

## **HOMELESSNESS — BROOME**

### *Grievance*

**MS J. FARRER (Kimberley)** [9.45 am]: My grievance this morning is to the parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Mental Health. I rise today to speak on the urgent need for this government to intervene and resolve the inexcusable homelessness in Broome. The concern for homeless people in Broome has escalated for many years. In February 2007, local community members formed the Residents Action Group, which met regularly to discuss how to solve this issue. Despite community efforts, years later the situation has not improved. Some Broome locals would say that homelessness in Broome is at an all-time peak. Homelessness in the Kimberley has reached crisis point.

This issue crosses many ministerial portfolios and this government has to take the responsibility. I call on this government to immediately take action to address Broome's homelessness, itinerant problems and lack of affordable housing. Broome currently has many people living at Male Oval, Kennedy Hill, One Mile community, the mangroves, the Chinatown area and other sites around town. I believe a taskforce must be immediately established to ensure that a specific location is secured to provide a safe environment for people visiting Broome and who are currently sleeping rough at Sam Male oval and other locations around town.

The job of the taskforce would be to find a suitable location, funding source and model for a site and appropriate facilities. We need to provide alternatives for people visiting town, especially from remote communities, so that they have greater dignity and there is less disruption to businesses, particularly in Chinatown. It is intended that the taskforce would include government agencies and key stakeholders such as Yawuru traditional owners, the Shire of Broome and other representatives.

Almost without exception the homeless people in the Kimberley are Aboriginal. Although the government is happy to have traditional owners open their buildings and welcome them to country, the simple fact is that our traditional owners do not have the simple dignity and right to have a roof over their heads. A range of compounding issues contributes to this crisis of homelessness. There continues to be a general sense from community members right across the Kimberley that there has not been the expected follow-through of government services to deal with the problems of alcohol dependence in the towns and communities that have alcohol restrictions in place. The "Return to Country Report" on page 10 states —

This survey interviewed 102 Indigenous people in various locations around Broome who identified as a 'visitor'. The results found that the following locations were most represented in the visitor population: Fitzroy Crossing, Looma, Bidiyadanga, Balgo, Wankatjunka and Kalumburu.

Over half of all respondents (56%) were aged between 20-40, with another 25% over 55.

Despite the Department of Aboriginal Affairs conducting this survey, this government continues to ignore the situation. Reasons people are leaving their own communities to travel to Broome and are experiencing homelessness include, but are not limited to: lack of exit accommodation from prison; lack of exit accommodation from drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres; the cost of accommodation; no visitors hostel in Broome; and a lack of accommodation for people living with mental illness. People come to Broome to visit persons in prison, to gain access to health facilities, and to attend funerals and cultural events and conduct family business.

It is essential that real solutions are implemented for everyone concerned. I say to the government that we do not want a bandaid solution to this issue. We need serious investment and commitment. Broome is one of the fastest growing towns in WA and a tourism hub. We should not have people living in these conditions. It is a disgrace and dangerous for the people involved.

I call on the government to show leadership on this issue and resolve this appalling situation and provide safe accommodation for the people in my electorate. This morning I urge all members to truly think about the hundreds of people in my electorate forced to sleep rough in overcrowded homes and in parks and under mangrove trees because this government refuses to deliver the essential funding to improve living conditions. This concern falls within the government's responsibilities, so I ask it to take action to resolve this issue.

**MS A.R. MITCHELL (Kingsley — Parliamentary Secretary)** [9.50 am]: I thank the member for Kimberley for raising this important issue. Last week was Homeless Persons' Week, and a number of incredible stories and a lot of information came through many media, which was very useful. Homelessness is a very complex and critical issue, unfortunately affecting too many people in our state. We have learnt that because our state has been reasonably successful, with very favourable living conditions and job availability, rapid population growth has resulted. In 2013 alone, there was a population increase of 71 000 in our state. With that increase in population, sometimes the infrastructure does not grow at the same rate. That is one of the issues that has impacted on homelessness through increases in prices and a declining number of places to stay. Something that

has become evident about homelessness in recent times is that there is not one simple form of homelessness. The way people present as homeless nowadays is quite different and quite varied. Many people probably do not understand the extent of that variation in homelessness.

I can assure the member that the state government is committed to addressing the cycle of homelessness. It is certainly not something that we are proud of and we will continue to do a lot of work on the issue. The Department for Child Protection and Family Support is the lead agency in dealing with homelessness, though obviously it needs to work with other agencies such as housing, drug and alcohol services and mental health. It is a collective effort, but the Department for Child Protection and Family Support is the lead agency. It has joint commonwealth and state funding through the national affordable housing agreement and the national partnership agreement on homelessness. Through the partnership on homelessness the state has worked successfully with the commonwealth government and other jurisdictions, and we have an assurance that that will continue through to 30 June 2015.

In addition, the state government has provided over \$600 million in the past four years to address the not-for-profit community sector's immediate financial needs—much of the work that is done is through non-government organisations—to ensure that the sector is sustainable through this period of growth and the need for additional services. In 2012–13, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported that more than 21 000 Western Australians accessed specialist homelessness services. We are certainly not proud of that figure, but accommodation was provided to 74 per cent of those people, and 87 per cent of people who required support to maintain their housing tenure were also assisted. We believe that we have made some progress, but we recognise that there is still much more to do.

I would like to specifically talk about the member's electorate of Kimberley. Besides the Kimberley, specific work is required in other areas, but let us now focus on the Kimberley. As the member said, the nature of homelessness in the Kimberley is different from that in other parts of the state. That needs to be looked at in a different way, and some work has been done in that area. The more traditional forms of homelessness may not be reflected in the Kimberley. The member mentioned visitors to Broome. That probably occurs a little in Perth, but is very evident in Broome. That makes it more difficult, because as the member said some of those people come in from communities where they have houses. When they come to another place for various reasons, they do not have a place to stay. They may not be looking for a permanent house, but rather for other services. It has an impact because as they visit other families, this creates overcrowding, which makes it difficult for families in houses in Broome. Some stay a short time; some will stay for a much longer period, depending on the purpose of the visit, and then antisocial behaviour results, which impacts on the families. Although the member did not mention it in her speech, that can also be compounded in the wet season when the roads along which they travel back to their communities may be impassable.

The initial plan was to provide through some local strategies intensive wraparound support for visitors to Broome from surrounding remote communities. Because the presence of visitors may result in overcrowding, it is important to provide that wraparound support to people individually and to certain households. Overcrowding may also impact on tenancies, so local support is provided for those people to ensure that they do not lose their tenancies. The Department for Child Protection and Family Support provides approximately \$4.4 million towards service in Broome and the West Kimberley to address a number of issues. It also participates in the very active Broome homeless action group which meets on a six-weekly basis to come up with specific strategies to deal with issues in Broome and the West Kimberley.

I repeat that we believe that access to safe and secure housing is a basic human right. The government takes this very seriously, and will be doing all it can to continue to improve the situation.