

INDIGENOUS HOUSING - COMMONWEALTH FUNDS

556. Hon MARGARET ROWE to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Housing and Works:

I refer to an article in *The Weekend Australian* of 17 June 2006 titled "Revamp for Aboriginal housing", which stated that in the last financial year, the Australian states and territories had failed to spend \$141 million that had been allocated to them by the commonwealth government for indigenous housing. Will the minister advise the house why the Western Australian government failed to spend \$58.22 million on indigenous housing that had been allocated to it for that purpose by the commonwealth government for 2004-05?

Hon ADELE FARINA replied:

On behalf of the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Housing and Works, I thank the honourable member for some notice of this question.

The commonwealth government is the major contributor to the under-expenditure described in the article. Western Australia has never received the commonwealth and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission component of the Aboriginal housing and infrastructure funding pool on time - that is, 1 July of the relevant financial year - since pooled funding commenced in 2003-04. In 2003-04, funding was received in December 2003; in 2004-05, funding was received in September 2004; and in 2005-06, funding was received in March 2006. Western Australia took over the program planning in 2005-06. Prior to that, the commonwealth's program planning was inadequate on a yearly basis, with no scope for forward planning and no certainty of ongoing funding. In addition, many of the projects identified by ATSIC and the commonwealth proved to be unviable, resulting in delays while other projects were identified. In reality, any under-expenditure has been offset by the value of works already committed; that is, tenders let. Indeed, the value of projects committed and carried forward into the next financial year significantly exceeds the nominal under-expenditure.

Consistent with its past appalling practice, the commonwealth government is yet to approve and release funds for Western Australia's indigenous housing and infrastructure operational plan for 2006-07, despite it being sent to the commonwealth minister nearly a month ago and the department advising that agreement had been reached at officer level on the list of proposed projects that will deliver housing and infrastructure improvements to remote indigenous communities in Western Australia. The commonwealth needs to release the funds agreed to under its agreement with the state and stop paralysing the state in its efforts to improve the living conditions of Aboriginal Western Australians.