

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan - Minister for Local Government) [10.00 pm]: I move -
That the house do now adjourn.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases - Adjournment Debate

HON ROBYN MCSWEENEY (South West) [10.01 pm]: Today I asked a question about 60 cases of sexually transmitted diseases that had been reported previously. The minister in answering said that the figure of 60 originally provided by the Minister for Health in response to a question asked in this place on 4 April was of notifications and not children. That is wrong, because the answer referred to 60 children. One child was aged less than 10 years, and the other 59 children were aged between 10 and 14 years. Fifty-two children were Aboriginal. One of those children was aged less than 10 years, and the other 51 children were aged between 10 and 14 years. That was in a four-month period, so it certainly was not notifications.

There were some extremely worrying trends for me in this response. One was that all cases of children under 14 years of age with a diagnosed sexually transmitted infection, and all those aged between 14 and 16 years of age where the STI may have been acquired through abuse are required to be reported. Who distinguishes whether any of those 14 to 16-year-old children had acquired an STI because of abuse? How does anyone know? Who works out whether that has occurred? The answer was that the Department of Health does not report to the Department of Child Protection for children aged 14 and over where an STI has been acquired through non-coercive sexual contact with their peers. The most worrying thing for me is that in relation to investigations of the 22 children referred by the Department of Health, the answer stated -

In a recent referral involving a 13-year-old having consensual sex, staff have not yet been able to interview the child but efforts to do so are continuing.

This is an answer from the Minister for Child Protection, who has now left the chamber. I was hoping she would be here to listen to this, because her ministerial staff have given the response. Does the Department of Child Protection now say that a 13-year-old child who has sex with somebody is having consensual sex? I would have liked to ask the minister whether she believes that 13-year-olds can now have consensual sex. What is the Department of Child Protection up to when it starts saying that 13-year-olds can have consensual sex?

Of those 22 children referred by the Department of Health, four are currently in the care of the CEO. The minister has given the answer for 22 of the children - a pretty airy fairy answer - but there were 60 children involved. Fifty-two of those children were Aboriginal.

I notice from a response to a question without notice that the senior child protection field workers located at Kalumburu will be given an extra \$16 794. That is presumably because Kalumburu is a remote community. What are these people getting that extra money for? Is not Kalumburu the place where a lot of Aboriginal children have been sexually interfered with? Is not Kalumburu the place that has been in the headlines lately? The child protection field worker located at Wirrimanu, and the two field workers at Warburton, will also be given an extra \$16 794. I hope these people are earning that extra money. One would hope the department is working overtime, particularly in Kalumburu, where all this trouble has occurred with Aboriginal children being preyed upon.

The other extremely worrying trend is the large number of children in foster care who have been abused. In December 2005, Gwenn Murray handed down her report into 57 children who had been abused in foster care. A select committee was formed to inquire into, and report upon, the adequacy of foster care assessment procedures. I chaired that committee. I would have thought the Gwenn Murray report, and the report from that committee, would have led to an improvement for children in foster care who have been abused. However, that does not seem to have been the case. In the first five years of this Labor government, some 390 allegations were made by children who are wards of the state. Eighteen months later, 182 children in foster care have made allegations of abuse. Fair enough, some of the abuse may have taken place prior to that time. However, I doubt that. I think that most of those 182 allegations would have been made within that 18-month period. The cases of 39 of the 95 children in foster care who have made allegations of abuse are still being investigated. This is 182 children who have alleged abuse after that 18-month period in which 59 children had been found to have been abused. The system has not improved. This government is saying that it will split the department into two and put in all this extra money. However, I have the facts. Of the children who have been abused, 95 are in foster care, and 182 are in the care of the chief executive officer of the department. That should not be happening now, after those two reports have been handed down, because the system was supposed to have been tightened up. The report of the committee that I chaired made 23 or 24 recommendations. The Gwenn Murray report also made many recommendations. Another report is the Ford report, which was given to the Premier in January and was tabled

in March. That report was meant to make things better. Eight or nine reports were produced before that 2005 period.

All these reports were produced, but nothing has changed. In fact, on these figures, it has become worse. What is happening with the foster care system that has caused 95 children to allege abuse? The Minister for Child Protection said in response to a question that I put to her that the department is reviewing the definitions of abuse in care. If the department is going to downgrade those definitions so that the government will not be so embarrassed about the statistics, it should look out, because I will be watching every step of the way. This government will not downgrade the definitions of abuse. There are four or five categories of abuse. Each one of those categories should remain, and each is as severe as the other. No one set of abuse should be put above another. The government has done that with sexual abuse.

Lake Pleasant View - Albany Heritage Reference Group Aboriginal Corporation - Adjournment Debate

HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (South West) [10.10 pm]: During the recent three-week parliamentary break it was my pleasure to attend a ceremony of great significance to Nyoongah people living in the great southern and Albany regions. At that ceremony, a unique piece of land that is greatly valued as a heritage place and is quite beautiful was saved and returned to its traditional owners. The piece of land in question is located some 50 kilometres east of Albany at Manypeaks and is known as Lake Pleasant View. It is a rock amphitheatre that covers about six hectares, and it was bought under the Indigenous Land Corporation's new cultural acquisition program. A three-year lease arrangement has been negotiated with local Nyoongah people. The site is to be managed by the Albany Heritage Reference Group Aboriginal Corporation and, hopefully within three years, a full transfer of this site and its ownership will go to that Aboriginal group located on the south coast. Culturally, this area is highly significant. Some exploration of hearth works indicated that the site has been inhabited for about 12 000 years

Hon Graham Giffard interjected.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Quite, but 12 000 years is a heck of a long time by our standards. There was continuous habitation of this place until about the early 1900s.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: How did they work out that it was used 12 000 years ago?

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: More than likely with something like radiocarbon dating. I am not sure of the exact nature of the scientific exploration that was undertaken, but it is certainly a ceremonial and meeting place of some significance.

The event went ahead basically because of enormous cooperation between Aboriginal groups and the state government. It was a clear demonstration of the Carpenter government's commitment to the reconciliation process. The building of a better future for Western Australians is something that the Carpenter government prides itself on. One of the main beneficiaries of this project, apart from local Aboriginal people, will be the kids from Manypeaks Primary School who will learn much about Aboriginal culture and history.

As well as Minister Roberts, who was present at the ceremony, I acknowledge the hard work of staff of the Department of Indigenous Affairs; namely, Mr Anthony Galante, who is the boss of the Department of Indigenous Affairs in Albany, Mr Harley Coyne, Mr Jay Cook, Ms Vernice Gillies and Mr Robert Reynolds. I also mention Aboriginal elder Mr Jack Williams and natural resource management staff from the South Coast Regional Initiative Planning Team. A strong commitment to building a better future and a vision to match that future is something that traditional landholders in the great southern have pursued for quite some time. I have every confidence in the future and in the return of even more of their ancestral lands to those people as time goes by. I wish them well in their future endeavours.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 10.14 pm
