

SCOUTS WA — 2018 YOUTH AWARDS

Statement

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [5.47 pm]: This is something of a variation on a theme, since it concerns the young people of this state. It was my great privilege, on 25 February, to attend the Scouts WA 2018 youth award presentations. I did so with my colleagues Hon Michael Mischin, Hon Bill Marmion, Terry Healy, the member for Darling Range, and Minister Mick Murray.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Terry Healy is the member for Southern River.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Southern River? Thank you; my east metro and south metro geography require some correction. I will take that advice on board.

Hon Darren West: You're from the western suburbs.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: No, I am from the northern suburbs.

During the presentation of awards, Ms Rebecca Mawson and Mr Richard Pilgrim received the Baden-Powell Scout Award, which is the highest scouting award available to youth in Australia. In order to receive this award, a scout has to display physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual development of the very highest standard. It is indeed a very rare and significant achievement, and I subsequently conveyed the congratulations of the parliamentary Liberal Party to both those recipients. In addition to those two individuals, 64 young people were recognised with an Australian Scout Medallion, which is awarded for completion of a leadership course, leadership activity and competition of the adventure accord. These young people were drawn from the metropolitan area and also from Australind, Geraldton and Liddelow. It was a broad representation. It was most pleasing that so many young people in our community engaged in useful activity, displaying leadership qualities that were recognised and will stand them in good stead for their futures. In addition, 21 Queen's Scout certificates were awarded, mainly for achievements in the areas of personal growth, leadership development and community involvement in outdoor activities.

As these awards were being presented, it was my hope that the Minister for Sport and Recreation was paying particular attention to the fact that outdoor activities and engagement are broad and universal concepts.

I draw attention to that fact only because of the government's decision in December last year to deny access to KidSport vouchers to children who prefer to engage in scouting, guiding and cadet-like activities. Why is that important? It is important because not every child from a disadvantaged background wants to pursue a competitive sport, and that might be for a range of reasons. After the awards presentation, I was approached by a gentleman who recounted to me a story about his granddaughter who was born with a congenital bladder condition. It made the pursuit of competitive sport far more difficult, challenging and embarrassing for her, but she found an opportunity to engage in community activity and teamwork in a useful and healthy way through participation in the guides. These are the children we are talking about. It appears to me that the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, I think more so than the minister, has taken a particular view about who should be eligible for these vouchers and who should not. I asked a series of questions in this place about what the scope of this program is designed to do. On Thursday, 22 March I asked the Leader of the House representing the minister what the program was designed to do. The minister replied —

- (1) It is to increase opportunities for young people aged five to 18 years from financially disadvantaged families to participate in sport and recreation in a club environment. The objectives of the program have not changed.

They may not have changed, but they have certainly been reinterpreted to foreclose opportunities for children who are not particularly interested in competitive sport and are looking for a healthy outlet to engage in a constructive, affirming developmental activity. This will impact on Scouts WA in a significant manner because between 18 and 20 per cent of scouts on its books have taken advantage of the KidSport voucher scheme. Scouts WA is obviously very concerned about what that will mean for not only the welfare of those children and their future development, but also its organisational capacity to continue to deliver programs, so much so that it has now applied to the Australian Sports Commission for registration as a nationally recognised sporting body in the hope that the ex-Department of Sport and Recreation—now the department of cultural industries and sundry other activities and pursuits—will take a more positive view and continue to provide that kind of eligibility to effectively the scouts, girl guides and cadets who are interested in remaining engaged. I do not think that is an appropriate course of action. It is a course of action that it has been forced to undertake and, in so doing, it strikes me as being somewhat ridiculous that Scouts WA has had to develop protocols to comply with World Anti-Doping Code guidelines. We are talking about children aged between five and 18 years. Nevertheless, that is the avenue that Scouts WA feels it has had no other option but to pursue.

All I wish to do is continue to encourage a constructive dialogue between the minister and Scouts WA. I have no reason to doubt the minister's integrity. I think he wishes to work towards a solution. At the moment, he has

gracefully extended the transition period, which will effectively increase the eligibility period until 30 November, when the guillotine was originally going to come down on 1 July. I think that at very little cost the minister has a great opportunity to reconsider this policy decision and ensure that 750 scouts, perhaps 200 guides and perhaps 30 or 40 cadets can continue to access the KidSport voucher scheme and give their future development a bit more certainty. I encourage both sides to continue that dialogue.