

TRAIL BIKE RIDERS

Grievance

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [9.37 am]: I rise today to grieve to the Minister for Local Government on behalf of trail bike riders in Western Australia. I acknowledge the presence of Mr Don Martin, the vice president of the Recreational Trailbike Riders' Association, and his daughter Elissa, who are here in the Speaker's gallery, along with Rick Gill, former CEO of the association, who was closely involved in writing the report titled *Back on track: WA state trail bike strategy*, which was released in 2008 and is a 344-page document prepared for the state government. The report made recommendations on six key focus areas: insurance liability and risk management, trails planning, managing for sustainability, changing behaviours, registration and licensing and funding models. It is an extremely comprehensive report that incorporated an action plan for the focus areas. Thirteen years later, the issues raised in this strategy remain unresolved.

Many members on both sides of the house have raised concerns about the issue, from riders who have nowhere legal to ride to residents who object to the noise and pedestrians or hikers who are confronted by illegal motorbikes. It is a sensitive issue that is often heard in electorate offices, particularly in urban fringe areas. The member for Kwinana, the Deputy Premier of today, was vocal in March 2011, when he moved the motion in this house —

That the government immediately commits to implementing the Back on Track strategy and commits to funding this strategy in the 2011–12 budget.

The member made reference to the strategy as a comprehensive policy response to the issue of trail bikes. He said that the document provided a clear outline of the way to succeed. He added —

Trail bike riders obviously need somewhere to use their trail bikes.

He said that they —

... have a right to the enjoyment of their pastime ... It is appropriate for governments to provide facilities so that people can undertake this particular form of sport and recreation in a safe and regulated manner to maximise people's enjoyment and the sustainability of this particular sector of this community.

The member for West Swan, the current Minister for Transport, also spoke to the same motion in 2011. Concerned for the safety of the public, she said —

Trail bike riding is a fun thing and young people like doing it.

She said that they will do it “whether there are legal places to go or not”. That very salient point was addressed in the 2008 strategy. It stated that the issues in the report are not going to resolve themselves. Doing nothing would have serious ramifications for the general community, health and safety, law and order and the environment, local and state government, trail bike riders and the relationships between trail bike riders and non-riders. The strategy also spelt out the risks of inaction, listing environmental, social, economic and political consequences. It went on to say that attacking the issue with anything less than a comprehensive approach is not likely to achieve results.

Despite the member for Kwinana's excellent motion 10 years ago, and five years of each side having been in government, the Back on Track strategy remains gathering dust. It has not been adopted or funded, and the issues have compounded. There are thought to be about 200 000 registered and unregistered trail bikes in WA. Sales of trail bikes in the state are estimated to be 8 000 to 10 000 units a year, a figure suppressed by supply issues at present but expected to continue to grow, particularly in the emerging electric bike market. Nationally, the sale of off-road motorcycles showed a 10.5 per cent increase for the first three quarters of 2021 according to the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries.

After 13 years of inaction, there are now fewer legal places for trail bike riders to ride. In 1978, there were eight designated off-road vehicle areas in the Perth metropolitan area. In 2008, that figure had shrunk to three, with the two largest sites reduced in size. This has been a longstanding issue in my own electorate; for example, in the Shire of Gingin at the Lancelin and Ledge Point off-road vehicle areas. I understand that the Ledge Point area was to be a dedicated junior track for pee wees but is now closed. That is a great shame, because it is important to have dedicated and safe areas for juniors. Recommendation 2.02 of the strategy requested additional off-road vehicle areas. Aside from the Medina area, trail bike owners further south of the metropolitan area, in Peel and the south west, have no legal off-road options.

I offer copies of the following online petitions as a sign of continued support for change, with 1 452 petitioners calling for off-road dirt/trail bike parks in the Mandurah–Murray area, and 1 100 people calling for off-road dirt/trail bike parks in the Bunbury region.

It is no real surprise that the use of illegal trail bikes is being reported on roads, footpaths and ovals, creating a nuisance. Without the means of identification that would come with registration, there is little the police can do. Similarly, when a stolen bike is recovered, there needs to be a means of returning a bike to its rightful owner.

This was covered in the strategy, along with a recommendation that plates be replaced with a sticker system. Focus area 5 of the strategy made recommendations about the registration of trail bikes, which if it had been implemented a decade ago would have generated revenue that could have been reinvested in designated off-road areas.

Section 4 of the Western Australian Local Government Association document *Off-road vehicles in WA: Management of off-road vehicles: Information for local governments* states —

Application for new vehicle registration or renewal must be made either in person (at any Department of Transport Driver and Vehicle Services Centre or regional agent) or by post. Currently payment cannot be made online or accepted by Australia Post.

Presumably this explains the paltry registration rate of about two per cent for off-road motorbikes. Applicants have to post a cheque or money order if they cannot pay in person at a Department of Transport office. A Shire of Gingin ranger who is enforcing the no registration, no ride policy at Lancelin has no ability to offer a registration onsite. Online payment for boat registration is an option on the Department of Transport website. Surely owners of off-road vehicles can move beyond having to pay by cheque.

In 2012, the member for Kwinana tabled a petition calling for the mandatory registration of off-road vehicles as recommended in the strategy. The petition read in part —

We urge the State Government to act to ensure that off-road vehicles must be registered and have visible licence plates so that Police and other members of the community can report misuse of these vehicles.

I understand that more than \$700 000 has accumulated in the off-road vehicle trust fund, the contributions having come from registration fees. It is also my understanding that securing funds from this trust account for the upgrade of off-road vehicle designated areas is akin to getting blood from a stone. One would presume that if those paying the registration fees could see evidence of where the funds were being spent, they would be more inclined to spend that money to register their bikes. I note that since the strategy was released, fees for registration have increased from \$6 to \$40.

I call on the Minister for Local Government to implement the most obvious of the actions outlined in the strategy. Trail bike riding is a legitimate recreational activity that should be encouraged and supported by government. It is imperative that registration is moved online, that further designated off-road areas are established and that funds from the off-road trust account are used to develop facilities. I thank the minister for taking the grievance.

I seek leave to lay the petitions that I mentioned for both the Mandurah–Murray and the Bunbury area on the table for the duration of the day's sitting.

[Leave granted. The paper was tabled for the information of members.]

MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Local Government) [9.43 am]: I thank the member for his grievance. I did try to listen attentively. The member for Moore spoke very quickly.

Mr R.S. Love: Sorry, I was running out of time.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I know that the member wanted to get all the information in, but it was slightly *Mission: Impossible*, so my apologies if I repeat some of the statistics or facts that the member referred to in his speech.

Since being made the Minister for Local Government, it is very clear to me that there is a lot of interest in the off-road vehicle space. I think it is fair to say that all sides of politics, Liberal, National and Labor, have an appreciation that the off-road vehicle community is passionate, and that it is really important. Given our incredible Western Australian environment and localities, there is plenty of potential opportunity for off-road vehicles.

I want to acknowledge our guests in the Speaker's gallery. I also acknowledge the very effervescent, robust off-road vehicle community members who regularly tag me on Facebook on a daily basis. I thank them for their advocacy; it is noted, and I appreciate their passion.

At the heart of this is regulation reform, which the member for Moore mentioned, and moving away from a paper-based system. I am acutely aware that since 1978, there have been no significant amendments to regulations, and this has been the hurdle to progressing and developing the fund and getting more people to register. As we know, and as the member for Moore mentioned, there is an existing paper-based system. The intention is that the registration funds are put into an account to be used for the maintenance, upgrade and development of ORV sites. The paper-based registration system is the key hurdle. I do not think it is stating the obvious to anyone now that, in these times, everything is done online.

This is an old system and as a result we are seeing that because it is a paper-based system, people cannot be bothered registering, or for whatever other reason. As a result, and I think member for Moore mentioned this, since 2014, there has been a 40 per cent reduction in ORV registrations, but, in comparison, retail sales indicate a 400 per cent increase. The lack of registration makes it very difficult, first of all, to return stolen or lost vehicles to their owners and it is quite obvious that that is a failing of the system. Also, seeing as I am highlighting it, the lack of registration

reduces the funding in the ORV trust account that is available for the maintenance of existing sites or the creation of new ORV areas, and for the education of riders and families.

I want to say this: this is not something that I have just put to the side. I have seen some of those claims made by the community, but that is not the case. I think it is fair to say that in my first 10 months as a minister, I am a reforming minister. I brought out the biggest package for local government in 25 years. I brought out the biggest social housing package, which is a reform program that is being delivered through a range of new modus operandi. I am committed to reforming this program so that we can ensure that it is easier for people to register, we get greater compliance and we get their funding into that account. Fixing the registration system is a cross-government approach. It is well known in the ORV community that my agency is working with the Department of Transport to consider the opportunities for an electronic registration system, which is all in line with the strategy report that the member for Moore mentioned.

In terms of accessing the funds, we are trying to put a stronger emphasis, renewed energy focus and oomph into the ORV committee. The ORV committee is currently preparing a plan schedule for ORV areas to see where investment is best placed to improve the safety of various off-road vehicle sites. We want to make sure that those funds are disbursed in line with a very clear, consistent strategy that benefits the off-road vehicle community. Some money has come out; I heard the member for Moore's comment about blood out of a stone! There has been money coming out. In fact, in my first regional trip as Minister for Local Government I went to York and announced a funding boost grant to the Oliver Batista York Motocross Track, which funded earthworks, toilets and other amenities. We have also announced \$25 000 for a feasibility study for an ORV area in Rockingham. Almost \$75 000 has been approved this year to enhance the Lancelin off-road vehicle area and to develop other concept plans; I will be meeting up with the Minister for Lands very soon to progress potential sites.

As Minister for Local Government I am responsible for the act, but in terms of potential new locations for land, obviously that crosses a number of agencies. But I assure the member that I am working with the Minister for Lands to see where there is land that is potentially excess to government needs that would also suit the ORV community. I appreciate that the ORV community wants action as soon as possible, but as the minister I am committed to driving reform in this area.