

CORONAVIRUS — STATE OF EMERGENCY

509. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:

I refer to comments attributed to the Premier in media reports that he is looking at what can be done to have a different regime to manage the pandemic. Will the Premier please explain what he means by this statement? Is it standalone legislation or will he use the Public Health Act 2016, which the opposition has called for, to transition WA from a state of emergency?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question.

As members know, over the course of the last two and a half years, the government has had in place state of emergency legislation to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. That legislation has allowed for a whole range of measures to be put in place and, in particular, it has provided the State Emergency Coordinator with the authority for a range of measures. They could use that authority, and the authority of the State Emergency Management Committee, to put in place directions that have allowed for certain measures across the community to control the spread of the virus. That mechanism has been available to us over this period of time. The pandemic is now in a different phase. Although we continue to have community spread of the pandemic—we have had so for the last four or five months—we have, perhaps, the highest vaccination levels in the world so we have much more modest measures in place. We have had to use a legislative tool to do that and we have used the existing legislation. We are looking at drafting new legislation that provides for perhaps a step down from the state of emergency that will still allow for compulsory mask wearing in hospitals, rules around remote Aboriginal communities if necessary, mask wearing and vaccination requirements in healthcare and aged-care settings and those sorts of initiatives using another legislative instrument that will be more specifically used for the COVID-19 pandemic. I make the point that the existing measures in place are quite modest and mild; it is just that we have to have a legislative instrument to have them so we are looking at what other legislative instrument can address this issue. If we can bring it in and have it drafted, then we will. If we cannot, we will look at what other measures are available