

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS — ABORIGINAL PROCUREMENT POLICY

**356. Ms M.M. QUIRK to the Minister for Finance:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's landmark Aboriginal procurement policy that provides greater opportunities for Aboriginal businesses in securing government contracts—something that was never implemented by the Liberal and National Parties.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on how this policy is delivering unprecedented support for Aboriginal businesses and helping drive greater economic benefits to the Aboriginal community?
- (2) Can the minister advise whether he is aware of anyone who has questioned the importance of this policy?

**Dr A.D. BUTI replied:**

(1)–(2) I thank the member for Landsdale for this question and also for her interest and expertise in this area. It is certainly a landmark policy. Before I go on to the policy, a newly minted Liberal member in the upper house, Hon Neil Thomson, made some very narrow-minded comments about this policy during the winter break. He called it window-dressing and said that targets were really a moot point when it comes to government contracts with Aboriginal business operators. It is perplexing to have a member of the Liberal Party question a landmark policy that seeks to enhance business opportunities.

Let me remind the house of the success of this policy. It has been going for two years. In the first two years, the McGowan government awarded 413 contracts to Aboriginal business operators at a value of more than \$350 million. In 2019–20, 234 contracts were awarded to Aboriginal businesses. That is about 5.5 per cent of government contracts for the year. What happened under the previous Liberal–National government? I know the member for Landsdale is asking me whether that was the Barnett–Grylls government or the Barnett–Redman government. Well, nothing happened. We do not know what happened because it did not keep track of the contracts made with Aboriginal business operators. It did not encourage contracts with Aboriginal business operators and it did not keep any figures on Aboriginal business operators. So, it is a bit rich for a member of the opposition to say that our landmark policy is basically window-dressing.

Hon Neil Thomson indicated that he believes that our policy is basically, in his words, a “welfare measure”. It is not a welfare measure; it actually seeks to create a sustainable environment for Aboriginal business operators to grow. He claims that it has had minimal impact on the Indigenous employment situation. That is just farcical. As we know, Aboriginal business operators are more inclined to employ Aboriginal workers.

I was recently down in the beautiful town of Albany. Minister for Health, I visited the Albany radiation oncology project—a fantastic project. As part of that project, a local Indigenous company called Impact Services had been engaged to provide and support Indigenous trainees to work on the project. That is what this policy aims to do. The Minister for Transport has secured record funding for one of the biggest improvements to regional roads in the state's history. I am sure that Nationals WA members will congratulate the Minister for Transport for that work. These projects have an increased proportion of Aboriginal business operators and they are not only employing Aboriginal workers, but also providing career pathways and long-term opportunities. The member for Kimberley will be aware that \$330 million worth of road projects are underway in the Kimberley, some of which have set targets of 30 per cent Aboriginal employment. Hon Neil Thomson should ask one of the 142 Aboriginal business operators that we have contracted whether this is window-dressing.

In conclusion, member for Landsdale, I would like Hon Neil Thomson to look at his inaugural speech in the upper house when he said he received some family advice, which was “be honest and don't exaggerate”.