

CHILD ABUSE, MANDATORY REPORTING

Statement by Minister for Community Development, Women's Interests, Seniors and Youth

MS S.M. McHALE (Thornlie - Minister for Community Development, Women's Interests, Seniors and Youth) [9.08 am]: The Premier has today tabled the Gordon inquiry report titled "Putting the picture together" and outlined the process by which our Government will consider and respond to its 197 recommendations and findings. The Government is committed to dealing with this national human tragedy, and I shall instruct my director general to work with the utmost speed and seriousness to deal with this complex issue.

Several of the recommendations refer to mandatory reporting, in particular of sexually transmitted infections. On 26 March 2002 I announced a review of the effectiveness of mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse. The Western Australian Child Protection Council was requested to manage the review and the Social Work and Social Policy Unit of the School of Social and Cultural Studies at the University of Western Australia was contracted to conduct it. The project leaders were Dr Maria Harries and Associate Professor Mike Clare. The purpose of commissioning the report was to prepare for and inform the work of the Government in relation to its consideration of the Gordon report. The terms of reference were, inter alia, to examine documentation relating to the reporting of child abuse, to identify the arguments that have been used for and against mandatory reporting and to detail alternate models for the reporting of suspected child abuse.

I received the Harries report in July 2002. It is a sound and well-researched report that summarises the world-wide literature both for and against mandatory reporting. It is a comprehensive overview of a very complex issue. The report outlines the importance of early intervention and the strengthening of protocols and arrangements between agencies and providers. It highlights the fact that in the early 1990s Western Australia was perceived to have been a leader in the development of across-government responses to child abuse generally and to child sexual abuse in particular.

The Harries report complements the work of the Gordon inquiry and must be considered in concert with that report. I thank Dr Maria Harries and Associate Professor Mike Clare for their comprehensive work. I also thank those who provided submissions to the review. The report will inform the deliberations of the Government and discussions among community and service providers in response to the "Putting the Picture Together" report. I commend the Harries report to the House and table the reports.

[See papers Nos 140 and 141.]