

OOMBULGURRI — ALCOHOL BAN

912. Mr P. ABETZ to the Minister for Racing and Gaming:

In November last year, alcohol was banned in the Kimberley township of Oombulgurri. Can the minister update the house on what has happened at Oombulgurri since that time?

Mr T.K. WALDRON replied:

I thank the member for his question. As the member said, and as members will recall, in November 2008 a liquor ban was put in place in Oombulgurri in response to a coroner's report that alcohol was a significant factor in the high rate of suicide, and other concerning matters. That ban was imposed for 12 months, and that period has now passed. I have been consulting with government agencies and the Oombulgurri community, which I visited earlier this month. The good things that are coming out include reports from the police of a vast reduction in domestic violence, which is very pleasing to see, and general alcohol-related crime over 12 months. There has also been no reported increase in the use of illicit drugs. There was some information suggesting that some of the Oombulgurri residents may have gone to Wyndham to access alcohol. On my visit there I discussed this with the police. It did happen to a certain degree, but it has now settled right down, and the police report that the number of offences in Wyndham has actually declined over the past 12 months.

While I was there, we visited the health authorities. There have been no acute alcohol-related presentations to the clinic since the ban was implemented and no evidence of increased illicit drug use. The health people are saying that people are coming back to the community for a variety of reasons, including the fact that there is no liquor. The comment from the health clinic was that staff were very positive that people were now viewing Oombulgurri as a safe community to come back to and be part of.

I suppose that when I visited, the community would have made sure that things looked all right, but it appeared to me that everything was under control. That is not to say that from time to time incidents may occur. I congratulate the people at the clinic for the work they are doing, and also the police. The senior sergeant there is Jane Gillham, who is doing a great job. Police come over on a rotation basis from Wyndham, which is a good thing because if there is a transfer of people between Oombulgurri and Wyndham the police will be aware of it. That leads to good policing and better relationships.

I advise the house that a community survey was carried out in September, and it showed that the Oombulgurri residents themselves believe that the alcohol ban has been beneficial, and they support the continuation of the ban. That was part of my consultation, and part of the reason I went up there. I also had the opportunity to meet with the new chairperson, Mr Darryl Smith, who impressed me with his enthusiasm and his desire to build on what has happened and to try to help with the social rebuilding of the Oombulgurri community. Some members may have been there; it is a lovely part of the world. Mr Smith said that the community had a way to go but it had had some governance issues, and we are happy to work with him to try to get through those. As the leader, he was also keen to extend the ban to create the extra breathing space to help rebuild the community. Just on that basis, and following consultation with police, health officials and community leaders, we have agreed to a 12-month extension of the alcohol ban at Oombulgurri. The necessary regulation for this is in place.

I will add just one thing in closing. We imposed the Oombulgurri ban for the first 12 months. The community has agreed to its continuance. Where others of the 175 communities have asked for bans, they are working well. However, I will make the point that I will not impose a ban unless I am 100 per cent sure that a community is totally committed and really wants to make it work. We have had a couple of communities that asked for this, but we could tell that they were not committed and there was no real intent. I do not want to continue with a ban in a community unless the community is 100 per cent committed. Those communities that are involved at the moment are committed, and the bans are working well.