

## **WHITBY FALLS HOSTEL**

### *Statement by Minister for Health*

**MR KUCERA** (Yokine - Minister for Health) [12.14 pm]: Since 1989 there have been eight reviews and reports on the future of Whitby Falls Hostel and its residents. The report presented to me by the Whitby Falls Review Committee on 18 October 2001 was the ninth. It is the Government's intention that this report will finalise debate on the role of Whitby Falls in the State's mental health program and end years of uncertainty for residents, their families and staff.

I sincerely thank Martin Whitely MLA for chairing this review, and the members of the review committee, who, despite their differences in outlook, remained open to different points of view and put the needs of residents first. I also pay tribute to the staff at the facility and the families of the residents, who have been cooperative and supportive of the review.

I believe that, in the long term, a farm-based facility like Whitby Falls is no longer the best way to support and rehabilitate people with a psychiatric disability. When Whitby Falls was established, it was expected that most residents would spend the rest of their lives there. Contemporary rehabilitation occurs in the community, with people being assisted to engage in a range of activities. This requires access to transport, work, social activities and other services. The relative isolation of Whitby Falls hinders community integration. It is also no longer appropriate to provide long-term housing for people with a psychiatric disability that is institutional in nature and isolated from the community.

With that in mind, the remaining residents will be offered home-like accommodation, rehabilitation and support services in the community. However, I emphasise that no resident will be forced to leave Whitby Falls. For those residents who do not wish to relocate, it is the Government's intention to provide new, modern, purpose-built residential accommodation on the west block. The State Government has set aside \$500 000 to upgrade the Whitby Falls property. Whitby Falls will therefore remain as a therapeutic facility with altered accommodation to provide a modern standard of care. The residents will remain in the main block until alternative accommodation is available to ensure that any disruption is kept to an absolute minimum.

The Government intends to retain the main block of Whitby Falls for the time being, with a view to further consideration on an appropriate use. It is immediately clear that some land will not be needed, and I agree with the review's recommendations that the tracts of land known as the north and bush blocks be divested, for the Government to determine their future use. The review found that the main farm block of the Whitby Falls site could be used for the rehabilitation of people with alcohol and other drug problems. This proposal needs to be considered in the light of recommendations of the Community Drug Summit. Before making a final decision on this, I will ask the Department of Health to consider this and other possible uses of the main block.

The Government's decision acknowledges changes in the treatment and rehabilitation of people with psychiatric disabilities while protecting the interests of the remaining residents. After many years of concern about the future of the site, I believe we have now delivered certainty to those residents who wish to continue calling Whitby Falls home. I table the report of the Whitby Falls Review Committee.

[See paper No 1247.]