

VIOLENCE RESTRAINING ORDERS — OMBUDSMAN REPORT

992. Ms S.F. McGURK to the Premier:

I refer to the Ombudsman's report released today in which he investigated the issues associated with violence restraining orders and their relationship to family and domestic violence fatalities. In particular, in 93 per cent of the cases in which the Department for Child Protection and Family Support identified family and domestic violence as an issue, the department did not proceed with further action. In 44 of those cases in which the department did identify family and domestic violence, the department concluded that it was not departmental business. In 290 duty interactions in which family and domestic violence was identified, the department did not use its own screening tool to assess the risk and protect against further violence. Will the Premier take responsibility for these damning figures and sack the minister who is overseeing this shameful neglect; and, if not, who is responsible?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

I am, Mr Speaker. Domestic violence quite rightly has been getting a lot of public attention over the past couple of years—as it should. There is no doubt that a lot of domestic violence has been concealed. People, women in particular, including the Australian of the Year, are now prepared to come out and speak about it, which is a good thing. I suspect—I do not know whether the evidence is there—that increased use of drugs, particularly ice, is a contributing factor. There would be a host of factors. I accept the comments made, but the Department for Child Protection and Family Support's biggest responsibility is to look after children in the care of the state. I am not moving away from the point of the question, but the number of children in the care of the state has almost doubled in the last decade. There is a limit to the resources. I think the resources of that department have gone up by something like 70 per cent since this government came to power, but that is not enough and by itself it does not stop domestic violence. We are therefore participating fully with the commonwealth and other governments around Australia in addressing domestic violence, and I hope that progress is made.

Mr M. McGowan interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I do not make an excuse, but bear in mind that it is not the department that is committing those acts; it is individuals in our community who are behaving in a gross way. At least the issue is out there. The only words I will say—and they will come from me—are that the prime responsibility of that department is the protection of children. Obviously the department gets caught up in domestic violence situations. It is a terribly, terribly sad issue, but I would ask members to hesitate a little bit before jumping on a bandwagon of criticising a department that is under enormous stress as a backdoor way of trying to criticise the government.