

CHILD PROTECTION — CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE — ROEBOURNE

123. Mrs L.M. HARVEY to the Minister for Child Protection:

I refer to the minister's answer to a question asked in the other place yesterday in which she refused to assure the community that there were no children in Roebourne in the care of paedophiles. Given that the minister was asked about this issue weeks ago and that she has subsequently been briefed, will she finally do her job and outline to the house whether there are any kids at risk of attack from paedophiles?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I have been asked this question before in this house as well as in the other place. First of all, I would like to answer on behalf of the communities of the West Pilbara, particularly those living in Roebourne, who are leading the response to make sure there is a rebuilding of their communities, not just in relation to child safety, which is a significant issue, but also jobs, education, community participation, stable housing and connection with people's neighbours, and ensuring that everyone is looking out for other people. That is what we need to do. Yesterday the Premier and I stood alongside Nicola Forrest from Munderoo and Jonathan Carapetis from Telethon Kids Institute. Jonathan Carapetis made the point that governments do not raise children, communities do. In the case of Roebourne, we are seeking to provide the right amount of leadership and to change the way that government works so that we are a lot more integrated within the community and across services—police, child protection, health and education—and also work hand-in-hand with community leadership to show our confidence in them to rebuild from the ground up.

The implication that no children in Roebourne are safe at all is utterly without foundation and not helpful. One of the reasons people came forward—whether it was children themselves, teenagers or families—to contact police and child protection workers was that there was confidence in their relationship with those service providers. If we destroy that confidence, we undermine the rebuilding of that community.

I have confidence in the child protection workers who are on the ground in Roebourne and throughout the West Pilbara, I have confidence in the police, and I have confidence in the community leaders who are taking up that issue to ensure that we make it clear that child safety is non-negotiable and an absolute imperative in all our communities, and that everyone has a role to play to ensure that children are safe. But we will not hitch our wagon to a hysterical, alarmist reaction that is not useful to anyone. If the opposition has any concerns or any information—I made this point when the question was asked of me before—it should come forward with that information. Simply making baseless allegations that give them something to hang onto, and creating a feeding frenzy around a very vulnerable community, is shameful.