

REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES — CLOSURES

891. Mr B.S. WYATT to the Premier:

I refer to the Premier's statement in *The Weekend Australian* in which he stated that he wanted to close down many remote Aboriginal communities because the state cannot service them.

- (1) On what basis will the Premier decide which particular communities will be closed?
- (2) In respect of those many remote Aboriginal communities that the Premier intends to close, where does he propose that the dislocated people will be accommodated?
- (3) Will this not create more social issues when people are driven away from their communities?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

(1)–(3) As members are aware, the commonwealth took the decision to cut its funding for essential services.

Mr B.S. Wyatt interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Victoria Park!

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Midland. I call you to order for the first time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: As members would be aware, the commonwealth took the decision to cease its funding for essential services to remote Aboriginal communities. We are very disappointed with that decision. The reality is that there are 274 remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia with a total population of around 12 000 people. Many of those communities have five, 10 or 15 people. This is a very complex and difficult issue for the Western Australian government to handle and we have no option but to handle it because the commonwealth has vacated the territory. It has walked away —

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Armadale, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The state will not have —

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bassendean, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Previous commonwealth governments created this issue of encouraging Aboriginal people to go back onto the lands that helped establish these small and remote communities. This will be a process of transition. The state government has not yet worked out how it will handle this, but we accept that we have no option but to accept the responsibility of dealing with this situation. It will cause great distress to the Aboriginal people who will move. It will cause issues in regional centres and towns as Aboriginal people move into them; there is no doubt about that. However, what is the issue in the Kimberley where most of these communities are? There are high rates of suicide, and people with a poor education, poor health and no jobs. Although this will be a very difficult issue to handle, this Liberal–National government will take it on, and we will do it to the best of our ability.

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: We will not laugh, as members opposite are. It is a huge social issue. It is a huge economic issue. It is a huge health issue.

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Midland, I call you to order for the second time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Members opposite may snigger, but they might look at their lack of effort in dealing with the issues of Aboriginal people. This government will take it on, as difficult as it is, because this is the biggest social issue that this state faces.