

CHILD PROTECTION — CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE — ROEBOURNE

960. Mrs A.K. HAYDEN to the Minister for Child Protection:

I refer to the disserving article in *The Australian* by Victoria Laurie on 17 November, which revealed that the internal Department of Communities briefing notes highlight that the number of sex offenders in Roebourne and surrounds is substantially higher than what the minister has stated publicly.

- (1) Can the minister confirm that Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations annual report hearings have revealed that at least six child sex abuse perpetrators in the Pilbara region are likely to attend the same schools as their alleged victims?
- (2) What is the real number of perpetrators and the real number of victims; and can the minister confirm they are all definitely out of harm's way?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

- (1) This news that the member has asked me about has been around for a while so I am surprised she has taken this long to raise it in the house if she is not sure about the discrepancies.

Mrs A.K. Hayden interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member!

Ms S.F. McGURK: The article in *The Australian* refers to a larger number of figures in relation to possible victims of child sex abuse in the Pilbara. A couple of different briefing notes were given to me late last year, which were tabled in the upper house as part of the preparation for the annual report hearings. A few different figures were referred to in different briefing notes. They referred to the possible number of victims. When there were concerns about child safety in the west Pilbara, the investigations that were done jointly by police and child protection workers not only addressed those revelations where the children or families were coming forward and reporting abuse, but also they were proactive. As we would hope they would, they looked at the number of children who might be at risk. They might be siblings or they might be spending time in public areas with those who had been abused. That referred to, at times, over 200 young people at risk. The number that we have given now to the upper house and have said publicly is that as a result of Operation Fledermaus there were 50 victims, and 42 or 43 of those were children.

- (2) In answer to the second question of whether anyone can be assured that some of those children who are displaying harmful sexual behaviours—what the shadow minister in the upper house has referred to as perpetrators—might possibly be at school with their victims, I have given an assurance publicly that a number of different oversights have been given to the situation where children with harmful sexual behaviours might be in the vicinity of their victims, or indeed, other children. There is a joint departmental response between the Department of Education, the Department of Communities, child protection officers and police. They evaluate what the possible risks for children managed at school are. Of course, where those cases have been dealt with through the court, the court provides another layer of oversight to make sure there is proper safety in place.

The situation I am outlining in terms of child safety where there might be children displaying harmful sexual behaviours and other children are at risk, is not particular to the west Pilbara. In fact, we know that for a whole lot of reasons, often because those children have been victims themselves and then go out and display harmful sexual behaviour, they need to be evaluated in terms of risk to other children in the vicinity of those children displaying that behaviour. This is not particular to the west Pilbara but it is something we have looked at very carefully. Despite the almost apparent glee with which my opposition counterpart in the upper house seized upon this information to say that there might be —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! I am on me feet, member for Armadale. I call you to order for the first time. I also call the member for Hillarys for the first time. Minister, you will get to the end of this, please.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The answer to the question is that the larger number referred to in briefing notes at the end of last year talked about “potential victims”. We now know the number of victims out of Operation Fledermaus, is 50 victims, and 42 of those are children under 18. Safety plans and oversight is in place to make sure those children who display harmful sexual behaviours are not putting other children at risk either at school or anywhere else in the community.