

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES - SANDERSON REPORTS

1138. Hon SHELLEY ARCHER to the minister representing the Minister for Indigenous Affairs:

- (1) Does the minister support the view of Lieutenant-General John Sanderson that Aboriginal people in Western Australia face similar disadvantage to some of the worst Third World countries?
- (2) Is the minister aware that many houses in Indigenous communities do not have simple working infrastructure such as running water, electricity and functioning toilets?
- (3) What additional resources will the minister provide to ensure housing and infrastructure in Indigenous communities are upgraded to a standard that is considered acceptable?
- (4) When will the government implement the recommendations in Lieutenant-General John Sanderson's report?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH replied:

I thank the honourable member for this question. On behalf of the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, I provide the following response.

- (1)-(4) More is being done to improve Indigenous communities' housing and infrastructure but clearly there is more to do and it will take some time. Since 2001, this Labor government has been committed to improving Indigenous health, housing and infrastructure.

The commonwealth's approach of just building and walking away from Indigenous housing has contributed to the current inadequate state of some remote housing and infrastructure. As the commonwealth walks away from its areas of historic responsibility, the state government is investing more in Indigenous housing and infrastructure than previously. Since July 2006, the Carpenter government has allocated an additional \$74.3 million for additional and improved housing - \$15 million to Halls Creek; \$35.4 million for housing and infrastructure in town-based communities; and \$24 million for the delivery of power, water and sewerage to remote communities.

As the member may be aware, Indigenous housing in remote communities and town-based communities is provided under an agreement between the commonwealth and state governments known as the Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Bilateral. With the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the commonwealth government has been increasingly withdrawing from the delivery of services it has historically provided. From 1 July 2006, the commonwealth government limited its funds under the bilateral agreement for the Remote Area Essential Service program, which provides water, power and sewerage services to remote Indigenous communities. From 1 July 2007, the commonwealth government withdrew its funds under the bilateral agreement from town-based communities.

To improve outcomes for Indigenous communities, the Department of Indigenous Affairs is coordinating a directors general group of Indigenous affairs. The group is addressing immediate, medium and longer-term logistical, resource and service delivery issues within Indigenous communities using a whole-of-government approach.

The Department of Indigenous Affairs is being restructured into two specific areas. The new area of the department will lead in developing Indigenous policy, economic development and determining and measuring that strategic outcomes are being met. This is an innovative response that will lead to real and measurable changes to the wellbeing of the state's Indigenous people.

Sustainable change will require the communities, government of all three spheres and the private and non-government sector to work together strategically and cooperatively. The Carpenter government is dealing with the issues affecting Indigenous communities and will continue to do so. We welcome the contribution of many to proactively deal with these significant and entrenched issues.