

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

First Report — “Annual Report 2012–13” — Tabling

MS M.M. QUIRK (Girrawheen) [10.09 am]: I present for tabling the first report of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee entitled “Annual Report 2012–13”.

[See paper 944.]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: This report is reasonably concise because the committee was first convened in May this year following the election. I take this opportunity to thank staff Sarah Palmer and Dawn Dickinson, who have advised the committee very professionally and competently and have managed to take up the current inquiry with rigour and enthusiasm. I also thank my fellow committee members: the deputy chair, the member for Morley; and the members for Armadale, Collie–Preston and Balcatta.

The report mentions a report of the previous Community Development and Justice Standing Committee entitled “The Toll of Trauma on Western Australian Emergency Staff and Volunteers”, which related to post-traumatic stress in first responders, specifically emergency workers. Because this report was tabled in October last year, we did not get a formal response from government prior to the last state election. The new committee, convened after the state election, has adopted that report and sought a response from government. Participating in that inquiry was one of the high points of my time in Parliament. We made some valuable recommendations. The newly convened committee certainly looks forward to the government’s response and the implementation of what we consider to be pretty significant recommendations. We were certainly made very conscious of the fact that some of our emergency workers bear the scars of post-traumatic stress many years after the major incidents in which they were involved.

Following the state election, the committee also undertook an agency review and called on the Western Australian Electoral Commission to give evidence on its management of the recent state election. A number of issues were discussed during that inquiry. They are not set out in any great detail in the report but I want to mention a few of the issues that arose. There was discussion about whether actions taken by the Electoral Commission had any effect on the level of informality at the 2013 election and also on voter turnout. It was apparent from that hearing that although the Electoral Commission had some positive outcomes with voter turnout, much more still needs to be done about informal voting. There was some discussion about whether the television advertisements featuring the song *You’re the Voice* were effective. It was suggested that these ads were pitched at the 18 to 25-year-olds who may never have been enrolled in the first place. It was considered questionable whether using John Farnham was effective in getting that particular cohort to enrol.

There was also some evaluation of the success of the additional full-time booths in the Kimberley and the Pilbara. The Electoral Commission extended its outreach to fly in, fly out workers, with booths set up at the airport for people to vote early, which was particularly successful and in demand, as was the high increase in early voter turnout. I suspect that the committee may need to do more work on why that occurred and what we can do to facilitate that.

Some evidence was also given on the effectiveness of the voter enrolment card, which had a tear-off section. There was not a high take-up of those cards, judging by the number of people coming to polling booths with that tear-off section. Although it included a barcode and a mobile phone QR code, there was absolutely no use for the technology at the polling booths equipped with it. In fact, the only time they tended to be used by Electoral Commission staff was when they came across a name that was difficult to understand or pronounce and they needed to clarify the spelling of names so they could look them up manually.

There was also some discussion about informal voting and whether the outreach to culturally and linguistically diverse groups by the Electoral Commission was sufficient. Prior to the election, the commission gave an undertaking to the committee that it would contact a number of ethnic organisations. We heard evidence that it wrote to 46 organisations but only two organisations asked for a presentation for their members from the Electoral Commission prior to the election. The committee was given a copy of the letter that was provided to those organisations. It was two pages long and, frankly, incomprehensible. I am surprised there was even that take-up of the offer. From that evidence, it is certainly my view that additional work needs to be done. Similarly, there was evidence that the communication by the Electoral Commission with the community was not optimal. There was a deluge of information but it was not well set out and clear. As I said, there was not a high usage of the electoral card.

The other issue that was briefly canvassed during that evidence was whether there should be a cap on election campaign spending. That might be something that the committee could look at in the future. Finally, there was some discussion about the proliferation of election signs and the fact that the Electoral Commission received a number of complaints that these are quite often placed in locations that have a tendency to distract drivers. The

evidence that we received from the Electoral Commission was that it reported these complaints to Main Roads. I think we are all pretty clear from the last state election that Main Roads did nothing about those signs. There was also evidence about the maintenance of the role and the fact that that was somewhat problematical.

It is obviously too early to say what our recommendations from the report on our current inquiry into custodial arrangements in police lockups will be when we table it at the end of November. The travel that is listed in the report relates to travel to the Kimberley and the wheatbelt to inspect police lockups and talk to various stakeholders. We look forward to that report being tabled in this place at the end of November.

MR I.M. BRITZA (Morley) [10.17 am]: I wish to make a couple of comments on the report of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee. The current chair and I were part of the committee that concluded the inquiry into the toll of trauma on Western Australian emergency staff and volunteers. I found this particular inquiry very thought-provoking and sometimes tender, very revealing and certainly sensitive. I certainly feel that the inquiry has not concluded. I felt honoured to be a part of it. Things were revealed that we never thought possible—things that were encountered by those on the front line. I trust that our government will respond accordingly.

The former chair and the committee members were extremely diligent in getting to the real matters of concern. I was particularly proud and honoured to be a part of that inquiry. I must acknowledge the former research officers in this inquiry, Dr David Worth and Ms Jovita Hogan, for their unwavering and outstanding support and encouragement of our committee during that time. The inquiry into our preparedness for the 2012–13 bushfire season was excellently administered and was definitely worthy of the time we spent in bringing it to the house. I look forward to hearing the government's response to that.

Our current inquiry is of utmost importance as well. I am confident that it will prove to the house how vital it has been to study the outcome of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody's recommendations. I look forward to the presentation of this report and state publicly the honour and respect that I have for our chair, the member for Girrawheen, and also my colleagues who have contributed to this current inquiry. Finally, to our research staff, I give my thanks and gratitude to our former principal research officer, Mr John King, and to our current principal research officer, Ms Dawn Dickinson, and of course my appreciation goes to Dr Sarah Palmer, who has along with all our staff been of great value to our committee.