want it near them. That is not my experience. We need to be very careful about stigmatising vulnerable people in our community and framing them as unwanted outsiders. My experience is that social housing is an important part of diverse communities and something that many of our communities are keen to embrace. That was my experience in Fremantle. In fact, I had the complete opposite experience when I was working in Fremantle. Both the council and the community have been calling for new investment in social housing over the last decade. I am not blaming any side of the house, but both the Barnett and McGowan governments spent most of the last decade demolishing public housing in greater Fremantle. In fact, I tried to add up the number of units but it amounts to many hundreds, from the Burt Street block to units in Holland Street, Davis Park, Hilton and White Gum Valley. Our frustration as a community grew. We wanted that housing. We wanted more people back in the heart of the community but very few—in fact, pretty close to none—of those houses were replaced. There is a call for a lot of support for social housing out there in the community. I am pleased that we will see some of that investment. I am speaking on behalf of my old council, but I know that it will welcome that as well.

A key part of the motion relates to prioritising investment to significantly increase public housing stock. This is very much at the heart of the motion. The pre-budget announcement was a significant and worthwhile move in this direction but it falls short of meeting the demand that exists right now. As members would be aware, over

Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon James Hayward

30 000 people are now on the public housing waiting list. Although the funding will make a dent, significantly more action needs to be taken if we want to make sure that people have somewhere to live. On Sunday, the minister said that the announcement will exceed the number of social housing properties delivered over the last nine years. I am sure that is a statement of fact but it is a bit of an odd statement given that during half of those nine years, the McGowan government was in power. It demonstrates the chronic underinvestment in social housing that we have seen over the last decade. I will give some examples. Over the last 12 months, the McGowan government has built only 47 new social homes. If we continue at that rate, it will take 29 years just to get back to where we were in 2017. In 2017, 837 government-owned houses were sold on the private market, giving the government \$218 million for selling housing that was not replaced, meaning that housing was not available to those who needed it. As members are also probably aware, there has been a drop in the number of social houses; 1 350 homes have disappeared since 2017. That is a net loss. That is a key part of the crisis that we are facing now.

To make matters worse, a staggering 133 homes that are owned by the Department of Communities are sitting empty. I know that there is an increased focus on this in the budget but it is extremely frustrating. One of these houses is around the corner from my place. It is a very fine brick and tile house, which seems to have had several paint jobs over the last six months but no-one living in it. How hard is it to get somebody into a house when we have a crisis like this? This house has probably been empty for close to a year. The reason for that is certainly not apparent to me. I know that my community would welcome seeing that house filled again.

I would like to draw members' attention to the priority waitlist. By the end of July this year, the waitlist had ballooned to 3 354 applications, almost 7 000 people, at least 25 per cent of whom are disabled. That is more than double what it was in 2017. Those people are in urgent need of housing. Some of these people are suffering from family and domestic violence. They are people who need a home to reunite with their children, people who are sleeping rough on our streets or people with ongoing medical conditions. We need to make sure that we get people a home. There is no excuse for not doing this.

This issue is not just about numbers; it is about real people and their real stories. I want to share some of their stories with members because sometimes we forget that we are talking about real people in our community, the ones that we represent in this place. I want to start with a woman I was recently informed about who has acute medical conditions and has been on the priority waitlist for 28 months. She was homeless when the first wave of COVID-19 hit and was placed in emergency hotel accommodation. Since that placement ended, she has been living on and off the streets, couch surfing where she can, and has travelled as far as Geraldton in the search for somewhere safe and secure to live. Her acute medical conditions are exacerbated by the stress and anxiety she has experienced after being in that situation for so long.

Another woman, who again is on the priority waitlist, has been homeless for almost 24 months. Blind in one eye, she is in and out of hospital for medical treatment. When she is discharged from hospital, she ends up living back on the streets because there is nowhere else for her to go. Needless to say, it is very difficult for people to manage a serious medical situation when they do not have shelter and have to sleep out in the cold.

Finally, there is the well-publicised story of Sharra Roberts, who was evicted, along with her children, during the first wave of COVID-19. She was living in a relative's caravan, which was destroyed by fire. Sharra has a four-year-old daughter, who has an asthmatic condition requiring specialist care. She is in and out of hospital. As recently as June, they were staying with relatives, but there were nine people in a three-bedroom apartment. They spend their nights sleeping in a car, like many other Western Australians who find themselves in a similar situation. Last week, Sharra was placed on the priority waitlist, 17 months after being evicted. She has been told that it is likely she will have to wait another two years to be housed. These are just three of the almost 7 000 people who are homeless now. The scale of this issue is unfathomable, and my heart goes out to these people. That is exactly why I and others who are involved in the sector are saying that although there are good things in the government's latest announcement, they are not enough. To quote Anglicare's chief executive officer, Mark Glasson —

The shortage of affordable and social housing in Western Australia is at a critical stage, so anything we can do to address that is good ...

It's a great start, and we need a lot more, but we have to start somewhere ...

What we'd be calling for is a long-term commitment of this kind.

That is at the heart of this issue and it is why the investment has a long way to go. When we take a closer look at what the government has committed to, we see that it claims to have made a \$2.1 billion investment in social housing. If we take out all the measures that relate to interventions and short-term and interim accommodation, all of which are really worthwhile and important programs but are not social housing, there is a different picture. If we include the government's previous social housing commitments, the total spend over the next four years is \$1.136 billion, which equates to \$284 million a year over four years. This falls well short of the investment required to deal with the

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 8 September 2021]

p3523a-3538a

Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon James Hayward

issue at hand, particularly when the sector has been calling for \$1 billion a year to address the issue of homelessness. Investment of the right scale could house every person who is currently on the waitlist; instead, the government has committed to housing around 22 per cent of those who are currently on the waitlist over a four-year period. It is no secret that the fewer people who get into social housing, the longer the waitlist and the worse the problem becomes. This understanding forms the basis of the very good Housing First Homelessness Initiative that the government has adopted, but we still need to adequately invest in this area.

That great investment is not fanciful. I will give members a couple of examples. Last year, the Victorian government announced a big build, with it spending \$5 billion over four years to build 9 300 homes. Other countries have also shown the way forward. On average, governments in Western Australia and Australia spend just over four per cent of their budget on social housing. The countries that have taken this issue seriously include the Netherlands, which spends 34 per cent; Austria, which spends 23 per cent; the United Kingdom, which spends 16 per cent; Ireland, which spends 12 per cent; and Korea, which spends almost nine per cent, which is double what is spent here. That investment gets social housing up and makes it not just a last refuge, but a proper opportunity for people to enjoy long-term, secure and affordable housing, and that is really important.

Another part of the motion calls for low-carbon and sustainable housing going forward. Yesterday, I asked a question about this in Parliament and I was pleased with the response because from now on, all new social housing will meet the seven-star Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme, which is a good outcome. I would say that that should be the minimum. There is a real opportunity to build the next generation of housing, and I hope that this housing will still be here as we approach 2050, when we will be looking at net zero emissions. We should plan for our housing to be part of the climate solution. Houses can very much do that now if they are designed well, face the right way and have good insulation and cross-ventilation. It is not hard to ensure that houses are part of the climate solution. I encourage greater ambition in that space.

I have also been quite vocal about the need for these houses to be made fully accessible. This is really important because, as I said earlier, one-quarter of people on the priority waitlist suffer from a disability. We need to make sure that all the new social houses that are built are accessible so that we can get these people into them. I am building a small house for my father-in-law. He is certainly not in need of a wheelchair at the moment, but I am planning for much later in his life, realising that if I design it for disability access now, it will not cost any more. Of course, a retrofit is a very expensive intervention. Making sure that new builds are accessible to all is really important.

The last point I want to make concerns innovation. I used the My Home model in the motion as an example of an innovative solution to the housing crisis. The government's announcement on the weekend is really good, but a lot of the social housing it committed to will not be built until later. We need some solutions that will get people at risk of homelessness right now into housing. My Home is a really good example of this. As members might have seen in the press recently, a project is about to start in North Fremantle, comprising 18 homes for older women over the age of 55 years who are at risk of homelessness, using state government land that has no use, such as Public Transport Authority land that has sat idle for many, many decades. The project will be fully funded through a public-private partnership. Those involved include Lotterywest, the Minderoo Foundation and St John of God. It is a really amazing project. I acknowledge Michelle Blakely, the architect involved, who is really driving the project. It is a great initiative. A few more of these projects are coming onstream, and this is where the government can really assist because it owns much of the land, as do some of the church groups that we also should be working with. We need to fast-track these initiatives. We need them to happen quickly. My frustration about this project started when I was the Mayor of the City of Fremantle. It has taken almost four years to get to this point. I congratulate everyone for their patience and getting it through. The project shows what can be done and it manages some of that risk appetite that some in the public service are nervous about. These kinds of developed models are really important because they are scalable and they can be built straightaway to ensure that we address both the priority waitlist and those at risk of homelessness right now.

In summary, I will finish where I started and acknowledge the important shift and pre-budget announcement made over the weekend. It is a really important first step in the process, but there is a long way to go. The budget will provide for 3 300 new homes. There are currently 17 000-plus households—more than 30 000 people—on the waiting list. According to the 2016 census, there are 9 000 homeless people in Perth. I expect that the 2021 census will show that this number has increased. We need many more homes of diverse sizes in the heart of our community that are built sustainably and with accessibility. I hope this is something that members on both sides of the aisle agree with. We have a housing crisis in this state. The government is taking some important first steps to address that crisis, but there is much work to be done and that work needs sustained investment going forward.

HON STEVE MARTIN (Agricultural) [1.26 pm]: I rise to make a contribution to the excellent motion moved by Hon Dr Brad Pettitt. I thank him for bringing this issue to the house's attention. I am guessing that he put the motion together before Sunday's announcement, but the first paragraph of the motion is still current. It reads —

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 8 September 2021]

p3523a-3538a

Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon James Hayward

Acknowledges that Western Australia is currently facing a housing and homelessness crisis and notes that urgent action is needed ...

Urgent action is certainly needed. I thought it might be useful to give a quick history lesson to see where we have been and where we are now. Well done to the government on Sunday's announcement. Hon Dr Brad Pettitt is right; this area needed a budget response and the Minister for Housing has gone some way to provide that, and I congratulate the government. But it has taken some time and as Hon Dr Brad Pettitt mentioned, we have had four and a half years of a Labor government, so what has it been up to in that time that has led us to this crisis point?

I refer to the social housing numbers. I was surprised to learn that the government has sold 1 370 homes over the last four and a half years. The Labor Party, the party with a social conscience, has been selling homes. Given that fact, it is no surprise that the waiting list has blown out. There are 17 000 applicants, which is approximately 30 000 Western Australians, on the waiting list. So for four and a half years, the government has been selling homes. I read in the media the Premier's response to Sunday's announcement. He said that one of the reasons for that sell-off was that some of those social houses could be described as ghettos or decrepit. I am not sure whether I will comment on that, but if that is his opinion, he has obviously held it for four and a half years. He has driven past those ghettos and decrepit homes for four and a half years, as has the Minister for Housing, without any action, and here we are today with an enormous and growing waitlist and a budget response that is good, but late. We are at the point at which the people being removed from that waitlist are being removed at the slowest rate in over a decade. Hon Dr Brad Pettitt mentioned that it takes 29 years to get to the bottom of that waitlist. That would be devastating news for the people who are on that waitlist. Some have been there for years and years.

I met a young man in Busselton who had recently been released from prison. He had been told he was on the priority housing waitlist. He was told that if it went smoothly, it might be a two-year wait. Members can imagine what his circumstances were: out of jail, trying to rebuild his life and that of his family, but he had nowhere to live. That waitlist has a human toll in Western Australia, and it is real. It is unacceptable that the Premier drove past the ghettos and the decrepit social housing for four and a half years. His government has responded now.

As a regional member, I was staggered to learn about the sell-off of Government Regional Officers' Housing. These are the homes for teachers and police. A small community cannot survive without either of those. For four and a half years, the Labor Party has been selling off that resource. Teachers have been living in caravans—not many, according to the Leader of the House, but one would be way too many. I have heard stories of teachers being booked into a motel during the week, Monday to Friday, which is when they work at school, obviously. Come Friday night, what happens? They are out: "Either drive back to Perth, bunk in with your mates or sort it out yourselves. We'll see you Monday morning; you can book back in." That is the Government Regional Officers' Housing scheme. There is an investment in that scheme, but that has over 200 homes to catch up to where it was four and a half years ago. I also welcome that investment. That needs to happen immediately.

The spot purchasing program has come under some attention in this announcement. I am not entirely sure how the spot purchasing program works, to be frank. I am reasonably certain that almost nobody in the Department of Communities does either at the moment. I assume someone will come up with an emergency, "We need a house", and bang, we charge out and buy it. We do not have to build it; we can do it in a hurry, relatively quickly. Obviously, the property market is tight at the moment so that will be difficult. In the last year of the Barnett government, hundreds of properties were spot purchased. In the last year, 14 properties were purchased under the spot purchase program. Roughly, once a month, someone got a bright idea in the Department of Communities or Housing and charged up to see the director general to say, "I found one. I've got one", and rushed out and bought it. I repeat: once a month. It is also welcomed to see some investment in the spot purchasing program.

That brings me to homelessness, which is also a part of Hon Dr Brad Pettitt's motion. The numbers are quite staggering. There has been a 60 per cent rise in homelessness since last November, which is a terrible number. If members talk to people from the welfare sector, they will tell them what that looks like. I will quote from a few of them, if I can. Circle Green Community Legal has reported a 500 per cent increase in daily calls after the rental moratorium was lifted. Many of those calls revolved around suicidal ideation, which is having a significant impact on staff. It is also having a fair impact on the individuals involved. Anglicare WA has seen demand for emergency relief and food assistance triple in 2021. There is overcrowding, people are living in cars, and women experiencing family and domestic violence have nowhere to live. They are some of the remarks from Anglicare. The Red Cross has reported that approximately 50 per cent of its client case load have been served with notices of eviction or are in rental arrears. St Vincent's has reported suicidal clients who have had thoughts of using life insurance to assist their family in keeping homes and paying off debt. Foodbank WA does an extraordinary job. If members have not visited, I absolutely suggest they do. It is a wonderful organisation; located near the airport. It provides over 6.4 million meals a year to people in need. It has seen an increase in the number of returning customers and an increase in the number of people who have never sought help before. Foodbank WA saw a 40 per cent increase

Extract from Hansard

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p3523a-3538a

Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon James Hayward

after the end of the rental moratorium in March. This increased to a further 25 per cent in April. Foodbank simply cannot keep up.

I turn to the Salvos. I visited the Beacon homeless shelter in Perth's CBD. It is consistently operating at capacity, which probably would not be a surprise, but it is the way that capacity is being reached now that is the important part of this argument. The Beacon used to be a crisis facility. On a regular basis, people from the shelter would pick people off the streets, take them to the Beacon, and give them food and provide them with shelter. Now it is almost full of what would be called in that business "long-term clients"—from three months to nine months—because there is simply nowhere to go after the Beacon. There is no social housing and there is no crisis accommodation for anything longer than it offers. Instead of catering for that emergency need off the street, the Beacon is full of people who simply have nowhere to go post facilities like that. That story is common all across those sorts of facilities. The Beacon is quite clearly struggling to meet demand. One issue it raised with me, which I spoke about briefly before, is that post-incarceration clients have nowhere to go. A fair bit of its business now is dealing with that situation.

A very sad part of the homelessness story was brought to our attention very visibly outside the front of this building quite recently—56 homeless people have died in Perth and Fremantle in the past 12 months. That number was arrived at by some research done by the University of Western Australia. I attended that vigil out the front of this building and met the relatives of some of the homeless people who had died. It struck me that we should have a clearer picture; we should not be relying on UWA to give us that number. The government should know, and we should know, how big that problem is. I am guessing that 56 is an underestimate of the real number. I asked the government a question in this place about how many homeless people have died in Western Australia. We simply do not know. I do not think that is appropriate. If we are fashioning our response to this crisis, we need to know the scope of it. Fifty-six is a staggering number, but we need to get some real data about what that looks like. I thought that might be a useful task for a parliamentary committee. I know the Labor Party is in control of most of the committees and it is quite a lengthy process to get up a select committee to take on the task. If anyone is keen who sits on a committee that is not up to much at the moment, that bit of research and data would be a useful task to take on, just to give us a feel of what that really looks like.

Of the 56 homeless people who died, 28 per cent were Indigenous Western Australians. Following that vigil, there was a rally in Forrest Place to discuss the deaths of three homeless women in Forrest Place in the three weeks prior to the rally on 27 August. In the square kilometre from the train station up to where the fountain is, there had been three deaths. I met briefly with Noongar elder Vanessa Culbong who spoke of her heartbreak of that situation. She was the aunty of one those young women. I quote Vanessa —

“We bring these people into the world and we have to watch them die with no one being held accountable and no justice being given ...

Vanessa, too, is homeless. I think she has spent some time in a shelter in the city, but she is in and out of “homelessness”. The heartbreak in her voice was obvious.

The Premier has made much of keeping Western Australians safe. If a person dies every three or four weeks in Forrest Place, that is a far from safe environment. I share with Hon Dr Brad Pettitt my congratulations to the government for recognising there is a housing crisis and spending some money on it initially. I have seen the numbers; I have a quick comment on one of them. I spoke recently to Shelter WA. I know how that organisation and some of its stakeholders roll out community housing—social housing with very limited resources. I saw the Minister for Housing's announcement that some of the money will be spent on modular homes. That might be a useful solution in regional Western Australia, but the figure to build those modular homes was five hundred and something thousand dollars per modular home—just for one. I thought back to Shelter WA's comment that if \$500 000 was given to one provider in the not-for-profit sector, the government would get a much better bang for its buck. I wonder whether the government might spend some of that money more wisely and get a better result in regional Western Australia in particular, where housing is very tight.

I welcome the opportunity to make a contribution on this motion and I thank Hon Dr Brad Pettitt for raising it with the house.

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [1.40 pm]: I rise to support the motion. I think any discussion on housing is vital given the current predicament. I want to reflect for a moment on an example that I am currently aware of in my home town of Broome. Without identifying the person, I have been in touch with her and it is a very tragic case. I am dealing with her situation on a regular basis and she has just updated me. She is an Aboriginal woman who is degree-qualified with a young family. I will not say how many children she has so I do not identify who she is, but she is happy for me to raise this issue because her situation is so desperate. Over the last couple of months, she has moved from one house to another to find accommodation, whether it is house-sitting or couch surfing. The other day, she sent me a very poignant photo, which was very upsetting. I know that members opposite sometimes

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 8 September 2021]

p3523a-3538a

Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon James Hayward

criticise me for the comments I make about comments made in this place, but I ask them to forgive me if I come across as passionate at times. I want to speak about this case today on her behalf. The photo she sent me was of her children on a trampoline with blankets. That was their night's accommodation. This is not someone who has deeply entrenched homeless problems. She has made a life for herself and has done very well in her education and in educating herself. She hopes for the very best for her children but she cannot find a social house in Broome at the moment. She is on the waiting list, which could take many years. We have looked on the Department of Communities' Opening Doors housing website for a shared equity home, because this person has managed to save a small deposit, but she cannot find a home. Right now—tonight—she will be checking into short-stay accommodation for as long as she can. She currently has a storage unit for her furniture. She also has a car, which is her backup home when required. This is a real situation. In June, Broome had a vacancy rate of zero per cent. I think that has improved over the last few weeks as a few properties have come on the market. The issue is complex, but, at the heart of it is the Labor government's failure to build homes. It is quite simple! Members opposite can sit there and smile and laugh, but they have failed to build homes over their four years of being in government.

Members can go to the Australian Bureau of Statistics website to see table 8731.0 "Building Approvals"; I will not table it because members can look at it themselves. Over the period of the Labor government, 39.2 dwellings were approved per month, and of all residential units, 52.2 were public housing. That is the data I have but I am sure the government's department can provide members with all the data on shared equity houses, social housing and Government Regional Officers' Housing. The housing market is a continuum. I have been advised by real estate agents in Broome that GROH has been on a renting spree, so of course that creates problems for us in our community. I have seen GROH homes that have been vacant for years. Only now are they being populated with members of the public sector after years of upgrades and expenditure, and I question the value of some of that expenditure. Why were those homes not circulated through the market during the downturn and new homes built? Simply, not enough homes have been built. Under the Barnett government, going back to table 8731.0—members can look it up themselves—an average of 52.5 public homes were built per month and total dwellings, including units, was 95 per month. Let me compare and contrast the total number of places to live—let us keep it simple—over the 101-odd months of the Barnett government versus the 50-odd months of the McGowan government. It was 95 versus 52. Members can get the detail of how many houses have been sold off and replaced but that is for building approvals. That is the data I have. My contention is that the government has not built enough homes, whether they be GROH, units, affordable housing or transitional housing. Whatever the housing is, the government has simply not built enough.

I welcomed the announcement of additional expenditure on social housing. It is absolutely essential but it does not solve this person's problem tonight. I hope that we see more action across the Department of Communities, across the housing portfolio, across the GROH homes portfolio—across the lot—and we see some development so that people like this person can have a roof over their head, which is a basic human right.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Mental Health) [1.48 pm]: I rise on behalf of the government to make a contribution on the motion before us. I want to start with a comment on the contribution made by the previous speaker. Of course, Hon Neil Thomson was a senior public servant during the years of the Barnett government. What did his government do? It tried to close remote Aboriginal communities. Shame on you! The Barnett government tried to close hundreds of Aboriginal communities. It frightened people out of their communities. How dare you be hypocritical today and forget what your government did a few years ago! Don't you forget it; I won't let you forget it!

I thank Hon Dr Brad Pettitt for bringing this motion before us because it is always good to talk about homelessness in this place. It touches the lives of many Western Australians, many Australians and many people around the world. Particularly in the last 18 months with COVID-19, we have seen many challenges around the world. However, because Western Australia has been so fortunate because the government and people like Chris Dawson and the Chief Health Officer—everybody—have worked incredibly hard to keep COVID-19 out, people from around the world and around Australia have moved back to Western Australia. We have seen miners from other states and territories who used to do fly-in fly-out work move to Western Australia. For a number of years, the bottom fell out of the housing market and people did not build houses. There are a number of challenges and they have all happily congregated together. I acknowledge the contribution made by Hon Dr Brad Pettitt, in which he endorsed and acknowledged the announcement made by Hon John Carey, the Minister for Housing, on the weekend about the significant \$870 million investment in housing in this state.

I want to do a quick tick-off, because Hon Dr Brad Pettitt's motion refers to low-carbon homes. I take the opportunity to remind the honourable member that if the federal Greens had voted for the carbon pollution reduction scheme in 2009, we would not be in this situation. In fact, there would be hundreds of millions of tonnes less of carbon emissions and electricity prices would be cheaper. If only his federal colleagues at that time had supported federal Labor's carbon pollution reduction scheme. That is a shame. As Hon Sue Ellery said to me, that was one of the

Extract from Hansard

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p3523a-3538a

Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon James Hayward

lowest policy moments in our country's history, and the environment has suffered ever since. Anyway, I digress for a moment.

Getting back to the main thrust of the motion at hand, I want to place a few things on the record on behalf of the minister and the government. As we have heard over the last week in particular, the government will invest \$2.1 billion in social housing over the next four years and that includes the extra \$875 million in funds announced this week. This is, as the honourable member said, the single biggest one-off investment in social housing in the state's history, and it will provide an immediate boost to social housing around the state. We do not make \$875 million budget announcements based on notices of motions lodged in the Legislative Council; this has been a long time in the making.

I was not sure whether the honourable member was suggesting that the minister said that people do not want social housing, but the minister has made the point that it is challenging in some communities because we have nimbyism; we have people who do not want social housing in their area. I disagree with that. We should have social housing everywhere. To the credit of the Minister for Transport, Hon Rita Saffioti, under the Metronet project, social housing is being built along train lines so that public transport is accessible to communities. Social housing will remain the central fabric of some of those communities, and that is important.

We are delivering 3 300 social housing homes. The honourable member's contribution today was gracious, but we are taking measures to immediately tackle the issue and increase public housing stock. Some of the things we are doing include spot purchasing, investing in alternative built forms such as modular and prefabricated homes, and converting existing departmental stock that would otherwise have been sold into the private market into social housing. We are also ensuring that there will be a pipeline of work beyond the current construction boom to continue to provide social housing stock and support jobs in the business and construction sectors. I am acutely aware of the challenges we face from the heated construction market in delivering social housing. This record investment in social housing will deliver up to 275 new homes in regional areas by mid-2023. We are seeing a significant investment in regional renewal projects. Members would have heard the announcement yesterday about the \$20 million investment in renewal projects in three communities in Geraldton, Albany and Bunbury that have been forgotten, if I can put it that way. This will revitalise, renew, rebuild and upgrade properties in those communities. This investment will refurbish older housing properties and will include significant urban and streetscape upgrades. There will be new road punch throughs, streetscaping and other projects that will boost amenity and livability. There is \$9 million for Spalding in Geraldton, \$5 million for Withers in Bunbury and \$4 million for Spencer Park in Albany. There is also \$2 million in the budget for planning and detailed scoping across those three projects.

Looking after our social housing stock is key to ensuring that properties stay in the system for longer. In our last term, we made some very difficult decisions to demolish a large number of social homes because the investment was not there to keep them in good material condition. As someone else said, we cannot have people living in squalor; we need to make sure that these homes are livable. As part of the 2021–22 budget, we will be investing \$12.8 million to undertake detailed building assessments on the more than 10 000 aging public housing and Government Regional Officers' Housing assets that we have. That will enable the department to scope the maintenance and works and conduct forward maintenance planning, which will reduce reactive maintenance to better manage aging stock. Of course, aging stock in the city is often very different from that in the regions. Quite frankly, houses in the area where I am based in Hedland do not last as long simply because of cyclones, the weather and the heat. Houses in those areas do not last as long and it takes more investment to fix them.

I made the point that, obviously, Western Australia is one of the safest places in the world. People in Western Australia have been largely free to live normal lives over the past 18 months, unlike those in many places around the world where the situation has been different. Our economy is strong, and that has seen an increase in the number of people coming back to Western Australia, which has caused additional pressure for homes and rentals. As I said, it came on the back of a few years of suppression in the property market when reduced investor finance was available in Western Australia and around Australia.

Figures published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics at the beginning of August show that more people moved to WA than left for interstate destinations in the three months to March. That was the most in a single quarter since the start of 2012. Sydney, Melbourne, Darwin and Hobart are the only capital cities to have lost people, but Perth gained 1 554 in the March quarter. Last financial year, there were nearly 27 000 new home building approvals in Western Australia. That is a significant 87 per cent increase on the previous financial year. As these new homes come online, the supply side pressures will begin easing, with more properties in the rental market, and I think that will be welcomed by the community.

The one-in-100-year pandemic that we have been dealing with has put pressure on housing supplies right across the country, but not every applicant on the social housing waitlist is sleeping rough. Many of these applicants have a roof over their head while they are waiting for public housing. They may be in a private rental, for example, but remain eligible for public housing. Although it is not optimal for some, at least they have a roof over their head.

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 8 September 2021]

p3523a-3538a

Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon James Hayward

I am advised that there is a separate register for those sleeping rough called the By-Name List, which accounts for roughly 400 to 500 people sleeping rough in Perth and Fremantle. The idea that every applicant on the public housing waitlist is out on the streets is not quite true. It is a lot more nuanced than that. The Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre report on housing affordability that was published in June this year estimates that 10 000 rental properties will return to the rental market over the next six to 12 months. This, along with our record investment in social housing across the state, will also reduce the pressure on the private rental market, which we know in turn works to reduce the number of people seeking public and social housing.

We are investing \$2.1 billion over the next four years, and that includes the \$875 million of new money in the budget before us. The Minister for Housing spoke yesterday about how this is already helping fast-track supply. A 16-apartment complex in Success was originally going to deliver only two social housing apartments. That complex has now been designated as 100 per cent social housing. Existing funding for a number of programs that is being re-prioritised and brought forward will help deliver a program of modular and prefabricated social housing builds across the state. We are investing in innovative design and materials because, as we know, bricklayers are in high demand at the moment. Again, it is another thing we have to contend with at this interesting time. Some of the innovative designs that we are funding, particularly in regional Western Australia, are using modular and prefabricated construction methods. The investment in modular and prefabrication construction will also drive job growth in those industries.

I want to touch on energy and environment for a moment. One of the key objectives of the social housing economic recovery package has been to implement sustainability measures within the home to reduce the associated energy costs and environmental footprint. All refurbishments and new dwellings constructed through SHERP must include energy and water efficient appliances, fixtures and fittings. As Hon Dr Brad Pettitt found out in response to his question yesterday—was it yesterday; it all melds into one?—the state is committed to ensuring that all social housing new builds designed from August this year will achieve a minimum seven-star Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme rating where feasible, with the exception of climate zones 1 and 2, where the *Design brief: Northwest regional social housing* is required to be followed. There is \$92.8 million in SHERP community housing grants that were announced at the end of August, which are for community housing providers or local governments to apply for—up to \$5 million for new builds and for refurbishment of existing properties. That will, hopefully, achieve the minimum seven-star NatHERS rating, which the honourable member mentioned in his contribution today. Accessibility is also important and I make the point that not every person with a disability needs to have a particular house. Not every person with a disability has mobility issues so we need to make sure we are building for the cohort that needs the house, noting of course that some do.

I want to acknowledge the social housing sector and the agencies that are providing quality services at the moment, including in my own portfolio of mental health and drug and alcohol, to people in need on a daily basis. I was pleased to hear the comments from Deb Zanella, the CEO of Ruah Community Services, a pretty good agency that delivers key services in our community. In response to Minister Carey's announcement on the weekend, she said —

...from a Ruah perspective, we are really delighted.

...I think we actually should take a moment and say this is a really great investment...

...the government's been listening to the sector; it's been doing its own analysis and it has produced something that will actually begin to shift the dial ...

Deb was on the radio on, I think, Monday morning. She gave us only a nine out of 10, so that means there is room for improvement, but that is good acknowledgement of the work Minister Carey in particular has put into this package.

Other applicants have also been in contact with government to acknowledge the contribution. Louise Giolitto from the Western Australian Council of Social Service put out a press release in which she said —

“WACOSS warmly welcomes the announcement of the extra \$875 million for social housing in this year's State Budget to deliver better outcomes for some of the most at-risk people in our community,”

That was a media release issued by WACOSS on 6 September, earlier this week.

We are also investing in Government Regional Officers' Housing in regional Western Australia. The McGowan government's management of the state's finances has allowed us to stop the GROH sales program, which was instituted by the previous government. The previous government had a policy of selling off GRO housing. In this 2020–21 financial year, we increased GROH stock by 2.6 per cent, adding about another 129 properties in the regions. We have spent over \$100 million in the last financial year on GRO housing and, as I said, we are spending \$12.8 million to carry out building assessments on more than 10 000 ageing properties and GRO houses around the state.

As at 30 June 2021 there was a total of 5 040 GROH properties across the state, so that is an increase. We are also exploring all options to fast-track delivery of GRO housing where it is needed. That again includes modular and

Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon James Hayward

prefabricated houses, which will open the door for new and quicker opportunities. One of the measures we have put in place in recent months was a change to the policy settings, which will make it easier to transfer assets between GRO and public housing. This will make better use of underutilised government-owned properties around the state. We recently announced six underutilised GROH properties in the town of Collie, which will undergo major refurbishments and be made available as public housing to meet current needs in that town at the time.

I want to briefly—20 minutes goes very fast—acknowledge Minister Simone McGurk, who today has announced funding for a new Common Ground facility in Mandurah. It is fair to say—I am certainly happy to say it—that we inherited a homelessness system that was a mess. It was operating on year-by-year contracts, which were renewed only at the last minute. Little or no direction was given to improving the system and supporting the people in our community. To her credit, Minister McGurk has driven change and reform in her portfolios. We consulted across communities, service providers and peak bodies. That work has led to the *All paths lead to a home: Western Australia's 10-year strategy on homelessness 2020–2030* that has been built from evidence-based research and consultation across Western Australia. Two new Common Ground facilities will be built, one in Perth and one in Mandurah. They will provide permanent supportive housing for adults who have experienced chronic homelessness or who are low-income earners. The model is based on a housing-first approach where people experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping are placed in housing as a first priority with wraparound services provided to them. It is not as simple as just giving someone a house, of course. Some people who have not lived in a house for many years, or previously or not by themselves, need that extra level of support. Housing First is about giving people shelter and a home and placing wraparound services around them. That, too, is important.

There will be two Common Ground facilities, one in East Perth, for which there is \$45.5 million in the budget and the new one that was announced today in Mandurah. Altogether, that will see 112 self-contained units constructed that will have communal areas, onsite support services and commercial space at the site. An announcement has also been made about the design and development of an online homelessness services portal that will make it easier for people experiencing homelessness to access help and support. Recently there was, of course, the \$14.3 million investment in the establishment of Boorloo Bidee Mia, the new accommodation services for rough sleepers on Wellington Street in the Perth central district, which is being run by Wungening Aboriginal Corporation and has other partners such as Noongar Mia Mia, to make sure we are delivering culturally appropriate services.

I could talk on this all day. Certainly 20 minutes is not a long time. I congratulate the member on bringing this forward today. It is important. I think his colleagues probably set the trap in that every motion they brought forward was a crisis, a crisis, a crisis. We probably always responded by saying that we were not supporting it. However, I appreciate Hon Dr Brad Pettitt bringing his motion forward today. It is important that we all talk about homelessness and I look forward to hearing from other members.

HON KATE DOUST (South Metropolitan) [2.07 pm]: Thank you, Acting President. I want to add some words. I thank Hon Dr Brad Pettitt for raising this motion today. I particularly want to talk about the final point of his motion. I will not comment on what has been said about previous efforts by former governments or lack of effort. I think our minister has dealt with that. I particularly want to focus on issues around My Home. Like Hon Dr Brad Pettitt, I want to put on the public record my congratulations to Michelle Blakeley. She has done an outstanding job pushing along this issue and working with all tiers of government to get these projects off the ground—no mean feat. She was very excited about the announcement made on 27 August in Fremantle. On that day we were at a forum on women's homelessness at the Karrakatta Club, where there were more than 100 women and 19 organisations represented talking about these issues. Michelle was very excited, but was not able to tell us why, that she was heading off to Fremantle for the announcement in the afternoon. People were very pleased for her. The idea of having, I think, 18 dwellings on site is very exciting.

I first met with Michelle some time last year in Victoria Park. As members would be aware, she has also been working on a similar type of housing project for women over 55 on the corner of Berwick and Kent Streets. This is obviously not as big a project. I think there will be five modular homes put in that location. It is a great location in terms of access to public transport, facilities, retail and other services. That location was a bit of a challenge. I do not know what the dilemmas were in Fremantle, but initially she had problems getting the project moving. There were issues with a tiny sliver of the land that was not owned by the state government. I think it was owned by the local government. Ultimately, it took some time, but she has only just been able to resolve the issue in the last month or two and is hoping the project will get off the ground.

Having been out to Welshpool where these modular homes are built and then in one of them, they are basically a studio. They are fully sustainable, they have solar panels, they have double-glazed windows and they have water sustainability. They will be in a cluster-type arrangement, which potentially builds on good community. For a lot of these women coming out of homelessness, the idea of having other women around them and being able to have that community is a real plus. I certainly hope that Michelle is able to continue her work in that space. The idea that it is a public-private partnership is also very appealing. She has been very successful in getting not just state

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 8 September 2021]

p3523a-3538a

Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon James Hayward

governments, local governments and senior corporate entities involved, but also church groups. The member referred to the Sisters of St John of God, and I am really pleased they are engaged in that space. I am pretty sure that Michelle has had discussions with other groups in the community. As she has moved around and talked about this issue, she has been able to inspire other groups. The Karrakatta Club is working with its membership, and these groups are coming up with feedback from the forum to see whether they can engage with government to see what they can do to provide assistance. Soroptimist International, which is another women's organisation, is also doing some work in that space. It has identified at least one potential location in South Perth for a building that could be repurposed for women over the age of 55. I know Hon Dr Brad Pettitt will be interested in that now he is member for South Metropolitan Region. There is some interesting work happening.

This is a real challenge. One of the members across the way said that perhaps we should have an inquiry through the Parliament to look at homelessness. The issue of homelessness for women over the age of 55 is an interesting challenge, and I must say that it is not something that previous governments have really focused on. Homelessness and solutions to it have traditionally been around men, because men were much more visible. We used to see them more on the streets. Sadly, we are starting to see more women on the streets. A lot of the short-term facilities were in place for men. There has been a shift. In recent times, Saint Bart's has repurposed and refitted some of its space to accommodate women in the short-term, and other organisations have done similar things. I am sure that Saint Pat's in Fremantle has been working in that space as well. But there is a real challenge there.

The issue is for women who have to deal with homelessness for the first time, which may have come about because of a breakdown in their marriage. There was a very good example on ABC 7.30 about a week ago. A woman was interviewed whose 30-plus year marriage, which she thought had been a happy marriage, all came apart. She was heading into retirement and found that after the family home had been disposed of, even though she thought she would have enough to buy a property, that was not the case. Then, she could not get a home loan and ended up having to work for another 10 years beyond her retirement. After she had completed that, she found that she did not have the income to afford rent. She lived in New South Wales, and at the end of the day she was fortunate enough to be placed in public housing specifically for women of her age group, and she has been there for a time. There are issues that come out of a marital breakup. The woman may not have been an income earner, so she does not have income when she comes out of the marriage. She may not have access to her partner's superannuation.

Superannuation was a big issue discussed at a forum I attended on 27 August. Hon Mia Davies was also part of that forum. It was very interesting to hear the perspective of regional issues of homelessness for women in that age demographic. Superannuation was identified as a significant issue for women over 55 when there has been a marital breakup. They do not have access to their partner's superannuation or in some cases there is not full and frank disclosure about their partner's superannuation amounts. I think back to a couple of my former colleagues from this place whose marriages broke up. They had to split their superannuation up much earlier with their male partner. It meant they had to continue on in the workforce much longer. Although superannuation is a federal issue, it is something we need to have a discussion about to see what we can do to enable some change in that space. The key issue is around access.

The other problem for a lot of women over 55 is that it is the first time they have lost a home or access to it. It could be due to that first example of the marital breakup, or it could be through a loss of job, loss of income, mental health issues or disconnection from family. Quite often in the past, when a woman lost access to a home, she may have gone to stay with another family member, but that is not always the case these days. The world has changed. Sadly, we do not necessarily embrace all of our family members, so that avenue is not always open to these women.

There are a range of issues. We have already mentioned today the number of Indigenous women who have been homeless. There are women coming out of prisons, sole parents and low-income earners. There is a raft of reasons why these things happen. But these women do not always want to talk about it. They do not always want to seek the assistance that they need to step back into an environment that is safe and secure for them. The minister has already referred to Common Ground, which in the short term provides a safe place, a safe haven, and wraparound services, which is fantastic, but the My Home option provides a much longer term placement for these women, and I think that is where we need to head for a lot of them, or all of them ultimately. Everyone needs to have their own home, their own space and their own security. They need their own place where they can plan for the future. One of the key issues for My Home, which I know Michelle Blakely has been very keen on, is making sure that women have longevity in these homes, so not just saying that it is four weeks, months or even a year, but 10 or 15 years or longer. That is a real challenge. The concepts behind My Home, Common Ground and lots of other models around the world are all good and worthy of exploration. I am thankful for and acknowledge the initial announcements that the state government has made over the last couple of weeks. There was the announcement made by Hon Simone McGurk about the Lotterywest funding for My Home. I hope there is more of that to come down the track. I acknowledge the announcements on the weekend from Hon John Carey and the announcement today in Mandurah for the Common Ground facility.

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 8 September 2021]

p3523a-3538a

Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon James Hayward

Minister, I hope that at some point in the South Metropolitan Region we might also seek to have that type of facility. Sadly, we see an increase of women on the streets in parts of my electorate. It is quite heartbreaking, because it is really difficult to find places for them. As members, we all have to deal with these issues. One example that comes to mind is a woman who had lived in a public house in Manning pretty much for 50 years. She, her husband and her family were the first tenants. In fact, her family expanded and grew in that home. She had an interesting story; within a week of her husband dying, she was given notice by the department that she had to move out because her name was not on the lease. If we think about it, for a lot of women in their 50s and 60s and older, it is a generational thing. If they were married, their husband's name was on the lease or the power bill or the phone bill or any of those other things. If their husband passed away, they had real difficulty trying to change the details or maintain their space in that home. This woman came to us because she was given a week to move. She had been in that house for 50 years. She was the primary income earner because, sadly, her husband had alcohol and drug issues. To keep the family going, she worked as a cook in an establishment for most of their married life. Her name had never been on the lease. We had a huge battle with the department to keep that woman in her home. We won eventually, but the department came back and said, "Let's move you." Things get complicated.

It is not just about finding places for people to live; we need to look at the reasons they get to that point and try to break down the silos and try to get better communication across departments so they can work together—not just state and federal departments but certainly local governments too.

Michelle Blakeley experienced issues in Victoria Park and possibly Fremantle when dealing with various agencies and different tiers of government. I know she had planning issues in Victoria Park. Perhaps some sort of consideration needs to be given to the regulations around the establishment of these types of facilities and arrangements so that people do not constantly have to deal with red tape. Four years seems to be an outrageous length of time to put in place a fantastic opportunity in that area to alleviate a long-term homelessness issue and to provide a safe and secure home for these women. Sadly, these will be ongoing issues.

Members may have travelled, not in recent times but prior to COVID. I do not know whether they looked around the areas they visited but I can clearly recall my last trip to Canada and the US a few years ago and seeing a number of women on the streets. Basically, their lives were in shopping trolleys, or they had their kids with them. The older they got, the harder it got. I do not want us to be like that. I think the state government is doing everything it possibly can in the circumstances to find the dollars and look at being innovative with different types of projects. I say to members opposite who are new to this place that I know it seems to be very difficult sometimes. Everything seems to begin from the time they are elected and sometimes they do not always know the history. Those of us who have been around for quite a while know some of that history and the difficulties we have had in dealing with other governments and trying to get these changes up or trying to get housing for people who are coming out of homelessness. It has not always been easy. These things do not happen overnight. Whatever their criticism of this government has been about the movement in that space, it is not about just dropping money and it happens. These things happen over an extended period; they build up. I do not know whether any government has been perfect in how it has managed the issue, but I acknowledge the significant dollar drop that has happened over the last week or so. We look forward to tomorrow's budget to see what else will be articulated; I do not know whether there will be any more funding.

I turn to one of the issues in my electorate that I have been very keen about for the last 20 years. The government put a significant amount of money into Brownlie Towers in Bentley, which had about 300 units, both single and double bedroom. It was a high rise that was constructed in the 1970s. Back in Geoff Gallop's day, about \$20 million was poured into it to try to rejuvenate it and make it safer. It was able to continue for a period of time. In the last term, it was decided that it was no longer viable and it was demolished. We have a huge parcel of land there. A lot of work was done during the previous government by former Minister Tinley to get that project moving, along with the local government. Again, I think there has probably been a bit of red tape and reticence about that project over an extended period. I see that as being an exciting rejuvenation of that area. I know that significant amounts of social housing will go into that mix. Some people were very attached to that area. I made comments earlier about the opportunity to have something built. That area would be a great location, given its proximity to public transport and all the facilities.

I come back to the comment made by Hon Dr Brad Pettitt about a reluctance of some people to have public housing or houses for homeless people in their area. I dealt with that fairly recently. I identified a patch of former public housing land in my electorate. I remember starting discussions with the former Minister for Housing in the last term about this opportunity. I thought the "My Home" project would be a brilliant opportunity for this particular parcel of land in my electorate as it was such a great location. It got such a pushback from the local community that I was really shocked. It did not matter that we were talking about women over the age of 50; those people just did not want social housing in their backyard. The key disappointment for me was that this whole suburb erupted even though it was a social housing suburb when it was first constructed. That just shows the shift. When people move in and build different houses, their attitudes change. I was really disappointed because I thought that putting this type of housing into that part of the electorate might have resolved a whole lot of other issues. Not only would it fix the

problem for these women and give them permanent housing, but it might also resolve some other problems. But the pushback was so bad that when I had to deal with the local candidate for that seat, I said, “You go to this meeting because if I go, it will set things on fire.” There are some real challenges in that space, particularly for women over 55, in finding them safe, secure and permanent homes, close to all the services they need, which would enable them to get their lives either back on track or moving forward.

It can be a sliding door moment for any of us. I look around at a lot of my friends. I am in that age group. We all think that 59 is the real 30, but I tell you what, it is really not! One of my girlfriends had a stroke several weeks ago. She has only a few days of sick leave left. We really worry about that sliding door moment—it could happen to anyone. I thank the government for the work it is doing in this space. There is a lot more to do but there are bigger, broader issues that we should discuss, such as how we can get to the point of preventing women from becoming homeless or making sure that if they are in that situation, with all the stresses attached to it, we can provide the best care and the best facilities so they can get on with their lives.

HON SOPHIA MOERMOND (South West) [2.27 pm]: I thank Hon Dr Brad Pettitt for moving his motion. I also thank the McGowan government for its funding and action in this area. The words of Hon Kate Doust very much resonated with me. I have a girlfriend, also in her mid-50s, who has worked hard. She is fiercely independent. She became unwell and was not able to access her superannuation. She was not poor enough to access social housing but also not well enough to keep working and pay rent. She has a dog and a cat, and she ended up homeless. When we talk about these sorts of social issues and the contributing factors that affect women in that age group, systemic and institutionalised sexism is definitely a part of that. Younger women are less affected by that. Certainly in my age group, I can see that quite a few of my female friends are only a few pay packets away from homelessness. That is not due to them being lazy or not working; it is simply due to them not having the access to resources that men in their age group have had.

There are three really distinct phases of social housing and dysfunction in society. The first phase is a mum and her children. Children need a stable home; they need that stability. They need a safe home and access to resources, such as food, child care and schooling to make sure that their social skills develop well and are on point. The second stage is when they do not have that safety and those resources. They may start acting out when they go to school or they may wag school and have more problematic behaviours simply because they lack the stability in their life that a long-term home provides. The third phase is crisis management. In that phase, we see people going off the rails and becoming involved in criminal behaviours. It is also when drug addiction may become an issue. That is where a lot of the money is spent at the moment. If we want to prevent all that, it would be wise to invest money at the beginning of the lives of those children. That would allow the opportunity for women to escape domestic violence and children to be well cared for in a stable and safe environment. Not only would we save money, we would also reduce human suffering, and that really is the most important point. If we provide that early safe care and safe housing, we will a happier and healthier population.

HON PIERRE YANG (North Metropolitan) [2.31 pm]: I, too, like the Minister for Mental Health, Hon Stephen Dawson, thank Hon Dr Brad Pettitt for moving this motion. Homelessness is a very important issue. It has been an important issue for me since I came to this place. I have spoken about this issue more than one or two dozen times. As Hon Dan Caddy mentioned yesterday during his member’s statement, I have been participating in the Vinnies CEO Sleepout since I came to this place in 2017. I hasten to put on the record my thanks to the members who have donated to this fundraiser, which saw us, collectively, raise around \$30 000 over five years. This year I was not able to join the rest of the participants because of our late night sittings. I got to Optus Stadium at about 3.30 in the morning. The door was shut. The gentleman guarding the gate said, “You can’t get in” to which I replied, “That’s fine.” I went home and parked my car in front of the street. I did not want to open the gate and wake up my wife and kids. I slept in my car for four hours before going into my home.

It is important to look at the situation before the McGowan Labor government took office in 2017. I wish to remind members that in the 2016–17 financial year, the Barnett Liberal–National government invested \$86 million to address homeless issues and provide services for those who were homeless. As we have heard over the weekend, the McGowan Labor government is boosting its funding to \$875 million, which is more than 11 times more in a mere four years. This is a great achievement and all Western Australians should be very proud of this government for making the best interests of our fellow citizens who are doing it tough one of its top priorities.

In 2011, the then Minister for Police, Rob Johnson, was asked a question by Hon Bill Johnston about the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and homeless people in the city. The general public was to be locked out of the city for three days. I refer to a WAtoday article of 14 April 2011—I am reading from my laptop so I hope no-one will ask me to table it—which states what Hon Rob Johnson’s reply was in Parliament. It reads —

“Well, they would have to sleep somewhere else for the night, won’t they? I’ll give them a tent and a cushion—what a stupid question.”

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[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 8 September 2021]

p3523a-3538a

Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon James Hayward

That was the attitude of a minister of the Crown in the Liberal government, which was in alliance with the National Party, some 10 years ago. The attitude of this government is a great turnaround for the people of Western Australia, especially those who are experiencing homelessness and sleeping rough. Very soon after we came to office, we announced our 10-year homelessness strategy. I had a conversation with Hon Simon McGurk about this strategy. She is a passionate advocate for people who are sleeping rough. We have been working tirelessly to find strategies and money to support services for people in Western Australia who are experiencing homelessness. I also remind members that in 2019, the federal Liberal–National government cut funding for Western Australia. On 10 May 2018, in response to the federal government’s decision to cut funding, I said the following in *Hansard* —

On that note, WA stands to lose a huge amount. The Liberal–National government has not only got its priorities wrong, but also shown great contempt to the people of Western Australia. The state of Western Australia and the Commonwealth of Australia have had a national partnership agreement on remote housing for the past 10 years. The commonwealth has similar agreements with other states and the Northern Territory. According to the WA–commonwealth agreement, the commonwealth provided \$36 million in the 2016–17 financial year and \$178 million during the last financial year. That money was spent on capital items such as new houses, refurbishments, employment and education housing, and also on reform items such as property and tenancy management, Indigenous employment, Indigenous participation, Indigenous business engagement and Indigenous home ownership. This agreement will expire at the end of next month.

I remind members that I made that statement in May 2018, with the agreement ending in June 2018. I also said —

It is extremely disappointing that the federal budget has not provided any funding in the coming financial year—not a single dollar.

It is disappointing that the federal government did not assist the people of Western Australia. The former Barnett government left us with a mess on the issue of homelessness. Instead of spending money on singing toilets and plastic cows, which is what the former Barnett government did, we have invested money on things that matter to people. Hon Neil Thomson may have a smile on his face; I am sure he is passionately agreeing with me.

I also want to talk about veterans and homelessness. I made a speech some time during the last term of Parliament about veterans experiencing homelessness at a much higher rate than many other groups in our communities. I want to put on the record that it is important that we support people and we look at people’s needs. I am proud that the government has put in so much money; in fact, \$2.1 billion will be in the budget for the next four years. I repeat: \$2.1 billion for the people of Western Australia. That huge amount will be used to support so many of our fellow Western Australians. I am extremely proud of that, but, unfortunately, some members here want to politicise this issue. It is disappointing that members opposite—not crossbench members—said that the work started when they were elected. That is not the case, honourable members. As Hon Kate Doust also outlined, the issue of homelessness has been with us for a very long time.

I also want to quote Hon Colin Holt, a former member of this place whom I deeply respect. He was a very sensible member. He was a great contributor to the democracy of Western Australia.

Hon Darren West: We miss him.

Hon PIERRE YANG: We do miss him, sincerely.

On 16 September 2020, Hon Colin Holt said —

I think what it highlights to me is that there is no silver bullet for homelessness ...

He is right, there is no silver bullet. Members may want to look at his wise words and reflect on what they said today. Hopefully, one day they will be able to give us some more sensible and reasonable contributions. That will be a good thing for democracy in this state.

I again want to thank all members who have contributed. I want to thank Hon Dr Brad Pettitt for bringing this motion to the house. Even though I will not be able to support it, I think it is a very important issue. I am pleased, in fact proud, that the McGowan Labor government is looking at addressing this issue.

HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral) [2.42 pm]: I rise to support this excellent motion brought forward by Hon Dr Brad Pettitt. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and congratulate the McGowan government on its recent \$875 million public housing announcement. However, I will be interested to see how much of this spend will be allocated to regional WA and what the wait time will be for these public houses, considering we are in the middle of a skills shortage and, meanwhile, as has been pointed out, there is a 3 000-plus social housing waitlist. I am hopeful that the upcoming budget week will be a good opportunity to get into the details.

I recently met with several advocacy groups in this space, one of which was Shelter WA, which has been calling for years for 5 000 public homes to be built. That is in contrast to the previous Labor government’s commitment of 260 public houses over the next 10 years. In my opinion, this recent announcement by the Labor government is

Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon James Hayward

an admission that we are in the middle of a housing crisis. Deaths have occurred due to the government's inaction over the last four years.

I was recently in Kalgoorlie and met with residents and community groups to gain an understanding of the housing issues facing the region and the town. The main issue raised with me was the shortage of housing. Kalgoorlie plans to expand to 40 000 residents; it is currently sitting at 30 000. The 2021 census data will probably bring it to about the 33 000 mark. There are plenty of jobs in Kalgoorlie because commodities are booming, but there is nowhere to put people. Housing availability in Kalgoorlie sits at less than one per cent right now.

Last week, I asked a question in Parliament on the state of 32 Government Regional Officers' Housing properties in Kalgoorlie. The response was that some of these properties have been vacant for up to 10 years. The *Kalgoorlie Miner* ran an article on this, and the Minister for Housing was forced to respond. The housing minister said that he is planning to reallocate unused GROH properties to public houses. I certainly plan to continue this line of questioning on the state of these houses. I heard firsthand testimony when I was in Kalgoorlie on the state of some of these properties. When people who were moving into these houses for the first time opened the front door, they were greeted by the sight of dead cockroaches on the ground; the homes also had roof tiles missing and broken windows. It is unfortunate that these properties are in this dilapidated state. I believe that the government needs to take a smarter approach with its current housing stock. As it plays catch-up with the public housing waitlist, it will be some time before new properties come on board. I note the comments from the housing minister that the department is taking a smarter approach. I think that is good. I congratulate the government on this recent announcement; it is a step in the right direction.

HON SANDRA CARR (Agricultural) [2.46 pm]: I rise to speak on the motion moved by Hon Dr Brad Pettitt and thank him for the opportunity to speak on homelessness and housing. We are all aware that there is a housing crisis in this nation. It is affecting the whole country and, indeed, other parts of the world. Western Australia has certainly not been immune to those circumstances. It is a complex situation impacted by a variety of factors, many of which could never have been accurately predicted. The circumstances under which someone might find themselves homeless are also, as Hon Kate Doust pointed out, quite unpredictable. She referred to that sliding door moment. I was not going to speak on that subject, but it reminded me of my own sliding door moment. It allows me to touch on some other circumstances that can impact people and the concept of homelessness.

I found myself homeless when I was aged in my early 30s. I had a suitcase of things in my car. My daughter and I slept in the car on the side of the road. An initiative in Geraldton that raises money for homeless people who sleep in their car involves the whole community gathering on the field to sleep in their car. I have never been able to bring myself to participate in that. It is a little too real for me because of my memory of that time. People find themselves homeless for a whole range of reasons. I was educated and I thought that my life was on track, but the situation I found myself in was one of fleeing an environment. Although I was lucky that I could finally make my way to the other side of the country to live with family, by current categories I was still a homeless person—I did not have an income, I did not have a roof over my head, I did not have any possessions, and I had two children to raise.

Although I was really fortunate in that I managed to claw my way back and find myself a home—I am very fortunate now to own a home—I remain deeply resentful that this happened to me. I remain deeply resentful every time I look at my superannuation. Hon Kate Doust touched on the idea of older women finding themselves homeless and unable to access superannuation or not having superannuation. I can tell members that as a sole parent, not by choice, I often found myself having to step out of the workforce or participate only part time in the workforce. A man of the same age with the same experience and skills as I have has much more superannuation than I have and will retire with much more money than I will. I find that deeply unfair. It is another condition that impacts women, although I do not necessarily agree that it impacts only older women. I think it impacts women more often than we realise. Having experienced it myself, I really struggled to seek help and support because people do not want to talk about. It is embarrassing.

Homelessness and housing are really complex issues. Homelessness can arise at all sorts of times and moments throughout someone's life, and they cannot necessarily anticipate that. The issue of homelessness is being rigorously addressed by the McGowan government. I am really pleased by the size and scope of the recent announcement made by our Minister for Housing, John Carey. I think 3 300 new social housing properties is an excellent start. Hon Dr Brad Pettitt referred to it as a "good start", which I think is an understatement. We are talking about a record social housing investment of 275 new regional homes by 2023, \$875 million to boost social housing, and a state budget that will invest \$2.1 billion into social housing over four years. I am not sure what sort of financials Hon Dr Brad Pettitt is used to handling, but I am not sure I would describe that sort of money as a "good start". I think it is a very significant, rigorous and substantive contribution to addressing social housing. I think 3 300 social homes is an excellent endeavour made by the McGowan government and it is one I am really pleased that Minister John Carey was able to secure for us.

I also note that the two members across the room who rose to support Hon Dr Brad Pettitt's motion—a Greens member—were Hon Steve Martin and Hon Neil Thomson. Hon Steve Martin referred to the Labor Party as a party

of social conscience. Indeed, I agree that we are a party with a strong social conscience. We have a conscience and I find it quite peculiar that Hon Steve Martin would choose to use a word like “conscience” in the current context of the Liberal Party. I point out to Hon Steve Martin that it was Hon Nick Goiran who wrote, according to my notes, “As for the Greens—they are the very reason I’m in this game. #greensfakehumans.” That is the Liberal Party’s attitude towards the Greens. I would think considerably deeply about aligning himself with a party that does not necessarily respect the outcomes he is hoping to achieve for the community.

I would now like to focus on the regional contribution of the announcement. I live in the regions; the regions are in my remit and I am responsible for them. The new announcement includes \$9 million for Spalding, a suburb in Geraldton that has had a lot of media attention of late; \$5 million for Withers in Bunbury; and \$4 million for Spencer Park in Albany, along with another \$2 million for overall planning and detailed scoping.

There was a significant housing issue to be addressed in my home region. It was keenly felt by people in Geraldton and the surrounding areas. It was exacerbated by the fact that we had a cyclone in the region so a lot of people’s homes were destroyed or deemed uninhabitable. Those people also had to find alternative accommodation in the region and that certainly exacerbated and complicated the situation in our area as people were looking in other areas to find accommodation. Some houses are boarded up and have been left empty for quite some time, but those houses are not necessarily all state housing homes. The \$9 million that has been dedicated to the Spalding precinct is a direct outcome of the hard work, and the dedicated, consistent and measured advocacy of the new member for Geraldton, Lara Dalton. She has been the catalyst for this announcement in Geraldton and I know that the Geraldton community is incredibly grateful for her dogged determination to see a positive outcome for that community. The money that has been announced has been informed by what is called the Spalding revitalisation plan. It was developed by the City of Greater Geraldton and Department of Communities quite some time ago and had significant input from the community. The plan provides more than just housing. It looks at the overall community and what we want for the community. It looks at other things that need to happen alongside housing. It is contributing work that creates a community that is more inclusive, more accessible and safer for the whole community. It is not just about providing housing.

The key word with social housing is “social”. We need to do more than just put roofs over people’s heads. It needs to be strategic. It needs to be thought out. It needs to be planned. These things take a bit of time. If we rush them and just whack up a house here or there, then we create a situation like there was in Spalding where streets were dead ends, which created clusters of issues and problems. The announcement by Minister Carey has sought to address that, so I am incredibly grateful for that. I am also grateful to Hon Dr Brad Pettitt for bringing up the issues of housing and homelessness. Unfortunately, I do not support the motion but I certainly support us having a social conscience.

HON JAMES HAYWARD (South West) [2.55 pm]: I rise to support this motion. I want to talk a little bit about Withers, a suburb in Bunbury. I have previously spoken about it in this place. Withers was built using the Radburn system, which I think I have explained before. It was very popular, probably around the 1970s, to build back-to-front suburbs that were based on an English village. Members would have seen them in South Hedland, Wundowie, Withers in Bunbury, Crestwood in Thornlie and Karawara, and I think Spalding was built the same way. It was a good idea at the start but, over time, these suburbs turned into a complete nightmare—an endless rabbit warren of dead ends that enabled the bad guys to access everybody’s houses through a central system of public open space between the houses. They could get in there and pinch anything they liked. If the police wanted to come and catch them, they would be stuck in a cul-de-sac and they would run around but the police had to drive five kilometres. It was no good. We had major troubles in Bunbury and the only way we were able to get a real lid on crime there was to ask the police to bring down its mounted division. The mounted division came down and I think stayed for two weeks. It was an amazing operation. All of a sudden, the people who were doing the wrong thing discovered that they could not outrun police horses and police were very quickly able to make a number of arrests. These are some of the complications that have happened. I do not know which government built these suburbs; it was probably different governments over time. They had the best intentions in what they were doing but, ultimately, the product was not suitable for Australia or fit for purpose.

When I was elected to Bunbury city council in 2013, one of my first jobs was to chair the Withers advisory committee. The Withers advisory committee was made up by the city council with a view to trying to permanently fix the problems that this suburb faced, including antisocial behaviour and crime. There was an absolutely massive saturation of social housing. In one street where there were 14 homes, 10 of them were social housing homes. With such a build-up of people, we find that the potential for social housing homes does not necessarily bring the best outcome. In other suburbs, where the concentration of social housing is not so high, we find that it works better because even if people in social housing have other social challenges, often the suburb helps to bring them up, as people are brought up by a village. Those suburbs tend to be far more successful than the suburbs with highly concentrated clusters of social housing. Withers, by the way, is a magnificent suburb very close to the beach between the hospital and

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 8 September 2021]

p3523a-3538a

Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon James Hayward

Hay Park, which is Bunbury's biggest open space for sport, and it is near Preston Beach and Yalgorup National Park. It is a fantastic location. In fact, I think it will be a very enviable place for people to invest in into the future.

Inevitably, there were real issues. In 2013, I was tasked with the job of chairing a committee to try to solve some of the problems. We worked very closely with Housing and others to try to find a solution. Over about three years, we put in closed-circuit television cameras, closed off some alleyways and put in some footpaths. We did the best we could at a local government level with about \$1.5 million. We did some of these things to help, and they made a big difference early on. We also engaged a company to do a proper plan of what the suburb could look like—I think UDLA was the name of the business. It did some consultation and came up with this fantastic idea to bulldoze most of the suburb, reconnect some roads so that they worked better together and completely redevelop the suburb. We published the plan in about 2016. All we needed next was the government to fund the project so that the work could get underway, because obviously it was quite expensive; there is a lot of headworks involved in knocking down old buildings.

One of the things that the state did pretty well straightaway was to move people out of the suburb, with a view to trying to transition it, so there were some empty houses there. We had the plan and we did that work and then the election was held in 2017. The now local member, Don Punch, made a big deal of Withers as a very important suburb, as he rightly should have, as did we; I think we committed about \$15 million to get the work done. Since then, we have just heard crickets—until the announcement on the weekend, which is very, very welcome. Finally, the bulldozers will get started and we will see some of that transitional change.

This motion is about saying that we understand that it takes the government a long time to do some of these things, but the reality is that whatever it is doing on that side needs to be the highest priority. It is fantastic that this money is being spent; it is a significant amount. Over the previous four and a half years, there has been very little priority in this space. That is the reality. We certainly welcome it now. It is terrific that those things are happening. There is a lot of work to do. I could talk more about homelessness, but I just wanted to give that one example of things that are in train but that sometimes take a long time. We need to use the energy of the state government to focus in and make sure that these things happen far more quickly.

These are the challenges for all of us. I really appreciated Hon Kate Doust talking about the absolute nonsense of the situation in which someone can live in a house for 50 years but then a bureaucrat can say that they have to get out in a week. That is the challenge we all have. It does not matter which side of politics we are on; they are some of the dramas that people in our communities are experiencing and we need to work together to do things better.

I commend the motion. I thank the McGowan government for its announcement about its investment. I encourage it to do more in this space because a lot more needs to be done.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Sally Talbot): Members, you will be aware that the temporary order provides for the mover of the motion to speak in reply for five minutes. There are five minutes and 10 seconds left. I am inclined to give the call to the mover of the motion in reply.

HON DR BRAD PETTITT (South Metropolitan) [3.03 pm] — in reply: First, I thank each and every member who has contributed to the motion. It was a really worthwhile discussion about social housing, homelessness and disadvantage in our community. I thought it highlighted how much we have in common across the chamber in that we want to deal with this issue. In moving this motion, I had hoped that it would get support from both sides of the aisle, so I am disappointed that it will not. I appreciate that the word “crisis” may have thrown some people, but I reiterate that the definition in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* says that it is a time when a difficult or important decision must be made and a crucial time or state of affairs when a decisive decision is impending. I feel that a government that has just made the biggest commitment ever to social housing probably should acknowledge that there is, as Hon Sandra Carr said, a crisis all around Australia. When a government is acting on it, it is nothing to be embarrassed about. Acknowledging that things need to change is the very first step. In many ways, I thought that we actually agreed on all parts of the motion.

Some really important points were highlighted, and I will go through some of them very quickly. Hon Steve Martin made a range of good points. One point that I failed to mention, as I did not know this, is that 28 per cent of the 56 people we know of who died on our streets were First Nations people. That is a reminder of the human face of this issue. We always need to go back to the point that this is about people and, ultimately, saving people's lives. As Hon Neil Thomson said, a key part of that is building more houses. At the heart of this issue is the fact that we are not building enough homes across the state, especially in regional areas. Hon Stephen Dawson made many good points. I feel like I should get into a debate about the carbon pollution reduction scheme, but the truth of the matter is that we did an emissions reduction fund of some kind under Gillard, which worked very well until Tony Abbott dismantled it. But that is a whole different debate for another time.

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p3523a-3538a

Hon Brad Pettitt; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon James Hayward

The Metronet housing project is really important. It is a really good initiative. I flag to the chamber that interestingly—this is something that we need to drill down into—it is not available to the communities around existing train stations, which I think is quite odd. Metronet is about the whole system; it is not just about new train stations. Making sure that we have social housing near existing train stations and activity centres is really important.

I know there has been a bit of an excuse around COVID and housing. It is important to point out that I do not think that that is necessarily a defence. It is true that domestic migration to this country went up by 3 475 people in 2020, but international migration dropped by about 13 000 people in the same period. Overall, both domestic and international migration has probably declined.

Hon Stephen Dawson: I do not want to delay you, but the other point I made is that the banks stopped lending for 18 months, so we are in this quandary.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: That is a fair point. For those who could not hear the interjection, it was about some of the lending characteristics. It is a complex issue. What I think came out in the debate is that a lack of both private and social housing has been built by consecutive governments over time and it has led to what I think can legitimately be called a crisis. As I have said in this chamber, I am very pleased about the pre-budget announcement about those first steps, which I think are very good.

I really appreciated Hon Kate Doust and Hon Sophia Moermond speaking about the disproportionate impact of homelessness on older women. It has come out very strongly. I realise I have 12 seconds left. That went very quickly. I apologise for not mentioning everybody else who contributed. I think this has been a really good discussion and I hope it is the start of more of it.

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Acting President (Hon Dr Sally Talbot) casting her vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (12)

Hon Martin Aldridge
Hon Peter Collier
Hon Donna Faragher

Hon Nick Goiran
Hon James Hayward
Hon Steve Martin

Hon Sophia Moermond
Hon Tjorn Sibma
Hon Neil Thomson

Hon Wilson Tucker
Hon Dr Brian Walker
Hon Dr Brad Pettitt (*Teller*)

Noes (19)

Hon Dan Caddy
Hon Sandra Carr
Hon Stephen Dawson
Hon Kate Doust
Hon Sue Ellery

Hon Peter Foster
Hon Lorna Harper
Hon Jackie Jarvis
Hon Ayor Makur Chuot
Hon Kyle McGinn

Hon Shelley Payne
Hon Stephen Pratt
Hon Martin Pritchard
Hon Samantha Rowe
Hon Rosie Sahanna

Hon Matthew Swinbourn
Hon Dr Sally Talbot
Hon Darren West
Hon Pierre Yang (*Teller*)

Question thus negatived.