MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier) [2.02 pm]: On 28 March, the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council completed its sixth and final meeting for Noongar groups in the south west to vote on whether to accept or reject a native title agreement—an Indigenous land-use agreement—with the Western Australian government. In each of the six meetings, Noongar people voted in favour of surrendering any native title rights they might hold in exchange for a series of benefits, including land. The total area that the agreement covers is 200 000 square kilometres. It is understood that there are more than 30 000 people of Noongar descent in Western Australia, making them the largest Indigenous group in Australia able to identify as one people, although individual Noongar families are linked to different areas within the total south west region.

The full agreement, the south west settlement, is the most comprehensive native title agreement since the Mabo decision by the High Court in 1992. The benefits of the agreement include: a trust fund into which the government will pay $50 million, indexed annually, for 12 years; up to 320 000 hectares of crown lands in multiple land parcels; joint management of the conservation estate; 121 housing properties; the future Noongar recognition act, subject to the support of Parliament, which will recognise Noongar people as the traditional owners of the south west; a Noongar governance structure made up of seven corporations, with state funding of $10 million indexed annually for 12 years; and a range of other benefits aimed at increasing Noongar cultural, social and economic capacity. The settlement has the capacity to deliver cost benefits to land users in the south west by, firstly, the permanent suspension of the operation of the Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993; and, secondly, the adoption of a standard cultural heritage management regime. It can also avoid years of costly and socially divisive native title litigation in the Federal Court.

Although the agreement emerged from a shared desire to resolve native title claims in the south west, it goes much further to form a foundation for a far-reaching change in the relationship between Noongar people and the state government. Ultimately, its purpose is to generate new opportunities for Noongar people to control their own future. Each of the six Indigenous land-use agreements will now be subject to a statutory period of public notification allowing for objections to be lodged in the National Native Title Tribunal. It is hoped that all legal procedures leading to the final ratification of the south west settlement will be completed within 12 months. Support for the agreement by all six Noongar groups is a remarkable reflection of the courage of the Noongar community to embark on a partnership with the state government. The government accepts the responsibility that goes with support for the settlement and with work in partnership with the Noongar people to make this historic agreement a success.

I thank the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council for the tremendous job it has done in negotiating with the government on the terms of the offer and guiding the offer through the meetings. A lot of work was done by state government departments and I commend them for their professionalism. I also congratulate the Noongar people for taking this great step towards self-determination.