

REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICE BOARDS, ABOLITION

612. Mr BOARD to the Minister for Health:

I refer the minister to an article in today's *South Western Times* about the minister's decision to replace five regional health boards in the south west with a single board consisting of one person - the Minister for Health.

- (1) Does the minister agree with the outgoing chair of the Bunbury Health Service, Mr Lui Tuia, that the Government's actions, as quoted in the paper today, "reeked of cowardice and discourtesy" and would disadvantage the south west communities?
- (2) Will the minister now categorically rule out the abolition of regional health service boards in other areas of the State?

Mr KUCERA replied:

- (1)-(2) This is an interesting question. The other day, after the furore in this House about country boards, I examined the situation that occurred in 1998 when the great southern health service was created. How was it created? Interestingly, it was created by the amalgamation of a number of boards in that area, which was led and driven by members opposite who now seek to denigrate and run down their services yet again. The Opposition has been talking down those services since the day we formed Government. Effectively, the Opposition has talked down its own health service. This is the kind of management to which members opposite refer. Last week during the Merredin by-election the Government was roundly criticised by members of the Opposition about the wheatbelt board. I will give members figures relating to the wheatbelt board that members opposite talked down. The Leader of the Opposition went to Merredin specifically to talk down the wheatbelt board. I will refer to the central health area of Western Australia and the Avon central health service.

Mr Board: Why does the minister not read this letter? He should be honest.

Mr KUCERA: I will refer to that later. In 1995-96, this board, about which there was so much criticism in the wheatbelt, had a budget that up until today has increased by 69 per cent.

Mr Board: We did that.

Mr KUCERA: Yes, the former Government did. I am sure that the member examined the activities of the board. The activity of that health service in the same period has declined by 19.9 per cent. There has been a 47.5 per cent decline in acute bed days, and a reduction in admitted patients activity of 40.7 per cent for private patients and 29 per cent for public patients.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Murdoch.

Mr KUCERA: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Government said all along that it expected country boards to manage properly. Although there was a 47 per cent downturn in patients, there has been a 69 per cent increase in costs. This is about getting the costs of the health service back on line.

Dr Gallop: Who was responsible for that?

Mr KUCERA: Exactly. I have not seen the *South Western Times* or the letter the member is referring to. In the report released by the Bunbury task force, one of the key agencies that recommended the amalgamation of all health services in the south west was chaired by none other than Mr Lui Tuia. His board was part of the key recommending groups that said this amalgamation should take place, specifically because of the report commissioned by those opposite - the 2020 report. The report does have some good things in it, one of which was that there was a need for the amalgamation of those services. That fine report, put out by the member for Bunbury's group, also stated that the major stumbling block to good management of health services in the south west was the five individual boards. Mr Tuia himself said that. I ask why there is this sudden change, and where is the credibility. I spoke to Lui Tuia the other day and thanked him for the excellent work he and his board have done. However, it is now time to draw a line in the sand, move on, reform and create the best health service in this country.