

CORONIAL INQUEST INTO ABORIGINAL DEATHS IN THE KIMBERLEY

1213. Hon SHELLEY ARCHER to the Minister for Child Protection:

I refer to the evidence provided by Mr John Hancock to the coronial inquest in the Kimberley.

- (1) What will the government do to ensure that the Department for Child Protection is given the necessary staff and resources to ensure adequate protection for children in the Kimberley?
- (2) What programs will the government put in place to ensure that drug-affected parents do not leave their children in inappropriate care, and when will this occur?
- (3) What programs does the government have in place to ensure the appropriate recruitment and retention of child protection workers in Fitzroy Crossing to ensure the protective needs of children are met?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

- (1) Mr Hancock gave a great deal of evidence about the work of the department across the Kimberley. Much of that evidence has not been reported. He noted that, at present, the department funds 91.5 full-time equivalent staff positions in total across the Kimberley. A new management structure has been put in place to provide support to staff performing very difficult jobs. District director level positions have been put in place for both the east and west Kimberley departmental areas. Since 1 July 2006 the government has provided the department with funding for an additional 26.5 FTE in the Kimberley. To respond where allegations in particular communities have arisen, additional staff are transferred as needed. Mr Hancock's evidence also demonstrated the preparedness of the department to take protective action, and in the past 16 months the number of children taken into the care of the CEO has risen from 67 to 155 in the Kimberley.
- (2) The government provides alcohol and drug services across the Kimberley through the Drug and Alcohol Office and the WA Country Health Service. These include a community drug services team in various locations across the region and two residential rehabilitation centres jointly funded with the commonwealth, as well as a number of sobering-up centres. The Department for Child Protection also provides funding of \$4 443 410 per annum to other non-government services across the Kimberley, including family support, financial counselling, youth support, emergency accommodation and domestic violence services.

Recently, the first of two new departmental homes for children was opened in Halls Creek. These homes are available to accommodate children while their parent or parents access alcohol and drug rehabilitation services. The department also plans to implement the responsible parenting initiative to Halls Creek and Kununurra from April 2008, and from other Kimberley locations at a later date. Consultations are commencing with communities in the Fitzroy Valley regarding the future establishment of the program in that area.

- (3) The department has introduced an attraction and retention benefit of approximately \$5 500 to \$7 500 per annum for child protection and other field workers across the state. In addition to normal salary, the department's field staff in locations such as Fitzroy Crossing receive a district allowance of \$12 490 per annum - the dependant rate - or \$6 245 per annum with no dependants; a government housing provision and rent subsidy; air-conditioning and gas subsidy; five days additional leave; five days time off in lieu of after-hours disturbances and travel; and a free return trip to Perth in conjunction with annual leave. Staff in locations such as Fitzroy Crossing are supported and supervised by visiting staff from Broome. The department supports new staff, including those in locations such as Fitzroy Crossing, through the Start Up training program. Many staff working in Fitzroy Crossing are Indigenous. A working in partnership with Indigenous people training program was run in the Kimberley, which improves support to these staff. In addition to formal recruitment processes, an Indigenous workforce development officer in Perth works to attract Indigenous staff to the Kimberley through informal networks.