

CORONAVIRUS — WA RECOVERY PLAN — ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

604. Ms S.E. WINTON to the Minister for Water:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's \$5.5 billion WA recovery plan, which includes a significant investment in infrastructure and essential services in the state's remote Aboriginal communities.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house what the almost \$39 million investment in upgrading water services will mean for those living in those Aboriginal communities?
- (2) Can the minister outline to the house how this investment will create local employment opportunities for Western Australian workers?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

I thank the member for what is a very important question.

- (1)–(2) Most people in Western Australia take it for granted that they have access to clean, safe drinking water. Sadly, in Western Australia there are communities, largely Aboriginal communities, that do not enjoy that basic human right of having access to safe drinking water. That fact was highlighted in an Auditor General's report in 2015—a number of communities that do not have that basic right that certainly non-Aboriginal communities have.

In 2019, along with the Minister for Housing, we announced a commitment of \$23 million to upgrade the water supplies of three Aboriginal communities—Bidyadanga, Mowanjum and Bayulu. That was the start of the work to deal with those issues that were raised by the Auditor General in 2015. As part of the \$5.5 billion recovery plan, which I am very pleased we were able to announce last week in Broome, an additional \$39 million will go into Aboriginal communities to ensure that they can have the safe, clean drinking water that the rest of the Western Australian community takes for granted.

Mr D.T. Redman: Is that royalties for regions, minister?

Mr D.J. KELLY: The member can look at the report himself.

Mr D.T. Redman: You don't know.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Listen to the answer.

The four communities we announced in Broome last week are Ardyaloon, Djarindjin, Lombadina and Beagle Bay. They will be upgraded to the tune of \$29.5 million. An additional \$3 million was announced to do the preparatory work for three additional communities, and an additional \$12 million has been earmarked for town-based communities. The town-based communities that will benefit have not yet been identified, because an important part of this program is that we consult with Aboriginal communities before we launch an upgrade of services. We cannot just replicate what we do in the metropolitan area in what goes on in an Aboriginal community.

It was a pleasure to be in Broome to meet with some of the elders representing the four communities that I have already referred to. I would not say that there was a lot of excitement, because a lot of them said that it was about time. These upgrades of services have been long overdue. I had the great pleasure of meeting the first Aboriginal liaison officer employed by the Water Corporation based in regional WA. She is a Yaru woman who is based in Broome. She has worked with the Water Corporation for a period of time and is really happy that she is going to be working on her own country to regularise water services that other Western Australians take for granted. It is about not only clean, safe drinking water, but also creating jobs. It would be easy for the Water Corporation to simply come in, do the work and get out. The Water Corporation has a really good record in Aboriginal engagement, so a very important part of this project is to ensure, as they go through this program, that they can access local contractors and local Aboriginal businesses, and that they can upskill Aboriginal people so that there is a skills transfer and there are opportunities for development of careers and Aboriginal businesses so that we get the bang for our buck out of this project.

Mr D.T. Redman: I'm just wondering whether there are mutual obligations and investments that the government can negotiate.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Mutual obligations—this is an investment by the Western Australian government. We are not asking for a financial commitment from these communities. Is that what the member is talking about?

Mr D.T. Redman: No, I am thinking about, for example, school attendance.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The member for Warren–Blackwood is suggesting—if that is what he is saying—that we should be providing these communities with clean drinking water but only on the basis that they give something back, like school attendance: “If your kids don't come to school, we're not going to provide you with clean drinking water”! Member for Warren–Blackwood, that is one of the most ridiculous things I have heard in this place.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warren–Blackwood!

Mr D.J. KELLY: The member for Warren–Blackwood would know that we are building a pipeline from Albany to Denmark to secure the water supply of Denmark. I have not gone down to the people of Denmark and said, “In order to get that upgrade, you’ve got to behave yourself on the weekend.” That is a ridiculous proposition! Really? Seriously?

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warren–Blackwood, that is enough!

Mr D.J. KELLY: I was going to conclude my answer by acknowledging the role that the member for Kimberley has played in these decisions. She has announced that she is not going to recontest the seat of Kimberley. She has been a magnificent representative of the Kimberley. One comment I was going to make was that it must have been very difficult for her to come to this place, because some very unsavoury things have been said in this place about Aboriginal people over the years. We just had an interjection from the member for Warren–Blackwood that probably typifies some of those attitudes. The member for Kimberley has done a magnificent job in this chamber. She has had a stellar career as a representative of her people, and I personally want to pay my respects to the work she has done and I wish her well.