

CORONAVIRUS — REMOTE COMMUNITIES

197. Mr D.T. PUNCH to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs:

I refer to the state government's response to COVID-19 and its potential impact on Western Australia's remote communities. Can the minister outline to the house what advice has been given to residents in Western Australia's remote communities in working to stop the spread of this virus?

Mr B.S. WYATT replied:

I thank the member for Bunbury for that question. As I have said in this place this week, remote Aboriginal communities are potentially quite vulnerable to COVID-19 if there is an outbreak of infection. Aboriginal people have higher rates of respiratory illnesses and are a vulnerable group. I have made comments about large gatherings at funerals. As a result, we have, just today, evoked powers under the Emergency Management Act 2005 and issued a direction that deals with two groups of people. A person who is outside the boundaries of a remote Aboriginal community must not enter upon any land within the boundaries of a remote Aboriginal community, and a person who is within the boundaries of a remote Aboriginal community must not move outside those boundaries except for specific circumstances, such as for medical care or obtaining essential services. We also made it clear that this does not apply to roads within those communities so that people can still get around individual communities. Heads of government agencies, community corporations, native title entities and land councils are being informed of this direction. Importantly, we are now working with remote Aboriginal communities to develop their community pandemic plans that are applicable to each one. This is a very important thing to do because, as I have said, Aboriginal communities are vulnerable. Yesterday, the Minister for Health said in a debate during private members' business that remote Aboriginal communities are quite safe if we can keep COVID-19 out of those communities. We will continue to work very hard to ensure that our Aboriginal citizens across Western Australia have the protection that we can give them. I do not take this step lightly. I emphasise again to those Aboriginal people who are considering moving vast distances between communities that this is not the time to do that. Large funerals should not be conducted, certainly over the coming six months. I will continue to emphasise that point because, ultimately, all that would do is expose many people—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people—to the potential spread of COVID-19.