

ECONOMIC STIMULUS PAYMENTS — CENTRELINK BENEFICIARIES

135. Mr P. ABETZ to the Minister for Racing and Gaming:

People in my electorate of Southern River are particularly concerned about the federal government's economic stimulus payments to certain Centrelink beneficiaries that are due on next Monday, 8 December. In light of the view that these payments may result in increased sales of alcohol and a possible increase in alcohol abuse in Western Australia, can the minister please explain the strategies the government has put in place to manage this issue?

Mr T.K. WALDRON replied:

I thank the member for his question. The federal government's economic stimulus package will result in thousands of dollars going to pensioners and other welfare recipients around Australia on 8 December.

Mr P.B. Watson: So, you don't want the stimulus package now?

Mr T.K. WALDRON: Just let me answer the question.

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Albany!

Mr T.K. WALDRON: Mr Speaker, these payments could amount to as much as \$5 000 or \$6 000 a family. I understand that it is about \$1 000 per child and \$2 100 for a couple. In most cases, these payments will be well-received and spent wisely—I have no issue with that. However, the government is concerned, as I am, that the increased payments could lead to an increase in alcohol purchases and therefore alcohol abuse for those at-risk members of our community. That is a real concern. I wanted to make sure that our licensees out in the community were reminded of not only their rights and responsibilities when serving liquor to individuals, but also their obligation to ensure safety in our communities. Accordingly, I asked the Director of Liquor Licensing to convene a meeting between the Australian Hotels Association, the Liquor Stores Association of WA, Clubs WA and the police in order to put in place some strategies to make sure that people in the industry are advised about the possible outcomes. That meeting took place and I am pleased that an agreement was reached on a voluntary code of practice, which outlines the measures licensees may adopt to ensure that the flow of alcohol served within that period is managed responsibly. The strategies include limiting the type of liquor sold; the containers, or number of containers, in which liquor is sold; and the days and times liquor can be sold et cetera. Decisions on any restrictions will be made by the individual licensees who will work closely with their industry bodies, police and communities. I have confidence that the majority of licensees will do a good job in implementing the voluntary code of practice. However, situations could arise in which, for example, bottle shop customers might be subject to extra scrutiny and the sale of some products could be restricted at that stage. Licensees have been advised to utilise the authority they have under the act to ensure that liquor is sold responsibly.

Local police have met with industry representatives and the Director General of the Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor, and I am grateful for their cooperation.

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: I will tell the member for Albany a story. I come from a town called Narrogin. Two months ago a difficult situation was developing in that town.

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: The member for Albany should listen to me to learn what happened. The local police, community leaders, including the local Nyoongah leaders, and representatives from the department came together and made a decision. I applaud them for that decision because they headed off what could have developed into a nasty situation that could have resulted in people being injured and the community being put at risk. That illustrates what we are doing here; we are being proactive by introducing a preventive measure for a situation that does not arise very often.

Mr P.B. Watson: What do they do with the money? Do they put it in a bank?

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany!

Mr T.K. WALDRON: I am disappointed in the member for Albany because he is not getting the gist of what I am saying. This is a preventive and responsible measure, and most members in this house would agree with me.