## Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 27 November 2013] p6659c-6660a Hon Dr Sally Talbot

Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People — First Report — "2012–2013 Annual Report"

Resumed from 21 November.

Motion

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I move —

That the report be noted.

As a member of the committee, I would like to make a few comments about this report. I was very pleased to see this report tabled. Members will have noticed, of course, that because the new committee was formed on 22 May when this Legislative Council was sworn in, the report that we have tabled is brief because it covers only 40 days of work. During that time, I understand that we met four times, which I think shows that all four of us are very dedicated to the task of providing an adequate service to this very important committee.

I wanted to add to the comments that I know were made in the other place when this report was tabled. I note that the Deputy Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Hon Robyn McSweeney, made a short statement when she tabled the report in this place last week. However, I think it is a particularly pertinent moment in which to acknowledge that the commissioner, whose work this standing committee oversees, recently announced she was resigning from her position. I think it is highly appropriate that we note her resignation. We should also note the great sadness and regret that has been expressed by a large number of people in the Western Australian community about the fact that Michelle Scott has decided not to continue in that position.

Michelle Scott, of course, was the first Commissioner for Children and Young People in this state. She was appointed in December 2007 under the act, which was proclaimed in 2006. It is a huge job. As the commissioner, she has responsibility for overseeing the wellbeing of about 560 000 children and young people in Western Australia. The act defines children as being people under the age of 18, but the commissioner's task—clearly, because it involves children and young people—includes people up to the age of 25. Michelle Scott has spent the last six years or so doing a tremendous amount of work representing the interests of children and young people to the Parliament to whom she, as a statutory officer, reports. She reports directly to the Parliament. Going through the work that she has done, even in the 40 days covered by this annual report, we were cognisant, in setting out the work the committee wanted to do for the next few years, of the enormous amount of work that Michelle Scott has done since December 2007. Just going through her list of achievements is really quite extraordinary. The most recent report that she released was part of the "Speaking Out" series. The report released this month is titled "Speaking Out About Disability". In preparing this report, she consulted with over 200 children and young people around the state aged between eight and 16 years; it really is a most extraordinary report for those people who have got the time to read it and I am sure we all have the interest in reading it.

In October 2013, just a month ago, the previous publication in the "Speaking Out" series was about living in regional and remote Western Australia. A year before that—my memory is that it was very early in 2012—the commissioner released a "Speaking Out" report about reducing alcohol-related harm to children and young people. Those three "Speaking Out" reports form the basis of a very substantial body of political and policy decision-making that will resonate over the rest of the life of this Parliament. I think, however, that when we look back at what the commissioner's role has achieved in the first few years, and which formed the basis of the work that the standing committee does, there are some very remarkable things Michelle Scott has been able to do during this relatively short time. She has set the bar extraordinarily high for measuring the performance of future commissioners.

Those members who are familiar with the act will know that it is quite a long and specific process to appoint a commissioner because, of course, there is a statutory obligation to consult children and young people on that appointment. I know that public sector appointments take some time anyway to go through the motions in order to tick all the boxes, but this is a particularly thorough process. I note that it needs to be started very soon if we are not to have a protracted period in this state with a commissioner who is appointed to only an acting position. I do look forward to hearing at some stage a report, perhaps, from the Attorney General, who has carriage of the act as well as the statutory review that is currently underway, about how he sees that process of appointing a replacement for Michelle Scott. For those of us who are interested in policy affecting children and young people, the monumental achievement of this commissioner is the development of the wellbeing monitoring framework project. That, of course, as many members would know, was set out in three key reports. The first was the state of WA's children and young people.

## Committee interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

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Sitting suspended from 4.15 to 4.30 pm