

WA SENIORS WEEK — WA SENIORS AWARDS

Statement

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [6.36 pm]: I rise very briefly to draw attention to the fact that this week is WA Seniors Week. The 2016 Australian census reported that nearly 480 000 people aged over 60 are living in Western Australia. That constitutes nearly one in five Western Australians.

This Seniors Week and before that I have had the privilege of meeting a number of inspiring individuals. On Sunday, 22 October I attended the WA Seniors Awards, which are presented by the Council on the Ageing in partnership with the Department of Community Services. There were six worthy finalists whose contribution to our community is as diverse as the demographic we colloquially refer to as “seniors”. Those contributions included volunteering time and expertise to encourage seniors to be physically fit, fundraising for community organisations, preserving local history, working with non-English-speaking people, supporting small businesses and volunteering for the Red Cross.

I want to congratulate all the finalists for the 2017 WA Seniors Awards. The three from the metropolitan area were Philip Paddon, Maureen Felton and Quentin Smythe, and the three nominees for the regions were Lesley Balinski, Harold Proud and Gwen Wells. I want to particularly acknowledge Philip Paddon, who was the overall winner of the Juniper Lifetime Achievement Award for his work with the Seniors Recreation Council of Western Australia, in particular the annual Have a Go Day event, and his many efforts in encouraging seniors to live healthy and active lifestyles. The overall winner of the regional Juniper Lifetime Achievement Award was Lesley Balinski from Katanning, who has been a tireless volunteer in her community through her involvement in the Katanning Harmony Festival and the Katanning Dramatic Society, and the work she has done with culturally and linguistically diverse people. All of those finalists deserve our thanks for the work they do in the community. They are indeed a source of wisdom that has been built up over many years of experience. They are compassionate, wise and diverse, and they deserve our respect.

All of us in this place will join their group, some sooner than others! We have a seniors demographic now that is unlike that of any other time in our history. People are living longer and because of that longevity there comes diversity across the economic, social and health conditions of the individuals themselves. It will become increasingly difficult to speak of seniors as a homogenous group, which has been our practice to this day. Today’s seniors are experiencing pressures not felt by their predecessors. English is a second language for a growing number of seniors, which means their communication with those outside their immediate families is a challenge. More seniors are living on their own as a consequence of a partner dying, which in turn brings about dramatic and emotional changes in their own personal lifestyles. Seniors are also working longer and contributing financially to the economy like no time before. They are also in some cases, and perhaps increasing cases, contending with adult children living at home while also faced with the challenge of caring for their own ageing parents. I also want to draw attention to grandparents rearing grandchildren due to the personal difficulties of their children. The diversity of seniors in WA poses important policy and program challenges for us all; however, whatever responses we develop must put at the heart seniors themselves. They must continue to be consulted and engaged. Seniors make a valuable contribution to our society in ways that can be felt on a very personal level and more broadly through their involvement in an ever broadening spectrum of activities.

Today I also had the pleasure of attending the Seniors Recreation Council of WA’s Have a Go Day, a LiveLighter event. The event, in its twenty-fifth year, was held at Burswood park. I want to acknowledge Hon Mick Murray’s contribution to opening that event and participating. He is a rock star among that group. I have to concede popularity when I see it! He went over very well and is to be commended. I will not make a habit of praising ministers; I just want to make that very clear! But once I see something that is worth praising, I will draw attention to it.

Over 150 different organisations were included at the Have a Go Day event today. There were demonstrations and activities such as tai chi, dancing, music and entertainment. The MG Car Club of Western Australia was there. I witnessed firsthand the huge turnout for the event and the obvious interest by those attending in the multitude of activities. I congratulate all involved in bringing together such a comprehensive event for seniors. It was an event that I am very happy to say was enthusiastically embraced by all who attended.