

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

HON NORMAN MOORE (Mining and Pastoral — Leader of the House) [9.16 pm]: I move —

That the house do now adjourn.

Kimberley Repatriation Plan — Adjournment Debate

HON SHELLEY ARCHER (Mining and Pastoral) [9.16 pm]: I want to talk tonight about the Kimberley repatriation plan. The demise of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in 2004 and the subsequent mainstreaming of Indigenous policy and programs have resulted in a number of important Indigenous programs ceasing or falling short of their objectives. One program of particular significance is the Kimberley repatriation project. Due to funding from ATSIC being cut in 2004, the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre was forced to sever the employment of a cultural heritage and repatriation officer and roll back the repatriation project. This has resulted in the remains of more than 100 Indigenous people and 600 secret and sacred objects being stored in a shipping container in Fitzroy Crossing, known as the Fitzroy Crossing Keeping Place. I personally find this situation disturbing and morally embarrassing for both the state and federal governments and all members of Parliament. Currently, the temporary Fitzroy Crossing Keeping Place stores more than 100 human remains and 600 secret and sacred objects. An additional 20 Kimberley remains are held by the University of Sydney, and approximately 10 remains repatriated from Sweden are being held at the National Museum of Australia. It is probable that other remains held in Europe will also be returned in the near future. KALACC has been lobbying the commonwealth government for more than four years to continue its repatriation plan to return to country the ancestral remains and secret and sacred objects of Indigenous people that were taken from the Kimberley many years ago by whitefellas.

KALACC is a dynamic and proactive Indigenous organisation that is leading the country in reconciliation activities. Unfortunately, its work is being hampered by ongoing government ignorance and neglect. Recently I received information advising that remains held in Austria were scheduled for repatriation to Australia. However, after four years of asking again and again for commonwealth assistance and receiving no constructive response, KALACC has requested that the National Museum not take receipt of the remains from Austria, or indeed any future and further remains from overseas, until the commonwealth provides to KALACC the resources that it requires to return to country and to community the items currently held in Fitzroy Crossing. It is KALACC's position that it would be crazy to bring additional remains back from overseas at this time because of the incapacity to appropriately handle them. It simply cannot do any more with its current limited resources. Added to this deplorable situation is the likelihood that remains repatriated to the Kimberley in 2004 are needed to be returned to the National Museum for possible matching with other remains received from Sweden in 2007. Personally, I find this situation embarrassing both domestically and internationally. Can members imagine how the Indigenous communities in the Kimberley feel knowing that the remains of their ancestors are being shipped here, there and everywhere, and are ending up in a shipping container in the Kimberley? What must the museums of Europe think about us not taking the care and responsibility to look after our own Indigenous ancestral remains?

I am aware that the former state government provided the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre with funding to prepare the Kimberley repatriation plan, and it is very appreciative of that. However, it also believes—and I share its thoughts—that the current state government also has a role to play in implementing any future plans for repatriation.

The Kimberley repatriation plan calls for \$300 000 to fund the repatriation of 120 human remains from the Fitzroy Crossing Keeping Place back to country. The plan provides for a full breakdown of the costs of repatriating human remains to communities such as Bidyadanga, Kununurra, Derby, Bardi, Noonkanbah, and islands off the central Kimberley coastline. I commend KALACC for its outstanding efforts of repatriation to date, and I really do beg and implore the state government to support its plans to finally have these remains returned to country and sited in a proper and final resting place.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 9.21 pm