

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS COORDINATING COMMITTEE

268. Mr F. ALBAN to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs:

I note that the minister has responsibility for the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act 1972, and that the act requires there be a body known as the Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee. Is the Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee operational; and, if so, what is its role or purpose?

Dr K.D. HAMES replied:

I thank the member for the question.

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Kwinana!

Dr K.D. HAMES: Members might think it is a rather tame question to ask whether there is an Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee, where it is, and whether it is operational. Yes, it is operational. The Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee is a meeting of the directors general of all the departments that service Aboriginal communities in particular, and it includes the heads of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Treasury, the education department, the police, housing—all those core components that look after Aboriginal affairs. Therefore, it is a very important committee and its members sit down to try to better coordinate government services into remote Aboriginal communities. Members will think it is a good idea and wonder how long it has been around. The 1972 act requires that there be such a body. It does not say that the government may have it or that the government can have it if it likes; the act states that there will be a committee made up of these people doing this role. What happened to the committee that we had in place when we were last in government in 2001? It was there for a while; the previous government had it for a bit. The previous government combined the committee into a new body headed by the Minister for Indigenous Affairs called the Aboriginal Advisory Committee in December 2001. That committee lasted until October 2003 before the government chopped the damned thing. Members opposite chopped the committee, so something required by the act has been absent for five years.

For five years there has been no committee, although the act requires there be one.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: You are wrong.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I am not wrong. We have just re-established that committee, which has not been in existence for five years. We have established that very important committee to make sure that we do the work. This is a reflection of this government's commitment to get on and make sure that we look after Aboriginal people in remote communities. The first thing the former Premier did when he got into government was to gut the Department of Indigenous Affairs in its service of remote Aboriginal communities. We are now trying to get the department reorganised.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: That is not true.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Yes, it is true. We are trying to get the department properly organised and functional. The member knows that that is true because of the comments in the Hope report on the Department of Indigenous Affairs during the term of the previous government. The member knows exactly what he did. He messed up Aboriginal affairs. The previous government sat and did nothing for eight years, and it is about time someone got back in and fixed it.