

STOLEN WAGES — REPAYMENT

**360. Hon SALLY TALBOT to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs:**

There appears to be an omission in the budget papers in that there is no mention of any funding allocated to the repayment of stolen wages. Given that the government has been sitting on the report and recommendations for nearly three years, how can the minister account for this omission?

**Hon PETER COLLIER replied:**

There has not been an omission; it has not gone to cabinet yet. We are still considering the stolen wages issue.

**Hon Sally Talbot:** This was your big chance. You missed it. You have blown it.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** In this budget we have committed \$167 million —

**Hon Sally Talbot** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! The first four questions of today have been followed by a consistent series of interjections by the people who have asked the questions. Ask your question and then wait for the minister. Give the minister an opportunity to provide the answer.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** The legitimacy of this government in terms of Indigenous affairs does not rest on the stolen wages issue. It is a significant issue for a number of people, which I acknowledge.

**Hon Sally Talbot** interjected.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Can you just listen! You are getting as bad as Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich. I will start calling you Ljil!

Several members interjected.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Where is Hon Ed Dermer?

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Yesterday I had to invite a member to look at standing order 116. Perhaps a few other members should have a look at that.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** I really want to answer this question. I am very conscious of the stolen wages issue. The stolen wages issue is a very vexed issue. Firstly, the time frames that we are talking about are in the significant past. Trying to ascertain exactly who is eligible for the stolen wages —

**Hon Sally Talbot:** Have you read the report?

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Will you be quiet, woman!

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! That is a classic example of an unruly and unparliamentary interjection prompting a response that is equally unruly and unparliamentary. If the minister directs his answer through the Chair, he will not have to look at any other member when he provides his answer, which will be recorded very studiously by Hansard.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** I apologise to Hon Sally Talbot. It was unruly and I apologise. But it was a little frustrating because I was getting constant interjections. I need Hon Sally Talbot to understand that I am very conscious of the stolen wages issue, but I can assure her that my “big chance” does not emanate from the fact that there was no funding for the stolen wages in this budget.

I will go through a few things. At this stage, we have allocated \$167 million over the forward estimates for Aboriginal incentives and programs, more than \$62.5 million of which will be allocated in 2011–12. I will go through a few things that we have allocated for Aboriginal people in this budget. They include \$13.1 million for the expansion of the regional justice strategy in the Kimberley and the Pilbara, \$1.7 million in support for the Clontarf colleges, \$300 000 in support for the transition of the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Committee to a new self-sustaining model, and it goes on and on. We have funded more than a dozen programs. What I will say to Hon Sally Talbot is that we will consider it. As I am sure she understands, it is a very, very difficult issue. It is very difficult trying to ascertain, firstly, who is eligible and, secondly, how much they are eligible for. The suggestion that we are ignoring this issue is unfounded.

**Hon Sally Talbot:** You’re going to have to fight to get it on the cabinet agenda, though, and that’s not what you’re doing.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** How does the member know whether I am fighting for it?

**Hon Sally Talbot:** I can read between your lines.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Absolutely not. I am sorry; Hon Sally Talbot is way off target on that issue.

I will conclude. The reason it is not in the budget is that it has not been considered. I had a discussion with Hon Kim Hames about this very issue today and will continue to have discussions. I will meet with someone from the Aboriginal community tomorrow to discuss this issue.