

**ACTS AMENDMENT (ABORTION) ACT 1998, REVIEW**

*Statement by Minister for Health*

**MR KUCERA** (Yokine - Minister for Health) [9.13 am]: On 22 May 2002, I advised the House that when it was completed, I would table the report based on the review of the Acts Amendment (Abortion) Act 1998. I am pleased to advise that the review is now completed, and, accordingly, I wish to table the report.

As I outlined in my previous statement on this matter, the purpose of the review is clearly stated in the Act. Section 8 of the Act requires that I carry out a review of the operations and effectiveness of the provisions of the Health Act 1911, and the Criminal Code as it relates to abortion, as soon as practicable after the expiration of three years from the commencement of the Act. Given the express terms, the review committee did not consider objections to the practice of abortion but, as required, focused on the operation and effectiveness of the Act.

Abortion is a complex and contentious issue. Indeed, there are widely divergent and frequently irreconcilable views about abortions within most societies, and individual views are often the strongest. Against such a turbulent backdrop, I am pleased to advise that the review committee has concluded that the legislation has provided the framework to achieve the objectives originally envisaged by Parliament when the Act was introduced.

It is of great significance that the legislative provisions in the Health Act 1911 have achieved the aim of making safe abortions available to Western Australian women. There have been no prosecutions for the unlawful performance of an abortion since the Act was introduced, nor have any charges been laid under the Criminal Code for alleged breaches of the legislation.

Based on its findings, the review committee concluded that there is no need for legislative amendment. However, it found that a number of improvements could be made in the administration and delivery of abortion support services, and in pregnancy educational services and programs, which are aimed at the prevention of unplanned pregnancies. The suggested improvements are contained in the report's 23 recommendations, all of which I accept and endorse. The committee suggested that the Department of Health, as the public sector agency principally assisting the Minister for Health in the administration of the Health Act 1911, take the responsibility for overseeing and implementing the recommendations.

In summary, the recommendations in the report focus on assessing the availability of relevant counselling services and developing strategies to meet identifiable gaps, including the possible expansion of the role of nurses; monitoring of health information about abortion that is provided to medical practitioners to ensure that it is comprehensive, current and effective; ensuring that information available to women seeking an abortion is culturally appropriate and recognises any special needs that can be identified; enhancing the monitoring and reporting of abortions in Western Australia; developing strategies to reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies in specific target groups; ensuring that service quality is monitored, assessed and maintained; and reviewing options for security arrangements around abortion clinics.

I pay sincere thanks to those who participated in the review committee, and I commend the committee for its thorough and sensitive approach to this issue.

I table the "Report of the Review of Provisions of the Health Act 1911 and the Criminal Code relating to Abortion as introduced by the Acts Amendment (Abortion) Act 1998".

[See paper No 1628.]