

CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT (RECOGNITION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE) BILL 2014

894. Ms J. FARRER to the Premier:

This afternoon in private members' time, the bill that I introduced to this Parliament, which seeks to recognise in the state's Constitution the first Western Australian Indigenous people, will be debated and, I hope supported, by all members in this house. I ask the Premier: will the government support my bill this afternoon and allow it to come to a vote?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

It is not within my control as to the passage of legislation.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Let me make some comments. The issue of the recognition of Aboriginal people within the Australian Constitution, and indeed within state Constitutions, is not a new issue. I commend the member for Kimberley for bringing it forward again. I spoke to the member —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Don't be patronising!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It is not patronising at all.

The SPEAKER: Member for Midland, I call you to order for the third time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I spoke with the member for Kimberley probably several weeks ago, maybe a month or so ago, and I made the point that the government in principle supported the recognition of Aboriginal people within our Constitution. I also made the point to the member for Kimberley that the state was in the position of finalising the agreement within the Noongar people, covering Perth and the south west, and a native title settlement, which in terms of the numbers of Aboriginal people involved is some 20 000, and in terms of the geographic area covered is Perth and the entire south west, and also recognising the total value of that settlement, \$1.3 billion, including cash payments, land, funding for economic enterprise and the like, and that the government had worked, along with the South West Land and Sea Council, for over two years on that. It was reaching conclusion and, indeed, early this week I made the comment that the agreement had basically been agreed to and was now going out to various parts of the Noongar community for authorisation meetings. I am optimistic that they will be successfully concluded around March. In that context, I made it clear to the member for Kimberley that it was the state's intent to honour the commitment given to Noongar people and that the bill that was introduced as a draft bill in February this year would be passed, hopefully with the support of all members, and that that would be the first act in recognising, in this case, the Noongar people specifically as the traditional owners of the Perth and south west region. I made that very clear and, indeed, made statements —

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mandurah!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I made that very clear. I indicated to the member for Kimberley that it was the government's intent that that should proceed first.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I indicated to the member for Kimberley that it was the government's intent that that should proceed first and that we were prepared to work in a bipartisan way —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I said that we were prepared to work as a government in a bipartisan way, including the member for Kimberley, and give due recognition to the fact that she has brought this forward. We remain willing to do so, but it is the government's intention that the Noongar recognition, which has been widely negotiated and widely canvassed and has been subject to wide public commentary and debate, should proceed. The offer remains. I do not doubt the member for Kimberley is absolutely genuine in what she is seeking to achieve —

Mr B.S. Wyatt: But you're not; that's the problem.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Well, I am.

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Mr Speaker, I am trying to answer the question.

The SPEAKER: Member for Victoria Park!

Mr M. McGowan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I make the point that the government is, in principle, in support —

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Mr Speaker, I give up. It is pointless.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mandurah, I call you to order for the first time.