

HOUSING — REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Statement by Minister for Housing

MR W.R. MARMION (Nedlands — Minister for Housing) [12.06 pm]: Today I rise to inform the house of the current situation regarding remote communities in Western Australia. Some members may be aware of media reports of an agreement between the commonwealth government and Queensland, Western Australia, Victoria and Tasmania. Let me be clear: there is no historic or landmark agreement between Western Australia and the commonwealth government. The commonwealth government has withdrawn responsibility for remote communities in Western Australia. Many of these were established by previous commonwealth governments. The commonwealth government approached Western Australia about providing \$90 million as a result of it effectively cutting all future funding to Western Australian remote communities. The state government had to make a choice between two options: do we accept the \$90 million or do we take nothing at all? Regardless of the choice of option, we would still be left on 1 July 2015 with responsibility for these remote communities. The \$90 million will provide only two years of funding for essential services.

On 18 September 2014, I wrote to Minister Scullion to outline the following points. Firstly the preliminary estimates of the costs associated with providing a minimum level of municipal and essential services to all 274 remote communities range between \$2 billion and \$6 billion over 10 years on a net present value basis, depending on assumptions on whether service standards are applied uniformly or variably across all communities. Over a 20-year horizon, the net present value costs increase to between \$3 billion and \$10 billion. Secondly, the state government is deeply concerned about a large number of remote communities that do not meet a basic standard of living. For example, the state government is concerned that drinking water is generally not treated or monitored in the more than 180 small remote communities and outstations for which the commonwealth has until now retained funding responsibility. Similarly, the National Audit of Municipal and Essential Services, commissioned by the commonwealth in 2009, found that remote Aboriginal communities regularly fail basic infrastructure and service standards, with only seven per cent of audited communities meeting the base level standard for all assessed functions. The state government finds it reprehensible that these communities may be left in such a state by the commonwealth government prior to withdrawal of its responsibility. I have conveyed to the commonwealth that it must conduct a full audit of remote communities so that there is a complete understanding of the conditions of these communities, and that it must provide an infrastructure package to bring these remote communities to a minimum standard.

I will continue to keep the house updated on this extremely serious matter as the situation progresses.