

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE
COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

*Second Report — Report review 2020–21: Examination of selected reports
by the Commissioner for Children and Young People — Tabling*

MRS R.M.J. CLARKE (Murray–Wellington) [10.08 am]: I present for tabling the second report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People titled *Report review 2020–21: Examination of selected reports by the Commissioner for Children and Young People*.

[See paper [815](#).]

Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE: The committee has reviewed the Commissioner for Children and Young People's 2020–21 activities and also considered two other important reports tabled after the end of the financial year. One of these reports was a comprehensive literature review of research, here and overseas, into the decline of wellbeing for girls. It was the commissioner's first Speaking Out Survey that identified the gender wellbeing gap—that is, the noticeable difference in wellbeing between boys and girls from when they enter the teenage years.

This is a valuable finding from this remarkable survey, which continues to prove its worth as a rich source of data on the health and wellbeing of our state's children and young people. The issues troubling teenage girls make for worrying reading and I am pleased to see that the commissioner's office has plans to follow up with groups of young people—females, in particular—to tease out some solutions. The second Speaking Out Survey has now been completed, with three times the number of participants as in the first survey, and the initial summary of results is imminent. I will be one, among many, reading the results with interest.

The commissioner's office completed a wideranging set of activities in 2020–21, including monitoring the impact of COVID-19, creating child-safe resources and following up the progress of previous recommendations. Disadvantage in vulnerable children requires particular attention and there is always more that could be done. We appreciate the efforts made to reach as many marginalised groups and individuals as possible, especially in a state as vast as ours. As Colin Pettit's time as commissioner comes to an end, I would like to thank him for his outstanding service over the past six years and for his passion in addressing critical issues for the health and safety of children and young people. We wish him well.

I would also like to congratulate the newly appointed commissioner, Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, an Aboriginal woman. On behalf of the committee, I thank Sarah Palmer, principal research officer; Lucy Roberts, research officer; and Carmen Cummings, research officer.

Third Report — The merits of appointing a commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people — Tabling

MRS R.M.J. CLARKE (Murray–Wellington) [10.10 am]: I present for tabling the third report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, titled *The merits of appointing a commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people*.

[See paper [816](#).]

Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE: Western Australia has around 40 000 Aboriginal children and young people, the third biggest population after those in New South Wales and Queensland. Those two states have appointed an Aboriginal person to act in the interests of Aboriginal children and young people, and so have Victoria and South Australia, whose Aboriginal children number around 25 000 and 19 000 respectively. Those states have established that having an Aboriginal advocate can help to address the higher levels of disadvantage experienced by these young people. Aboriginal children and young people in WA face the same type of entrenched disadvantage; in fact, many face additional challenges because of where they live. WA has the highest number of Aboriginal people living in remote or very remote regions—38 100 compared with 36 600 in Queensland. This is 38 per cent of WA's Aboriginal population, while the Queensland figure represents only 16 per cent of its Aboriginal population.

The four states with an Aboriginal commissioner or guardian have outlined their reasons for making the appointment. There have been calls for all states to have such a position, as well as for an Aboriginal commissioner at a national level. WA has not appointed an Aboriginal commissioner, even though there have been recommendations to make such an appointment for two decades. Various arguments have been put forward for why the current arrangement, which allocates responsibility for all children to the Commissioner for Children and Young People, is acceptable. But it is worth noting that the commissioner himself firmly believes that there should be an Aboriginal commissioner. Outgoing commissioner Colin Pettit has worked hard to connect with Aboriginal children and young people and the adults from their communities, but he is the first to admit that an Aboriginal person in the role could do it better and someone should be given the opportunity. Aboriginal children and young people need to be heard loud and clear to have a better chance of a brighter future.