

GOLDFIELDS ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE CENTRE

Statement by Minister for Heritage

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Heritage) [9.03 am]: Recently, Hon Kyle McGinn, MLC, member for Mining and Pastoral Region, and I had the great pleasure of visiting the Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre in Kalgoorlie. The centre was established in 2016 under the auspices of the National Trust of Western Australia. The centre is tasked with the linguistic preservation of goldfields Aboriginal languages—a region with 16 Aboriginal languages, with several having more than one dialect. Work is well underway in documenting those languages through the creation of linguistic preservation documents, including extensive recordings of natural speech, lexical databases, and the writing of phonology, sketch grammar and descriptive grammar documents. I am advised that in the goldfield regions there are 7 200 Aboriginal people, representing roughly 12 per cent of the state’s total Aboriginal population. Of those 7 200 Aboriginal people, approximately 2 900 speak an Aboriginal language as their first language, while 3 600 are bilingual.

Recent studies have proven that connection to heritage culture, heritage language and country significantly increases positive self-identity and, consequently, a sense of place in society and, subsequently, wellbeing. Little recognition is given to the fact that Western Australia is home to over 80 Aboriginal nations and their languages. Each language expresses the core identity of the speaker. To not recognise someone’s language is to deny that person the equal right to express themselves. It is imperative that we acknowledge the Aboriginal languages of this state so that Aboriginal people can freely express themselves. Earlier this year the Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre received a grant of \$40 790 through Connecting to Country. Connecting to Country is intended to achieve the following objectives: facilitate sharing of cultural knowledge and skills between generations; recognise cultural leadership within the Aboriginal community; contribute to stronger community wellbeing through culture-specific programs; and share traditional ways of maintaining cultural knowledge.

The centre will use the funds to enable the goldfields Aboriginal cultural master and apprentice project. The project involves six Aboriginal nations of the goldfields region. Two elders from each nation will be engaged and each elder will be matched with two young people for the purpose of passing on significant cultural knowledge through on-country visits. A total of 12 elders and 24 young Aboriginal people will therefore be engaged in cultural knowledge transmission. Work so far completed by the centre includes three well documented languages with databases, dictionaries and grammars; seven partially documented languages with databases between 1 000 and 3 500 entries; one completed dictionary ready to be published; and seven sketch grammars written to date. The centre’s work on the preservation of Aboriginal language, however, extends beyond linguistic research, and by necessity involves responding to the need for translating and interpreting services, particularly in relation to the courts, hospitals, prisons, child protection, aged care, mental health and social services.

I acknowledge the very important work of the Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre.