

DR TRACY WESTERMAN — WA AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Statement by Minister for Child Protection

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Child Protection) [11.26 am]: I rise to pay tribute to Dr Tracy Westerman, who was recently named WA Australian of the Year. As a psychologist and Njamal woman from the Pilbara, Dr Westerman's work to bring together mainstream psychology and Aboriginal culture has been unique in addressing suicide and mental ill-health in Aboriginal communities in Western Australia.

Dr Westerman grew up in Tom Price and at the age of 15 decided psychology was her calling after reading about it in a book. In a recent newspaper interview, she described moving to Perth to study at the University of Western Australia as a culture shock. Perhaps this helped her work towards bridging the gap between the two worlds she lived in. Almost 20 years ago she founded Indigenous Psychological Services to bring those two worlds together to deal with the high rates of mental illness among Aboriginal people. Today she is an internationally recognised leader in suicide prevention and she has trained more than 22 000 clinicians in providing culturally appropriate psychological approaches. Her programs have been rolled out in remote Aboriginal communities throughout Australia and have even been adapted in places as far away as Canada.

As the Minister for Child Protection, I am only too well aware that suicide and mental health issues have had a devastating impact on Aboriginal communities in our state. I am grateful that in Dr Westerman we have an outstanding Western Australian woman leading the charge to improve the lives of some of the state's most vulnerable people. I know that the Department of Communities has made use of her expertise, as I heard in her recent keynote address to the department's Festival of Learning. On behalf of the McGowan government, I congratulate Dr Westerman on her outstanding achievement and I look forward to working with her to ensure that we address the impact of suicide and mental ill-health for Aboriginal Western Australians.