

BLACK DOG RIDE

Statement

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [9.47 pm]: As some honourable members would know, last Sunday—two days ago—a number of Black Dog rides were held across the length and breadth of Australia. I had the great pleasure and privilege of not only riding in, but also launching the Black Dog Ride that started and finished in Denmark in our electorate, Mr President. Some honourable members will know about the Black Dog rides. They were started in 2009. Their object is to raise awareness about depression and suicide prevention. The term “black dog”, which also lends its name to the Black Dog Institute in Australia, comes from Winston Churchill’s famous adoption of that phrase to describe his depression. It is a very evocative phrase, capturing as it does the blackness of depression but also the sense in which we can use the word “dog” as both a noun and a verb, so people who suffer from depression often talk about the fact that they are “dogged” by feelings of darkness and sadness.

I first encountered the Black Dog rides a few years ago in a cafe in Subiaco. A person I had often seen having breakfast there came over and talked to me. It turned out to be Jack Michael, whose wife, Anna Michael, was in some very sad sense the founder of Black Dog rides because Anna committed suicide some years ago. The Black Dog rides were started by Jack’s friend Steve Andrews, who, in his own account, says he found himself at the funeral of his best friend’s wife and decided at the wake that something needed to be done to raise community awareness about depression and to start a national conversation so that people with mental illness feel able to talk about it, to work together to remove some of the trauma and stigma that attaches to depression and to seek support, both in funding research and showing some sense of solidarity for people who suffer from depression and their families.

Steve Andrews started on his own Black Dog Ride, which was a long motorbike journey around Australia. He raised \$34 000 for the Suicide Call Back Service. He took with him a little soft black dog toy; those members who are engaged with social media would have seen the picture I posted of some of the black dogs who came with us on the ride on Sunday. In Denmark, 116 motorbikes and about 150 people took part in the ride and we covered about 250 kilometres.

I will share a little more about what the Black Dog Ride does. The inaugural Black Dog Ride was in 2009 and Steve Andrews has built it into quite a massive national event. He has coordinated 73 Black Dog Rides so far, bringing hundreds of people together to foster a culture of mental illness awareness. Now, nearly six years after the rides started, people who have participated in the rides have raised more than \$1.7 million for mental health services nationwide. The impressive thing about the Denmark ride is that all the money raised from it stays in the Denmark region; every cent of that money goes into providing mental health first aid and providing local organisations with much-needed resources in the great southern area.

The list of events that have happened since 2009 is truly impressive: \$34 000 was raised in 2009 for the Suicide Call Back Service; in 2010, in the south west of WA, 250 riders raised \$8 000 for Lamp Inc; in 2010, more than 200 riders on the Black Dog Ride to the Red Centre raised \$80 000 for the Black Dog Institute; in 2011, 400 riders participated in another Black Dog Ride and raised \$10 000 for Lamp; in 2011, another Black Dog Ride to the Red Centre raised \$161 000 for the Black Dog Institute; and the list goes on. These people love riding—they find a great deal of pleasure in riding—and they have linked their pleasure in riding with a very significant fundraising opportunity to help people who suffer from depression.

Hon Lynn MacLaren is asking me if I rode; I do indeed ride, but on Sunday I rode as a pillion passenger for the 250 kilometres.

Hon Lynn MacLaren: That counts!

Hon SALLY TALBOT: After I registered, the organiser rang me and asked whether I would launch the ride by speaking to people after the breakfast before we set off, and I was very happy to do that. I told him that I may end up as a pillion passenger, and he encouraged me to ride because he said a number of police officers had registered for the ride so it would be quite slow! I am not sure whether that was entirely true but everyone had a great time.

We started at Koorabup community park in Denmark at about seven o’clock in the morning. The Lions Clubs nationally are Black Dog Ride community partners. The Lions Club did us proud at the breakfast; it truly is the best breakfast you will ever have. At seven o’clock on a beautiful autumn morning, down by Denmark River eating bacon and egg sandwiches that have been just freshly cooked by valiant Lions Club members, it is the best breakfast you could ever have. We then went by the most beautiful circuitous route, all over sealed roads I might say—a tribute to the Shire of Denmark—to Mt Barker, where we had morning tea. Of course, we had worked up an appetite on the first 70 kilometres. Again, it was prepared by the Lions in Mt Barker. I should add that we also had three local shire councillors riding with us: one of the organisers was Councillor Roger Seeney

from Denmark; the Deputy Mayor of Denmark, Kelli Gillies, also followed me as a speaker to launch the ride; and we also had a Mt Barker Shire of Plantagenet councillor riding with us. We then went on through the Porongurup Range to Albany. I should pay special tribute to the police in Albany and Denmark who escorted us through Albany. We rode all the way around the city centre, which was a great sight. We got a huge amount of support from people who were coming out of the shops and welcoming us to town. We then took the lower road back to Denmark and ended up at the Denmark Boating and Angling Club where, once again, the Lions fed us.

Hon Ken Travers: That's a change from what the Romans used to do.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Absolutely. It was a really fantastic day. Everybody there said that it was one of the best-organised rides they had ever been on. The marshalling was superb. We must have had 20 or 30 marshals all the way around the 250-kilometre route. Some of them were riders and some of them took their vehicles. The community spirit was fantastic. I felt very proud to be engaged with the riders and with the cause. I emphasise again that this was not just in Denmark; it was all over Western Australia. Tragically, members will have read that a Black Dog rider was killed on the Kalgoorlie run, which was very, very sad. Such a fantastic effort was put in by all these people who were prepared to come out and do something that they love, but do it for such a good cause. I think it is fair to say that we showed solidarity with sufferers of depression and with the families of people who suffer from depression. Above all, we showed that these people are not alone. I want to particularly pay tribute, not just to all the Lions Club members, who, as I say, are community partners of Black Dog, but particularly to four people who did an enormous amount to make this ride so successful: Rob Woods, Chris Sainty, Tony Farrell and Councillor Roger Seeney. It was a fantastic event and it did great credit to all the people who participated. Thank you.

House adjourned at 9.55 pm