

CHILD PROTECTION — CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE — ROEBOURNE

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson) informed the Assembly that he was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the member for Hillarys seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

MR P.A. KATSAMBANIS (Hillarys) [2.56 pm]: I move —

That this house calls on the Premier to appoint one specific minister, such as the Minister for Police, to take lead responsibility for the protection of victims of child sexual abuse and to update the house on what action is being taken to ensure not one of the 184 victims of child sex abuse in Roebourne are living with an accused or convicted perpetrator of child sex abuse.

I raise this matter in the house today because in our society there can be no greater matter of public interest than the protection, safety and wellbeing of children, particularly vulnerable children. Members of Parliament like talking about human rights. It is an absolute human right for every single child to live in safety and security in their own community, free from the fear of being attacked or abused by anybody. Unfortunately, we know that in modern society there are serious societal issues that mean that some children will be subjected to this sort of abuse from time to time. We have seen the publicity again this week about how one perpetrator, David Lindner, was able to essentially embed himself into a community in our south west and cause absolutely horrific harm to children in that community. We know about the fact that there are, sadly, 184 victims of child sex abuse living in the community of Roebourne. We also know that living in that community is a large number—I will not put on a number on it today; I heard some numbers around it—of child sex abuse perpetrators or paedophiles. Previously, in this house, I have described these people in terrible terms. They deserve that description; I think they are scumbags. They are the lowest of the low and deserve absolutely no sympathy. The people who deserve sympathy are our children, especially our vulnerable children, but they deserve more than sympathy. They deserve everybody—every single person—acting to provide the appropriate level of protection for them. That involves community, as the Minister for Child Protection said today during question time, but it also involves more than just a community. It involves every single person living in Western Australia and it certainly involves the mechanics of government. The public of Western Australia entrusts the government to provide that level of protection. It is not good enough in this case to say, “Oh, we are using our best endeavours. We are doing the best we can.” We need to leave no stone unturned to protect every single vulnerable child in this state—every single one of them.

Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister, you will have a chance to speak.

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: It is not a solution at all to suggest that we move these children around. Why make the victims suffer? Let it sit on the record that the opposition is certainly not talking about that. We believe that every child should be safe from abuse and violence of all types, including child sex abuse, in the community that they want to live and grow up in. They deserve to live and grow up in their community without the fear of this.

For some time, since the revelations about Roebourne have become public, the opposition in this house and in the other house have pursued information from the government. We have asked questions in this place and the other place of the Minister for Child Protection and the Minister for Police. We have asked those questions because we want an assurance on behalf of the people of Western Australia and the people of Roebourne that if there is a known perpetrator living with children in that community, that the perpetrator be removed. We have been stonewalled at every single level. The Minister for Police, who I have a lot of sympathy for in this matter, said that the police have made inquiries and the police are not aware. She has been very careful with her words and I understand that. She is the Minister for Police. The police are not aware of any such circumstance. But we have seen the publicity and the commentary made by the former Commissioner of Police that he had trouble getting that information, even getting an answer about whether these things were happening. He had trouble. The minister today assured us that the current Commissioner of Police does not have such trouble but has not been told of any such issues. She has been very, very careful with her words in saying that. She has not given an outright assurance.

The Minister for Child Protection today told us—she said this before in answers to questions both here and in the other place—that she has asked questions of her department about whether any of these vulnerable children are being exposed to the dangers of sharing a home with a convicted or accused paedophile, someone who has been charged with an offence and is awaiting trial and sentence. The minister has provided answers that are clearly unsatisfactory. She said that yes, she has asked the questions, and then she waffled on about how she was not going to point the finger at anyone and the like. She has not given the assurance that having asked the questions, she has

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not received an answer that is positive and that says that none of these children are at risk in those communities today. None of them have to share a house with an accused or convicted paedophile. She has repeatedly refused to provide that assurance, despite Roebourne being a pretty small community and the victims being relatively well known and the perpetrators being very well known within that community.

Point of Order

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I know it is a confusion that the Liberal Party does not suffer from, but we are talking about two ministers, both female, both giving responses. So when the member refers to “she”, it is somewhat confusing. He may well want to call the ministers by their titles to avoid confusion.

The SPEAKER: I thank the member. If you could do that please.

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thought I was very clear. I was speaking about the Minister for Child Protection. I think I made that very clear.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I thought you were talking about the Minister for Police.

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: I was previously speaking about the Minister for Police. I dealt with that issue and was talking about the Minister for Child Protection. I am sure both ministers are pretty clear because they are listening intently and I thank them for that.

The SPEAKER: I agree with what the member said.

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: Okay, I will make sure I am very clear in the future. I will make sure.

Debate Resumed

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: The non-answer and the continual refusal to provide an answer by the Minister for Child Protection simply increases the rightful fears that members of our community have that this issue is unfortunately out of control. We do not know whether known perpetrators are living with vulnerable children or worst-case scenario, they are living with vulnerable children.

I will get on to a male minister in a minute, because the Minister for Police made reference to working with the Attorney General. This area crosses a number of portfolios, including Child Protection. I know the people on the ground who do this work in the Department for Child Protection and Family Support are totally and utterly committed to protecting children. I cast no aspersions on them. But systemically, that protection is with the Minister for Child Protection. Collecting data and laying charges against paedophiles lies with the police in the first instance, but then prosecutions, sentencing and all the laws around sentencing primarily lie with the Attorney General. I am not accusing anyone of passing the buck, but it opens up the issue of who has responsibility for what and we saw that today in question time. I asked the Minister for Police whether any of these vulnerable children are exposed. She said that the police have told her they are not aware of any such case. She was very clear, precise and rehearsed in her words—very much so—to make sure that she did not mislead the house. The answer more generally is that the police may not know, but that does not mean it is not happening. The Minister for Child Protection, as I said, has completely and utterly refused to give an assurance that it is not happening. This area is far too important for us to keep bouncing around questions and non-answers for weeks and months on end. We have been going at this since November last year in the other place and in this place. It is far too important. This is not about political grandstanding. This is not about the Labor or Liberal Party, the government or the opposition. This is about the protection of vulnerable children who have the right and expectation, and who deserve to live in their community without a fear of being attacked or of being molested by these evil paedophiles. Whether it is happening in Roebourne, Hillarys, Rockingham, Riverton or any other community across this state, we should be doing our utmost to stamp it out. It should not matter where it is or who those children are. The basic human right to live with dignity and without fear of abuse and attack ought to be extended to every single child in every single community. If we start making exceptions or excuses, then we will expose the most vulnerable children to the highest possible risk. That is why the opposition is pursuing this issue as a matter of public interest today.

[Quorum formed.]

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: As I was saying before that interruption, every single child in this state and every single child in the world, really, deserves that expectation—the right—to live in their community, no matter where they are, without the risk of being harmed by this sort of evil predator. I accept that the government has a Minister for Police and a Minister for Child Protection but we are today asking the Premier to firstly accept the fact that serious issues are going on. People like Mr Lindner have been grooming children in communities in the south west. There are also ongoing issues in Roebourne and through every single attempt to get information, we have been given less and less information rather than more about whether vulnerable children are being protected. There are also other instances of child sex abuse across our state. A coordinated approach is needed. In this matter

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of public interest today, the opposition suggests that one minister should be given lead responsibility to protect victims of child sexual abuse and that the minister also update the house on what is happening in Roebourne. Otherwise we get, “Oh, the police minister knows only a little bit” and the Minister for Child Protection is asked questions of her department but will not answer them.

Perhaps government members can think back to the time when they were in opposition. In 2016, I remember when Ryan Clegg was found to be living close to homes and schools in the inner Perth suburb of North Fremantle. In his role as shadow Attorney General, the current Attorney General was absolutely outraged and called for the government and the Director of Public Prosecutions to immediately bring an appeal against the offender, who had been bailed after pleading guilty to 61 child sex offences because, at the time, I think the shadow Attorney General, Mr Quigley, said that the man was living about 60 metres from a school. Mr Quigley was outraged that a known paedophile was living within 60 metres of a school or a childcare centre and in close proximity to homes. He was totally outraged and attacked the government, suggesting that it was in some way giving comfort to paedophiles when we certainly were not. I do not accuse any government of doing that. I think we are all committed to the right outcomes, but we differ on how we get there. Now in government, the fear of a paedophile living in the same house as a young child who has already been abused does not seem to stir the same emotions in either the Attorney General today, the ministers, or the Premier to do something about it. In opposition, they called on the previous government to act immediately. I think in one of his rhetorical flourishes, the current Attorney General called on the government to march into the Supreme Court on Monday morning to put in a writ to stop this guy from living near a school or childcare centre, or near homes. Now they are in government, there is no such urgency from these members.

The Premier might choose to appoint the Minister for Police to be the minister responsible to coordinate this area, which goes beyond just police, beyond the Attorney General and beyond child protection. It covers all those fields. The Premier could choose the Minister for Child Protection to be responsible. If he so wishes, he could choose the Attorney General to be responsible. In many cases for governments in the past, when an issue is of such major significance with the capacity to involve catastrophic harm for our most vulnerable citizens, Premiers and Prime Ministers have taken it upon themselves to play a coordinating role; perhaps the Premier could even consider that. We need to have a system in which the buck stops with one responsible minister across the board so that government members cannot say one issue is in a child protection area and another is in a police area, or that it is for the Attorney General to decide, because working in silos just does not work.

As I said earlier, this sort of response should not be bound by geography. The issues today are around Roebourne and the communities in the south west where Mr Lindner was acting, but we know that tomorrow or the next day, they could appear in almost any community across Western Australia, whether it is a regional community, a suburban community or a remote community. We need to listen to what some of the community leaders have had to say, and even some Labor Party luminaries. In March this year, Labor Party luminary Graham Richardson wrote an article in *The Australian* that I commend everyone to read, titled “Why don’t we stop looking away when kids are raped?” He makes a number of good points. I quote —

Along with syphilis I can think of no greater evil than child sexual abuse. But we mostly choose to turn away from it, and as long as this conspiracy of silence holds sway, these deaths, these little tragedies, will continue unabated.

We should not look away. Graham Richardson says that we should stop looking away, start looking at the problem and start fixing it. How do we do that? It is by appointing one responsible minister. The government does not have to create a new department, but pick a minister and say, “You’re the coordinator” or a cabinet subcommittee, or something that indicates that this government is taking this serious problem seriously, rather than continuing to provide the community with non-answers. We should not do what Aboriginal activist Jacinta Price says that we do too often. I quote —

This has become the norm for Aboriginal victims of sexual abuse. Put up with it and shut up. The culture of secrecy has allowed vile criminal sexual behaviours to flourish while the human rights of children have been obliterated.

It is well past time for all who are concerned with the welfare of our children to have open, honest and confronting discourse about the truth. No more can we point the finger elsewhere.

That is sage advice from someone who has lived, and I think continues to live, in some of these communities in the Northern Territory. She understands the problem and is not prepared to put up with it or shut up any more. She does not want the finger pointed elsewhere, but wants the problem resolved. We should start listening to these people and we should start acting, because if we do not act, all we do is perpetuate the awful and degrading cycle of child sexual abuse that we often know becomes one of transferring the abuse from the abuser to the person being abused, who, when they grow up, often perpetuate that cycle. We need to put a stop to it. I am not accusing

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anyone of not caring about this. It is a matter of a coordinated approach to the issue and prioritising it so that it can be fixed, rather than saying, “Trust us, we have got this all under control”, because we do not have it under control. Unless we can get an absolute assurance that no child in Roebourne is exposed to living with a paedophile in their home today or tomorrow or the next day, we do not have that solution. I hope the government acts wisely in this area and starts to take a coordinated approach across departments and agencies, and that the Premier stands up for the rights of children by appointing a coordinating minister who can lead us to solving this difficult but absolutely critical problem.

MR Z.R.F. KIRKUP (Dawesville) [3.20 pm]: It does not give me any pleasure to follow the member for Hillarys in this case talking on this very important issue. I congratulate the nine or so members of the government here listening to the opposition put its concerns to the government today. We have too often read heartbreaking and gut-wrenching stories of what happens right across Western Australia, and indeed other states and territories in the Federation. For too long all of us have borne witness to and read those stories about child sexual abuse of young people—very young ages, two, three and four-year-old children—who have sexually transmitted diseases as a result of being raped. There is no other way of putting it. It is an awful and heartbreaking thought to consider. When the opposition puts its concerns to the government on behalf of the people of Western Australia, when we ask very serious questions that we think deserve an accountable answer in this place, and when we seek assurances that 184 of the child victims in Roebourne are not presently living with convicted or charged offenders, we get nothing but waffle words from the government. We get no certainty at all and no reason to be assured that those children are still not living in those conditions. That is why this matter of public interest has been brought to this place today. It is disappointing because, as the member for Hillarys has said, we all know that everybody in this place would be united in their view to try to do everything possible to stop this occurring in the first place. It is incumbent upon the opposition to ask the government what action has been taken and how we can be assured that 184 innocent child victims of sexual abuse are not continuing to be exposed to that cycle of abuse that occurs today in Roebourne. It is a very serious issue about which we and the community would expect very clear answers from the government. We have asked questions of this government—simple yes and no questions of the ministers opposite. We have asked the Minister for Child Protection and the Minister for Police whether they can guarantee whether those 184 victims of child sexual abuse were living with any person who had been convicted or accused of child sex offences. The answers required a simple yes or no, but we do not get a simple yes or no response. To be perfectly frank, it seems to me that the ministers opposite choose to try to cloud the issue at every turn. They give extensive answers that do not provide any real certainty or surety to the opposition or the people of Western Australia that there is not a single person living with a convicted or alleged perpetrator of child sexual offences. It is awful.

I recall that when government members were in opposition, they would often moralise the government of the day with individual cases, demanding ministerial intervention in those individual cases. It seems to me that if they had those high moral standards in opposition, they should take them into government, but unfortunately that does not seem to be the case. On the front page of *The West Australian* there is an article by Tim Clarke, legal affairs editor, with the headline “Why Hasn’t this Monster Stopped?” That is a very good question that *The West Australian* put. We have been asking the question about what the government is doing to stop those same monsters in Roebourne today. Unfortunately, it disappoints all of us on this side that the government has not been forthcoming with those answers. It does not matter whether the victim is living in Roebourne, Rockingham, Riverton or wherever they might be. All of us here would expect that those victims deserve equal protection. It seems to be unusual that Operation Fledermaus found that 36 men in the community of Roebourne were charged with more than 300 offences on 184 child victims. That is 19 per cent of the population of Roebourne. In 2016, the population of Roebourne was 981 and there were 184 child victims. If any other community in Western Australia had nearly 20 per cent of the population being victims of child sex offences, the Army would be marching in there and stamping down on what is happening in that community. Yet, when we ask simple questions of this government about whether children are still living with those who perpetrate —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members, you have the opportunity to talk. No interjections, please.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: When we ask the government simple questions about whether those child victims are being protected or whether they are still residing with those who commit child sex offences, we do not get a clear response at all. This is absolutely concerning to the opposition; it absolutely concerns all Western Australians. I back what the member for Hillarys has said. We absolutely expect a single minister to be held responsible for this, a single minister intervening in this case, because if it was any other community in Western Australia, I suspect there would be far greater intervention than what is occurring now, which is blind ignorance of the issues associated with Roebourne.

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Child Protection) [3.26 pm]: I am very pleased to speak on this matter, but not because it gives me any pleasure to have to respond to these terrible situations. I am sure that people across the chamber are appalled at the extent of child sex abuse revealed through Operation Fledermaus. In fact, the reports from the police are that we can expect high levels of child sexual abuse throughout families and communities in other areas in regional Western Australia, and perhaps even the metropolitan area. We are going to continue to do that work to try to uncover that sexual abuse, whether it is in the Pilbara or anywhere else, and also to make sure we have an effective response. That is what we are debating today—what an effective response is to the revelation that there is extensive child sexual abuse in one particular extended community, being the West Pilbara.

People talk about Roebourne. Roebourne is a central area where people come and go, but in their early briefings to me and other ministers, the police were clear that this issue was not particular to Roebourne. We need to understand the circumstances in which this confused, dysfunctional, disturbing and obviously illegal and damaging behaviour is occurring. I have been asked in question time whether I can give guarantees that no child is at risk in Roebourne or anywhere outside of Roebourne and, as I said before, I wish I could give guarantees. In fact, a huge number of children are under the age of 18 in this state—over 625 000—and I wish I could give guarantees about all of them, but of course I cannot. What I can do is make sure that the public servants I have responsibility for in the Department of Communities, particularly those doing child protection work, are properly resourced on the ground in those areas with particular vulnerabilities. I will ensure that they are working in lockstep with other service providers, particularly the Western Australia Police Force, juvenile justice workers, not-for-profit groups and community leaders active on the ground to understand what risky behaviours occur and what risks children might be exposed to and how to remove and properly address those risks. When I say that child safety is a whole-of-community responsibility, it is not a glib comment or a throwaway line. It is a sophisticated understanding of the need for us all to be mindful that if we think that child safety will be achieved by the police coming in by way of cavalry and Department for Child Protection and Family Support and government officials coming in and working on the ground and that will be enough, it is never enough. We need to arm families and communities and make sure that everyone understands that they have one eye out for the welfare for all children in their community. That is what we are endeavouring to do in Roebourne. Having said that, we understand that there are immediate issues of child safety and we are very much alert to that.

We have increased Department for Child Protection and Family Support resources on the ground. The department is working very closely with the police. I commend the police, particularly those who worked at the beginning of Operation Fledermaus; they worked closely with child protection workers, and it was that closeness in working together that meant people came forward with those cases as they did. We want to make sure that we are working with the community to empower it so that if there are cases in the future, people feel confident to come forward and to talk about those cases knowing that they will be responded to properly and not demonised. We do not need a hysterical response from government and the general public. We need an effective response that endures in the long run. We need to build up and empower that community and acknowledge that community safety is the way that we truly guarantee child safety in the long run. I have been up there. I think our machinery-of-government changes—which were designed to have a more coordinated response between Department of Housing and Department for Child Protection and Family Support—and the cabinet subcommittee looking at community safety working with Department of Justice and police and the like all feed into that work.

I will respond by going through the “West Pilbara Plan”, which again is not something that occurs out there as blue-sky thinking or a theoretical response. It is a practical response that is immediate and has a sense of urgency, and involves capacity building and strengthening the community. I refer to the shrill claim by the speaker before me, the member for Dawesville, that if we know this sort of child abuse is going on, we should call in the Army. How did that go in the Northern Territory, member?

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member!

Ms S.F. McGURK: People think that if they call for some sort of intervention or emergency response whereby the cavalry and the emergency services come in and sweep up children and hold them in their arms, everything will be okay. I wish that were the case. However, we have to work with the community and empower those families and the community. We have to hold perpetrators to account, and we are absolutely doing that. Demonising that community and criticising it and saying that it is the community’s fault that those children have not been kept safe —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Ms S.F. McGURK: — will only drive the problem further underground, and that is not what we want. Some of the responses —

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup interjected.

The SPEAKER: I thought it was very good that when this side of the house spoke, there were very few interjections, so I would like the same opportunity to be given to the minister.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I have been up to Roebourne three times and spoken with a number of community elders and leaders there—mostly women, but not only women—about what in their experience they would like to see change. People may have heard me say it before, but the first time I went up, some of the women said to me, “You are the sixth minister who’s come up here and asked us what we thought. Perhaps you want to listen to us and then implement some of the things we tell you.” That seemed to me to be a completely reasonable request.

We were given community rules identified by the elders and what is called the Balagarni 10, the community strategies to address child abuse and trauma by the community. We were given that. A number of community initiatives have then been picked up in our “West Pilbara Plan”. That includes having a cultural centre that is a healing place where family and health can be looked at. Perhaps drug and alcohol abuse counselling and culturally led healing strategies can be used so that people understand what is and is not acceptable in traditional culture in that area. We will have a one-stop shop where government services are at one counter so that people can come in and know where they can get help and assistance in one easily accessible place. We have committed to put in place 10 supported safe houses in the community. They will not be refuges, but they will be supported households where, for instance, if some of the elder women are already caring for a number of children who go there late at night and those women need a larger house, they will be supported to move to a larger house and given extra food and resources and support to make sure that they can provide the support in an ongoing way. They are already providing that now, but they are stretched.

We support initiatives such as the police and community youth centre, which is doing some really good work on the ground as it does in many communities. The night patrol is focused now on children and getting children off the streets late at night and taking them somewhere that is safe. We will have a refuge for men so that when there is violence and abuse in the house, the women and children do not have to leave, but the perpetrators have to leave and take some time out to get sober and straight. We are putting those initiatives in place. A number of requests that were put through to us that I am happy to say were part of our “West Pilbara Plan”. We have not put in place everything that the community asked for. Some of the responses that we have put in place the community did not ask for, but I think together it is designed to be a respectful response that is not doing something to the community, but doing something with the community and trying to build its capacity. That is not woolly social worker nice-feeling sentiment. That is genuinely listening to those people in the community who want to build a safe and secure environment in which kids are going to school, growing happily and securely, studying, playing sport, have good social connections and have safe people to talk to if they have concerns. After school, as they grow older, they have an expectation that they will train or get work. They are all the things that everyone wants for young people in their community. That is what all of us as local members and the member for Pilbara want for people living in Roebourne and west Pilbara.

We are committed to continuing to look at practical employment strategies on the ground so that there is meaningful employment in that community and more people working and able to bring home an income. We want more engagement at school. Currently, there is low engagement. We want a more meaningful connection with the school environment. As I am saying some of these things, I notice the member for Dawesville shaking his head as if these are theoretical matters and we should be concerned only about child safety. I met with Mick Gooda, who people might know ran the Royal Commission and Board of Inquiry into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory about the Don Dale Centre and was previously the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, a position now held by June Oscar. He had just been up to Roebourne and I met with him afterwards to talk about what he thought were the priorities in establishing a healthy community in the west Pilbara. He said that he thought that we have got the balance right of making sure the message to the community that child safety will not be compromised is unequivocal and clear. These are illegal acts and perpetrators will be held to account and we are determined to put that to effect. However, we also have to make sure this empowerment is led by the community and is not something done to them but is done in partnership with them. Unless we do that, I fear history will just repeat itself. A patronising, paternalistic attitude has not worked in the past and there is no reason to think that outside intervention will be effective in either the short or long term. That is why I am determined to work with women leaders in the community and those who want change, such as Violet Samson, Pansy Hicks and Nellie Connors, and male leaders such as David Walker and Patrick Churnside, whom I have met up there, and people from the Mawarnkarra Health Service, the Aboriginal health service up there—services on the ground day in and day out to make sure people understand that child safety is not negotiable. Of course we think that, but we want to build that message in the community and not in a patronising, paternalistic way, which,

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if we are not careful, will drive the problem underground and exacerbate feelings of powerlessness and frustration and a sense of the future being futile for that community. That is what I want to avoid.

I was very pleased to have a positive response from Mick Gooda after we had announced the west Pilbara plan, as we did from Dr Hannah McGlade, a Noongar academic woman who works at Curtin University and who has been very, very passionate about child safety in Aboriginal communities and has spoken out against child sex abuse. I have spent quite a bit of time with Hannah McGlade seeking to understand some of the issues. She said that she thought we have got the balance right of calling out bad behaviour, making sure people understand they are illegal acts that will not be tolerated. There will not be any sort of working around and hiding from the real issues, but at the same time we need to empower that community if we want to achieve change in the long run. That is the balance we are trying to strike in Roebourne. I wish that I could say that every child in Roebourne will be protected against sex abuse. I wish I could say that about over 600 000 children in Western Australia, but we need a more sophisticated understanding about child safety. If the royal commission taught us anything, it is to understand that we need laws, systematic response and a deep community buy-in to understand where children are unsafe and how to instil protective behaviours within our everyday life.

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland — Minister for Police) [3.43 pm]: I believe the motion the opposition has put before the house this afternoon is somewhat misguided and simplistic. It is attempting to come up with a very simple solution to a very complex and entrenched issue. It is a superficial idea and a superficial response to an incredibly complex area. In effect, the opposition's suggestion by way of this motion would create another silo. Having someone singly responsible is not the way ahead. The way ahead is for a whole-of-government collaborative approach, although people might ask: what does that matter; what will it deliver? I think both the Minister for Child Protection and I are able to enunciate what it is delivering for the Roebourne community.

[Quorum formed.]

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: As has been acknowledged by members of the former government, much child abuse is familial abuse and that creates necessary constraints in identifying offenders because in identifying offenders, we also identify victims. This was pointed out numerous times by ministers in the former government. Child abuse in remote and regional communities, particularly in Indigenous communities, is something that Labor governments have for a long time been focused on addressing. When we were last in government, post the Sue Gordon report, the Gallop government rolled out the multifunctional police facilities. That was a comprehensive investigation and report by Sue Gordon and members of that committee. They concluded, quite rightly, that we needed a comprehensive response; we needed agencies working together, not in silos. That is why those multifunctional police stations were put in place. In the first instance, we put in place nine of them throughout regional areas in Western Australia, including places like Balgo and the Dampier Peninsula. The former federal Liberal government, through Mal Brough, the minister at the time, recognised how worthwhile this approach was. That is why when some funding flowed to the Northern Territory, we got some federal funding for three more of these multifunctional police stations in Western Australia so that child protection officers in communities and other agencies could work side by side with police on location in these communities. It is only by government agencies working together towards one common result that we can get results. If we continue to work in silos and have police charging and locking up people, we are not dealing holistically with the issue. That is why the most effective way is not to deal with it in silo but to deal with it comprehensively.

I turn my attention now to Roebourne. The member for Dawesville probably was not born when some of the key issues in Roebourne that affect people's thinking occurred. For people who are as old as I am, the memory of what occurred in Roebourne lock-up with John Pat resonates very strongly. I think it is something the Roebourne community has not yet come to terms with. In September 1983, at the age of 16 years and 11 months, John Pat died in a police lock-up. Prior to and since that time, there have been issues of trust and mistrust of police and levels of dysfunction in that and other communities. Restoring that trust and working together with Indigenous communities, particularly the Roebourne community, has not been easy at all. I think it is appropriate that the Department of Communities is the lead agency. Police have their role to play and are 100 per cent behind the Pilbara trauma response plan. Particularly in the case of Roebourne, I can see why having police as the lead agency would not be appropriate. Roebourne is not the only Indigenous community that has had those issues with police from an earlier era. Our Pilbara police are working very strongly and very collaboratively with the Indigenous community there now. In building that relationship and a greater level of trust, Operation Fledermaus has led to many disclosures. Resources have gone into providing specialist child interviewers and the like, and through a whole range of activities police have gradually built up trust to the extent that we have the disclosures we have. As a result, people are being charged and put through the courts.

Pilbara detectives have received disclosures of child sexual abuse in the communities of Roebourne, Cheeditha, Five Mile, Wickham and Karratha. Those families are all from areas where people would be frequenting Karratha and the Pilbara police districts. Pilbara detectives have also utilised youth community intervention officers—police

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call them YCIOs—so they were able to gain significant community support to be able to investigate those crimes. Through working together, the districts were able to develop a relationship of trust to be able to investigate these child sexual abuse matters.

The Department of Communities is actively engaging with children who were in contact with those known offenders and conducting child assessment interviews. Pilbara detectives liaise very closely with the Department of Communities to progress those specialised child interviews, and a lot of disclosures have been made by children who are at risk. I do not think anyone is in disagreement here. These are the most serious of matters. Our government takes them very seriously. It is not about chest thumping; it is about working together in the long term to get comprehensive solutions to complex problems to bring people who have offended to justice and to provide the required support to victims. That is why we need a holistic approach, and not an approach in silos.

Pilbara detectives continue to meet with Aboriginal elders and members of the community. They are 100 per cent committed to working with those elders and the community in conjunction with the Department of Communities. I add that Commissioner Dawson made Roebourne a priority when he first became Commissioner of Police in September last year. I received advice that Commissioner Dawson went to Roebourne with Deputy Commissioner Gary Dreierbergs and other key members of government. They attended both Karratha and Roebourne in the Pilbara on 13 September last year, which I think was effectively the commissioner's first week on the job, to look at those community concerns in Roebourne. I understand that he went there on 14 December with Mr Graeme Searle and the Department of Communities. I think collaboration and cooperation is essential to resolving these issues and in supporting the community in the longer term.

MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Parliamentary Secretary) [3.54 pm]: I rise to speak to the motion put by the opposition and to congratulate it for putting this matter of public importance motion to Parliament. It is probably one of the most important matters it has put forward in the last 12 months. It is good to see the opposition using its time usefully.

I am pleased to say that the government is happy to be held to account on this issue because the actions that we have put in place, led by the current Minister for Child Protection, are entirely appropriate. One of the first things we did as a government was to establish a cabinet subcommittee for community safety and family support. The government understands that complex social issues require a coordinated approach with all the ministers in the room and on the same page, which that cabinet subcommittee helps to facilitate. That subcommittee will look at a range of issues, including child protection, the West Pilbara plan, the meth strategy, Target 120 and juvenile justice. A whole range of issues are all interconnected. One member opposite asked whether we had a cabinet subcommittee. I am glad to report that we do, and that it is operating to deal with this as a matter of urgency, as it should. This issue in the West Pilbara did not happen overnight; it is a result of years of social disadvantage and dysfunction. Members opposite were in government for nine and a half years —

Mr S.K. L'Estrange: Eight and a half!

Ms A. SANDERSON: They were in government for eight and a half years. I stand corrected.

It is not as though we woke up on 17 March and all of a sudden there was an issue in Roebourne. This has been going on for a long time. It is a little galling to hear the outrage from the other side. This is about housing, jobs, drugs, and alcohol as well as sexual abuse. It is a complex issue, and all those issues need to be seriously tackled. One of the strong recommendations from the Gordon report was that building capacity in Aboriginal communities was the way to tackle these issues and improve the quality of life in those communities. The minister should be congratulated for implementing a program that will build capacity in those communities. That is the way that we will deal with this issue.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse) [3.57 pm]: I would also like to contribute to this debate. First and foremost, this issue is about the protection of children in Western Australia, regardless of the community in which they live. In *The West Australian* today the question was asked: "Why wasn't this monster stopped?" That is a fair question, and we are no closer to having an answer. In the house today I asked whether the Minister for Police could confirm whether the system is broken. As the member for Vasse, I am part of the Busselton and Yallingup communities, where David Lindner, who was recently charged with 58 serious sexual offences, was residing and was promoted on page 3 of the local paper as being a great community advocate. I have some appreciation of the hurt and the destruction that the behaviour of a sexual offender can have when he is grooming a community and the impact they can have on the lives of the victim and the victim's family. But that is only one sexual predator.

In Roebourne, we know that there are at least 36 paedophiles and that 184 children were molested according to the 2016 census. As the opposition, we ask that the buck stops with one minister. We are not seeking guarantees of safety, but guarantees that perpetrators are not living in the same houses as children. That is a fair question, given that one in five of the population is molested. It is fair enough that we ask that the buck stops with one minister, that further action is taken, and that the government acknowledges that the system is broken.

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 11 April 2018]
p1874c-1882a

Mr Peter Katsambanis; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Zak Kirkup; Ms Simone McGurk; Mrs Michelle Roberts;
Amber-Jade Sanderson; Ms Libby Mettam

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Mr I.C. Blayney) casting his vote with the ayes, with the following result —

Ayes (15)

Mr I.C. Blayney
Dr D.J. Honey
Mr P. Katsambanis
Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup

Mr A. Krsticevic
Mr S.K. L'Estrange
Mr R.S. Love
Mr W.R. Marmion

Mr J.E. McGrath
Dr M.D. Nahan
Mr D.C. Nalder
Mr K. O'Donnell

Mr D.T. Redman
Mr P.J. Rundle
Ms L. Mettam (*Teller*)

Noes (37)

Ms L.L. Baker
Dr A.D. Buti
Mr R.H. Cook
Ms J. Farrer
Mr M.J. Folkard
Ms J.M. Freeman
Ms E. Hamilton
Mr T.J. Healy
Mr M. Hughes
Mr W.J. Johnston

Mr D.J. Kelly
Mr F.M. Logan
Mr M. McGowan
Ms S.F. McGurk
Mr K.J.J. Michel
Mr S.A. Millman
Mr Y. Mubarakai
Mr M.P. Murray
Mrs L.M. O'Malley
Mr P. Papalia

Mr S.J. Price
Mr D.T. Punch
Mr J.R. Quigley
Ms M.M. Quirk
Mrs M.H. Roberts
Ms C.M. Rowe
Ms R. Saffioti
Ms A. Sanderson
Ms J.J. Shaw
Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski

Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr P.C. Tinley
Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms S.E. Winton
Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr D.R. Michael (*Teller*)

Pairs

Ms M.J. Davies
Mrs L.M. Harvey

Mrs R.M.J. Clarke
Mr J.N. Carey

Question thus negatived.