

FINE DEFAULT STRATEGY

392. Mr A.P. O'GORMAN to the Minister for Justice:

Will the minister outline any progress on the state government's fine default strategy?

Mr R.F. Johnson interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Hillarys to order for the first time.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO replied:

I think the member for Hillarys knows what is coming, so he does not want to hear the answer.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Why don't you talk about a more serious issue?

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: Is the member saying that keeping people out of jail is not a serious issue?

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Hillarys to order for the second time. I suggest to the minister that he not encourage interjections.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: I will strongly refrain from responding to interjections.

This is a very important issue. I raised in Parliament some time ago the issue of fine defaulters in prison, and I want to report to the Parliament where we are on the matter. When I came to Parliament, approximately 1 300 people had arrest warrants for fine defaulting. At this point, 516 of those warrants have been resolved and arrangements have been put in place to collect some \$900 000 of those fines. The reduction in the cost to the community in this case, calculated by the number of days in prison, amounts to some \$9 million a year. I have a wonderful graph to show members. It shows the number of fine defaulters in prison.

An opposition member: It's upside down!

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: Unfortunately, it is not! As of this week, only 30 people are in jail for not paying fines. That is a great outcome.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Leschenault and the member for Nedlands to order.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: On the weekend the member for Hillarys made the comment that we were letting people out of prison to make room for fine defaulters. As usual, he got it wrong.

Mr R.F. Johnson: That is what you were doing.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: The member said that last weekend. The fact is that we are addressing the issue. I congratulate the special team that has been put in place to look at this issue. This is a real issue. Every person on that list is a family member who is no longer in prison for not paying fines. I am sure that the Parliament would want the government to pursue that policy. I will be happy on the day that I can say in this place that there are no fine defaulters in prison. That does not mean that those people are not paying their debt to society. We have in place arrangements whereby \$900 000 in unpaid fines will be collected. Those who cannot pay their fines in money terms will do community work. The most important point is that these people do not go to jail, the university of crime, and learn other tricks that create even more devastation in the community. It is more important that we as a society understand that people should not be put in jail for not paying fines. If the courts wanted to send people to jail for the offence, they would have sent them to jail in the first place. We need strategies. I look forward to the support of the opposition when I ask the federal government to allow us to garnish either the social security payments or wages of these people to pay for their fines, because it is important that they pay their debt to society. I congratulate the departmental people who have been working strongly on this issue.

Ms S.E. Walker interjected.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: I did not hear the member's comment.

Ms S.E. Walker: I will tell you later.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: Okay. It is important to ensure that people who are fined pay their debt to society. At the peak, some 160-odd people were in prison for not paying fines. That number has been reduced, but not through the soft option. They are being forced to pay their debt to society by way of a fine, by doing community work or by coming to an arrangement with the department. That is a great outcome for society and something that we should all support.