

Mr Ben Wyatt; Dr Kim Hames; Ms Josie Farrer; Mr Terry Redman; Acting Speaker; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Andrea Mitchell; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Colin Barnett

REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES — CLOSURE

Motion

MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park) [4.01 pm]: I move —

That the house condemns the Premier for the ongoing uncertainty, confusion and fear that he has created in remote Aboriginal communities since stating that he would close 150 remote communities and calls on the Premier to immediately —

- (a) seek to have the commonwealth government reverse or delay its decision to cease funding municipal services at remote Aboriginal communities;
- (b) clarify on what basis the government will base its decision on which communities are worthy of future government investment;
- (c) outline the baseline data that the government has collected to justify the Premier's statement that remote communities have failed; and
- (d) outline the government support that will be provided to those people currently living in remote communities to ensure that their closure will result in better social outcomes.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you, perhaps more than many people in this place, travel around remote parts of Western Australia and know that they are an incredibly diverse part of Western Australia. Every Western Australian is very much defined by the size of our state and our small population. I want to make some points about remote Western Australia before I get into the specifics of the argument. It is often dominated by the debate we have heard of late about this deficit model of what is failing and what is miserable, and the selective use of statistics. I travel around remote Western Australia reasonably regularly. For the purposes of the discussion we are having today, I am largely talking about the Kimberley, but, as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, the issue also relates to the Pilbara and the goldfields. It is more than just the Kimberley, but 80 per cent of remote communities are in the Kimberley, so it is very much a Kimberley issue.

Anyone who is familiar with the Ranger program would know about the desire for a Broome hostel, and that they have been trying to get a response from the government. The Living Change program by the Wunan Foundation in the East Kimberley is still trying to get a positive response from government and the various arts movements across remote Western Australia. I note, just by way of passing, Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in Kununurra, which is a fantastic arts centre—anyone who has been there will understand and accept the work that it does.

Last night I listened to Fred Chaney give a fantastic interview with Phillip Adams about the importance of remote Western Australia. He talked about the Social Ventures Australia report into the Mardu, which is spread across a huge area of remote Western Australia and does fantastic things and achieves fantastic outcomes. In my role as chairman of Clontarf Aboriginal College, I know that we have students from all over remote Western Australia whose parents or guardians have made the decision that their children can live on country and then be sent to Perth for their education. That is not unusual. We have seen the great work done in the Fitzroy Valley and the partnership with Wesley College in Melbourne. During the wet, those students are down in Melbourne studying and learning. During the dry, they are up on country in Yiramalay in the Fitzroy Valley with students from Melbourne learning Aboriginal culture.

Just recently we saw a fantastic announcement by Christopher Pyne—not naturally a friend of mine, I would have thought; I have never met him—about the federal government's investment in remote schools. Today I heard the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Hon Peter Collier, talk about literacy rates and the federal government's significant investment in explicit direct instruction in remote schools in Mt Magnet, One Arm Point, Kunawarritji, Punmu, Broome, Nullagine, Fitzroy Crossing, Kulkarriya, Halls Creek, Meekatharra, Carnarvon, Warralong, Strelley, Yakanarra and the Mulan community, and in Jigalong Remote Community School in Newman, Christ the King School in Lombadina and the Holy Rosary School in Derby. This is a big investment by the federal government into literacy in our remote schools. Noel Pearson was wandering around Mardu country last week already seeing some of the great success they are having in literacy. I saw some of the photos of Pearson and Brian Samson at Jigalong floating around on social media. There is a strong investment by the federal government, yet we have the state government's desire to withdraw from remote communities. It clashes with what appears to be coming from Christopher Pyne in education anyway in respect of our remote communities.

I want to reflect for a minute on former Governor Lieutenant-General John Sanderson who did a number of reports for both the former Labor government and the current coalition government. What I liked about the

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Sanderson reports is that he asked, as did Fred Chaney last night on Radio National with Phillip Adams: What do we want from our regional and remote Australia? Do we want it abandoned and empty? Fred Chaney said that he would like to see a web of communities and people through the central part of our country. That is exactly what we should be aspiring to achieve. Sanderson made that point as well. I have been to a couple of the Indigenous protected area launches. We are starting to see a better understanding of the importance of remote and regional Western Australia at the federal government level.

I want to quickly reflect on how we got to where we are in this remote community debate. It goes back to a media statement made on 24 September last year. The commonwealth Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Nigel Scullion, put out a media statement stating —

The Australian Government has reached historic agreements with the Queensland, Western Australian, Victorian and Tasmanian Governments that will see the states take on responsibility for municipal and essential services in remote Indigenous communities.

Clearly, from the report on the ABC last night, it seems that this discussion has been ongoing for a lot longer than anyone living in a remote community would realise, but Nigel Scullion talked about this historic agreement. I note that the former housing minister Bill Marmion, the member for Nedlands, came into the house after that and made the point in a brief ministerial statement that he refuted that historic agreement. He said that it was reprehensible that these communities were left that way by the federal government. The minister, the member for Nedlands, also tabled a letter that he sent to the commonwealth minister, Minister Scullion, in response, stating again that it was reprehensible for the federal government to announce an historic agreement and to walk away. I want to make a point. Nigel Scullion said—I quote again—that this agreement —

will see the states take on responsibility for municipal and essential services in remote Indigenous communities.

I accept that the federal government should not be providing that service. It is clear that this discussion has been taking place absent the involvement of Aboriginal people for quite some time. But the reality is that the commonwealth government has been in this space for decades. For the federal minister to say that he has reached agreement whereby Western Australia has agreed to take on that responsibility when clearly it had not is an egregious breach of duty by that federal minister. It is disgusting. I hope that the Leader of the National Party will contribute this afternoon. I am interested to hear how his meeting with the minister went—the minister who abandoned his responsibility by putting out this scurrilous and misleading media statement.

I have noted the response of the former minister, the member for Nedlands, and I am coming to the first point of my motion. Bereft of what to do—because how does one engage a federal government that puts out such rubbish?—I wrote to Warren Mundine and every member of the national Indigenous Advisory Council and made the point that their role is to advise and that they need to be part of this conversation. I made the point that anyone can accept that it is odd that this service provision is provided by the commonwealth government, but the reality is it does and it has done so for a long time, and it is negligent of the commonwealth to simply say, “We’re off. In two years we are out of here. Here is \$90 million.” I have made the point that I have no problem with the deadline. It is obvious that deadlines crystallise the minds, but it is clear that the state government, as Graeme Campbell, the president of the Shire of Broome, pointed out today, has been caught with its pants down, even though the state Department of Aboriginal Affairs clearly had a report about this in 2011. The state government was standing there stunned about this decision.

Dr K.D. Hames interjected.

Mr B.S. WYATT: Wait, minister. I said to Mr Mundine and the members of the national Indigenous Advisory Council that they needed to start to advocate on this issue and that it would not be unreasonable for a five-year time frame. That would allow the state to respond sensibly, but not with the statement that “we are closing 150 communities because they are awash with sexually transmitted diseases” that we have seen from the Premier. We need a proper, rational conversation and fair consultation with Aboriginal people that brings them in to be part of this, and not to dictate from Perth in, I think, September or October last year. We are still waiting to this day for a consultation process. To this day we are waiting for a basis upon which the Premier stood in this Parliament and said that those communities had failed. We are still waiting. We have heard the different arguments raised by the Premier. I make the point that he has made the judgement—guilty—and is now running around trying to present the argument. It is an utterly unfair way to treat people living in remote communities.

What did we see, despite the reprehensible rhetoric from the member for Nedlands and despite his critique of the historic agreement in the media statement from Nigel Scullion? Two weeks ago when the Premier met with Nigel Scullion up here, in a media conference afterwards—I got the recording from a journalist who was kind enough to give it to me—a question was put to the Premier about the funding cuts to remote communities. The Premier replied that he did not discuss it to any great extent. Everywhere we turn we see the Premier

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critiquing the commonwealth, on any issue involving support to Western Australia or funding, yet on this issue, there is silence. That is what the Premier said. He is now digging himself further into a hole by trying to construct the argument around failure and explaining why he has declared the Aboriginal people in remote communities to be guilty. He is now presenting the argument.

In the first question I put to the Premier about this matter on 12 November, I asked him on what basis he would decide which particular communities would be closed. He made the point —

... the commonwealth took the decision to cease its funding for essential services to remote Aboriginal communities.

He went on to say that the commonwealth did that because it has vacated the territory; it has walked away. In the *Halls Creek Herald* of 5 November, a week earlier, the Premier is quoted as stating —

Unfortunately because the Commonwealth has now left the field, as you know, I think the numbers of communities across the Kimberly and Pilbara will reduce significantly but I think we've got to concentrate on the larger ones to make sure they can be sustainable.

Again, on 27 November, the Premier said in a PerthNow article by Kara Vickery, "Coffee with Colin: Premier Colin Barnett on women in public life, GST, Aboriginal communities", the Premier stated this of his decision to close remote communities —

And it's been precipitated by the Commonwealth withdrawing funding for essential services like water and power. Both the Commonwealth and the State had contributed \$30m a year each. The State will continue with its \$30m but we no longer have the Commonwealth \$30m so something has to change.

The argument from the Premier very early on was that this was a funding issue: \$30 million a year has been taken from the commonwealth government and we cannot afford to top that up. I note as an aside the delicious irony in that, bearing in mind that the Premier has received \$24 billion in mining royalties during his time as Premier.

I then heard the Premier on the radio and in Parliament talk about a community that was costing the government \$85 000 per head. He was continuing the argument that it was a result of the finances and that it is unrealistic to expect government to continue to support communities at a certain level. He referred to a community that costs \$85 000 per person for the provision of municipal and essential services. I asked the Premier on 20 November last year which community that was. He responded —

I made that point at the time, that I would not name the community, and I will not name the community, because I am not going to do what perhaps the opposition thinks I might be doing or what they seem to be doing; I am not going to wander around and target communities and tell them, "You will be closed."

The reality is that that community that he was critiquing at \$85 000 per person was a community that he had already closed—Oombulgurri. In answer to a question on notice from 18 February this year, it was Oombulgurri. He closed a community and continues to critique the broader Aboriginal population for the expense of that community. How is there any respect in that process?

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

Mr B.S. WYATT: I am looking forward to the Leader of the National Party's response, because I think that he has an interesting and key role to play in the cabinet, because the Premier has nailed his colours to the mast. I think that the role of the Leader of the National Party and that of the National Party are very important. I said at the time that, at a billion dollars a year, royalties for regions has a very important role to play to get a proper considered outcome, and I think the Leader of the National Party agreed with that.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

Mr B.S. WYATT: I think he agreed with that. When I was asked about something that the Leader of the National Party had said in an interview on, I think, the last sitting day of last year when he talked about this, I was very positive about it. I note that there clearly has been a difference of opinion between him and the Premier, and that is no doubt playing and working its way through the system. I hope the Leader of the National Party wins the argument because, given the Premier's rhetoric and defamatory statements in here about Aboriginal people, he cannot do it. The government will not be able to pull this off without engaging Aboriginal people and the Aboriginal leadership of the Kimberley. It will not be able to do that. It is as simple as that. I have no doubt that the Premier is getting advice from the bureaucracy that he cannot just close down those communities. The first comment I noted in response to our eloquent and Churchillian Prime Minister's "lifestyle choices" statement was from the Kalgoorlie–Boulder Chamber of Commerce and Industry. I think it was Hugh Gallagher who critiqued that statement. I know the member for Kalgoorlie shares that view. All the shires

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in the Kimberley share the same view as the Kimberley and District Chamber of Commerce. I hope that the Leader of the National Party can exercise some influence in this matter because it is very important for not only Aboriginal people, but also the broader community.

I now want to go to where Mr Barnett has chosen to take this discussion—that is, the use of the issue of sexually transmitted diseases.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): The member for Victoria Park has the call.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! The member for Victoria Park has the floor. Leader of the National Party, it started over there, and if you would like me to call you for trying to point out how I should chair, I will be happy to do that. It started over there and it will stop now. The member for Victoria Park has the call.

Mr B.S. WYATT: The latest rhetoric from the Premier is around gonorrhoea. I know what has happened here: the Premier has moved away from the cost issue because it was starting to look like an argument that was not quite presentable enough. He went where he went when he has under political pressure over James Price Point. That is where he is now. I understand this; I know where it is going. The Premier said to the Minister for Health or one of his staffers, “I need a statistic—a shocking statistic.” There is no doubt shocking statistics can be found. The Premier came in here last Thursday, 19 March, and said —

In 2013, there were 39 cases of gonorrhoea in Aboriginal children.

...

These 39 cases were in children aged from 10 to 14. We are seeing sexually transmitted diseases in children aged from 10 to 14. How many cases of gonorrhoea are there in the wider community? There are none—not a single case.

That is what the Premier said. Today, he put a bunch of qualifications around that, but on the day that there was a large protest at the front of Parliament House by concerned Aboriginal people, the Premier stood in this place and said that! Government members’ leader said that. He went straight to those statistics. I thought that gonorrhoea is a reportable infection and this is something that we can check. I note that today the Premier continued with his gonorrhoea rhetoric. As an aside, on Thursday, I put a question without notice to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in the upper house—it is quite rare for a question without notice in the upper house. What did the minister say? He stated —

Regarding the specific cases of gonorrhoea, no, I am not familiar with where those cases are.

It is clearly not an issue that has been raised at cabinet subcommittee level; this is just a little debating point that the Premier thought he would use. The Premier said today that he was talking about the Kimberley. We have known for years and years that rates of gonorrhoea infection in the Kimberley have been higher than is the case in the rest of the state. That is not new information. I have not heard the Premier mention his concern about this issue before—not once. I have sat in this chamber for seven Premier’s Statements, and not once have I heard him talk about this issue.

The Department of Health website has all the statistics on every sexually transmitted disease imaginable it seems. I looked at the statistics for gonorrhoea specifically in the Aboriginal community, but also in the Kimberley. For each of the years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012 and 2013–14—the most recent comparison—the rates of gonorrhoea in the Kimberley and Aboriginal populations are without a doubt higher than is the case elsewhere. It is interesting that since 2006, the rate of gonorrhoea in Aboriginal people has declined remarkably. In 2006, the age-standardised rate per 100 000 was 1 600 in the Aboriginal community. By 2012, this had dropped to 550. I can only imagine that is a significant success for the health community in reducing the rate of gonorrhoea in the Aboriginal community. Yes, it is higher than elsewhere, and I accept that, but gonorrhoea is not only in the Aboriginal community; it is in the wider community. Last Thursday, the Premier said —

How many cases of gonorrhoea are there in the wider community? There are none—not a single case.

He said that there was not a single case of gonorrhoea either in the age group of 10 to 14-year-olds that he was talking about or across the community. There was no recognition from the Premier that although the rate of infection is still high for Aboriginal people, it is coming down remarkably. I turn to other areas. The great southern, member for Albany, has had some significant spikes. In other areas of Western Australia, the rate of infection is going up significantly. Colleagues will remember that I quoted in question time the most recent comparison on the website between 2013, the year the Premier quoted, and 2014. The website states —

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 25 March 2015]

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The gonorrhoea notification rate decreased by 19% among Aboriginal people and increased by 47% among non-Aboriginal people, resulting in a lower rate ratio compared to the previous 12-month period.

Aboriginal people are having more success reducing gonorrhoea infection rates than the non-Aboriginal community. Yes, the rates are higher than elsewhere. We know and accept that. We have probably known about that for decades—certainly as far back as the records I can get on the Department of Health website.

The argument for closing communities cannot be about money, because the community with the figures the Premier keeps rolling out has been closed. He closed Oombulgurri. The closures cannot be about the rate of gonorrhoea infection, because the government is having some success reducing that rate. The Premier made the point that no-one else in the community suffers from this other than Aboriginal people. It was just outrageous.

I thought: okay; I will pursue every little argument the Premier raises because he has declared the communities guilty, and now he is trying to present the case for the jury—but the case keeps changing, which is infuriating. I asked the Premier: of the 39 cases of gonorrhoea he talked about—today, we found out he was talking only about the Kimberley—how many were in remote communities and were they all in remotes? The Premier is using that argument to justify the closure or remotes. Were all those cases in remotes? Yesterday, I got this answer to a question in the upper house; I quote —

The figure of 39 cases of gonorrhoea in 2013 for Aboriginal children aged from 10 to 14 years compared with none for non-Aboriginal children is for the Kimberley region. This data has been provided by the Department of Health. There is difficulty in distinguishing cases residing in remote communities versus townships in remote regions because, from the point of view of the sexually transmitted infections notification data, people who live in small or remote communities often have their addresses recorded as the nearest town—for example, via Fitzroy Crossing, via Halls Creek et cetera—or a post office box number based in the post office of the nearest township. Also, some populations move frequently between towns and small communities, so a given address on the case report form does not necessarily constitute the location where they spend most of their time.

That answer means, friends, that the Premier has no idea how many of those 39 cases of gonorrhoea reported in 2013 for the 10 to 14-year age group in the Kimberley came from remote communities. Did they all come from Broome or from Halls Creek? Was it half and half? Members' guesses are as good as mine, because the Premier does not know. Colleagues, that is the basis upon which the Premier is making this decision. No doubt, as the jury keeps hearing the arguments, at some point there will be other things added to that. It is not about gonorrhoea; it cannot be, because it makes no sense for it to be about gonorrhoea.

The other reason I know this argument will fail is that there is literally no coordination between federal and state governments—zero. The federal minister said exactly the opposite of what the government is saying. Nigel Scullion is quoted on the ABC website as saying last Friday, after his meeting with the Leader of the National Party, the following —

“I met with one of the ministers from the West Australian Government yesterday and made it very clear that a sit down with the mob is well overdue, ...

They're not closing communities. That would be really useful to tell them, that would be a really useful thing to tell them at the moment.

“The West Australian Government plans to sit down with every single community and talk about the long-term viability and talk about where they need to make investments and in what communities.

...

“There's a 150 communities who have absolutely no chance of being shut down.

The federal minister said that. Christopher Pyne apparently agrees with that view because he is investing in direct instruction and explicit direct instruction in remote communities across Western Australia. The state Minister for Aboriginal Affairs made the point today that the communities will be fully consulted before they are closed. What is going on? If the government cannot get the federal government to agree on the future of the Kimberley, what is going on? We can talk about the Mitchell Plateau and all sorts of things.

We are talking about the people who live in the Kimberley community. The federal government is saying a completely different thing from what this government is saying. It does not give me much confidence that the deadline of mid-next year is going to produce a positive outcome. As further evidence of the lack of coordination, consultation, involvement with or respect for Aboriginal people from the federal government and the state governments, I look at where the money has gone. The announcement last week about where money from the Indigenous advancement strategy will go is wreaking havoc across Australia. All members will be

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familiar with June Oscar and the Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Women's Resource Centre. Members opposite are nodding their heads. They do brilliant work—exactly the work that apparently the Premier has expressed a worry about. The centre looks after mothers and newborns. It is focused on early childhood development and health. It is organisations such as June Oscar's that have achieved a significant decline in the rates of gonorrhoea. I am absolutely sure it is part of the important flow of information and support. What has the Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Women's Resource Centre put up with over the last little while? By way of background, it was part of the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development, which established 38 children and family centres across Australia. We have a few of them here in Western Australia, and Marninwarntikura was one of them. Federal support for that agreement ceased on 30 June 2014. In WA, the state government has twice rolled over unspent funds on a six-monthly basis to enable it to keep operating until 30 June this year. Marninwarntikura has no idea what is happening post-30 June this year. Do members know why? It is because the federal government did not give the centre any money—not a jot of federal funding. Marninwarntikura is one of the most successful providers of services that directly deals with health outcomes for Aboriginal people and children. Its funding is guaranteed until 30 June by the state government, but it has been abandoned by the federal government. If this government cannot coordinate funding with its federal colleagues, this policy will fail. If the Leader of the National Party cannot get the Premier back into some form of respectful dialogue with remote communities, this will fail. My view is that the Premier has gone too far. The best thing we can hope for is that the Premier does not utter another word in this area. I am directing my speech very much to the Leader of the National Party; I am pinning my hopes on him. After seeing the Liberal Party leadership completely embarrass itself by what it has done, I am looking now to the National Party for leadership.

Several members interjected.

Mr B.S. WYATT: I get a feeling from the Leader of the National Party from our discussions that he understands the damage that has been done by the Premier in this space. I am interested in this leaked document because clearly, despite the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Hon Peter Collier, saying that nothing has been done and the government has no idea about the framework upon which it will decide which communities will close, his department received a document from the federal government back in 2011, so clearly work has been done on this. I have looked at the list of communities and it is perhaps a desktop study by the federal government because some of those communities are not communities as such and some of them get zero support from government as it is, so I am curious about what the federal government has done. But, clearly, something has been happening at a state and federal level.

I went to the Kimberley last year and again early this year and, still, no-one has been spoken to. The one thing I agree with the dopey federal minister about is that the government should get out there and speak to people. The problem that the Premier has got is that he has cruelled the water, so we will not get a sensible dialogue or Aboriginal people feeling they are a valuable part of this conversation. I still find what Hon Peter Collier said today amusing. He said, "We will speak to them before we close them." Maybe it was a Freudian slip, but he was reported as saying that local government consultations had not yet started but that he had assured the sector they will be involved in the implementation. I mean—duh! When they are being closed down, the communities will be involved. This is not the way to go about public policy. There will not be any savings to government; it will not save one cent, by the way.

I will conclude, as I do not want to go on forever. I want to hear some members of the government, particularly the Leader of the National Party, who went and met the federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Nigel Scullion—hopefully it was a fruitful conversation. I will conclude with a couple of quotes. As members know, I like to hold the Premier to statements that he made when he was on this side of the house. It is a fairly standard operating procedure for oppositions. We try to hold the government to the standards it demanded when its members sat on this side of the house. It is always interesting when members make the move from the opposition benches to government benches. I have never moved from here to there; I have only moved from government to opposition. I have never made that move, but it has been very interesting to watch. I have been very critical of the Premier in a number of different spaces. I read the Premier's contribution to debate on the Reserves (Reserve 43131) Bill 2003. This debate related to the closure of the Swan Valley Nyungah Community Aboriginal Corporation camp and debate during consideration in detail was a reasonably heated discussion. I will quote a couple of points made by Mr Barnett, who was then the Leader of the Opposition. On 3 June 2003, referring to the people at the Nyungah camp, Mr Barnett stated —

To move them out and scatter them around the metropolitan area may place those children at even greater risk and in more danger than they are now. That is the sort of legitimate question that members of this Parliament can ask. Has it been decided to close the site immediately or to move the people out gradually? The professionals, the law enforcement agencies and the members, the supporters and the

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people who have associated with and have a knowledge of the community—both past and present—all have the common message: The kids are at risk and they have been abused, which is totally unacceptable, but it does not allow for a simplistic solution. We are dealing with 35 or 50 people in this camp and the best way of assisting them might be to leave them where they are.

Mr Barnett went on to say —

They might have been abused—probably the majority of them have been—but the camp might be the one piece of stability left in their lives —

This is the Premier, colleagues. Later in that debate he went on to make another point, and I have not raised this point in my public commentary, except in response to the use by the Premier of the gonorrhoea statistics for Aboriginal people. I got those statistics in order to make a comparison. I will continue to quote *Hansard* of 2003 in which the Premier said —

The people in that community happen to be Aboriginal; they have dark skins. They will have lost their rights. The application of this is racially based. There are many other examples of abuse of children, often within the one family. If, for example, the Premier were made aware of a case in which a white father was abusing, say, his daughter, would he confiscate the property? —

Or in this case, close the community —

No. The Premier should not shake his head.

Mr Barnett went on to say —

As horrendous as the abuse of and the crimes against children are—there is no dispute about that —

No-one disputes that and that is why it is always a difficult point on which to challenge a rampaging Premier who throws those statistics around incorrectly. Mr Barnett also stated —

In this case legislation against an Aboriginal community is to be put in place that has not been put in place against other individuals, institutions or organisations, when again there have been examples of abuse of children.

...

My point is simply that this action against the abuse of children has one thing that distinguishes it from any other action against the abuse of children, and that is a racial connotation, because it happens to be an Aboriginal community.

He went on to talk about the commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act. I say to the Premier, who I am very disappointed to say has not been in the chamber at all —

Dr K.D. Hames: He was.

Mr B.S. WYATT: No. He came in here, tried to interject, I did not want to take that interjection, and he stormed out in high dudgeon. That was the involvement of the Premier during this debate, for the record. That was what the Premier said in 2003.

Dr K.D. Hames interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Health, that does not invite you to interject.

Mr B.S. WYATT: The Premier stood over there and made comments about gonorrhoea and Aboriginal people. He is continually moving the goalposts upon which communities are deemed by him to have failed. What is the standard? It is now time to provide some clarity, because we are seeing this issue in the media. I am getting calls from people asking me, “Warralong’s had its water cut off. Is the government moving in?” I have to say, “No, I don’t know.” Communities are moving around. They are angry. They are fearful. They do not know what their future is. The government has to give people some certainty. All government members know that. I accept that the government has to cajole the federal government, although the Premier not uttering a word to the minister the other week was extraordinary. He has to get the federal government to re-engage and extend the time frame by a couple of years to allow a more sensible discussion and debate to occur. Clarify the basis for the government’s decision. What is the basis of the decision? We have a federal government report, we have a couple of different arguments run by the Premier and we have heard Peter Collier refer today to literacy, despite the fact that the federal government has invested significantly in literacy in remote communities. What is it? How do these communities convince the Premier that they are worthy of investment? Outline the baseline data that the government has collected to justify the statement that these communities have failed.

The government will have to prove that once services to communities have been withdrawn or the communities have been closed—whichever way the government defines it—the people in those communities will thrive better

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than they are currently. If the government is going to do this, how will it prove it has been a success? The government did not do it with Oombulgurri, by the way. I asked a question in the house. Zip! The government just closed it. No baseline data was taken. The government needs to outline the government support that will be provided to those people currently living in remote communities to ensure that the closures will result in better social outcomes.

I was listening to Fred Chaney being interviewed last night on ABC Radio National. He made the point that the government is saying that it will all happen next year and that the government is saying that it is okay because we have a year. He said that without huge investment—huge investment—in housing, schools, health facilities, programs and services, the closures will create a worse outcome. This is a guy who has been around a while. I think he knows what he is talking about. I remind members again that the initial argument of the Premier was his need for some budget savings.

Colleagues, no-one who talks about the outrageous conditions of remote communities is saying that they are middle class Perth. No-one is saying that we cannot do better. However, we cannot say, “We’re closing you, there are too many STIs and you are too expensive”, without some explanation and without speaking to Aboriginal people.

I conclude with this comment. When the Aboriginal people in the Kimberley through the Kimberley Land Council signed on to the Browse Basin gas deal, the Premier said —

“In my view, it’s the most significant act of self-determination by Aboriginal people in Australian history, ...

That is what the Premier said. Self-determination, colleagues, involves a two-way dialogue. Self-determination cannot just be on the Premier’s terms. Self-determination, as the Premier is apparently committed to, involves a respectful conversation with Aboriginal people. That has not happened. I implore all members, particularly the Leader of the National Party, because I see him as the one opportunity here, to reset this dialogue with the remote communities of Western Australia and to participate in a much more respectful conversation than has taken place today.

DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville — Minister for Health) [4.45 pm]: I thank the member for Victoria Park for those comments. He made some critically important points in his speech. One is that there is fear out there in the community. Sadly, that view that people have formed—for whatever reason they have formed it—is wrong. Secondly, there is great fear. I was talking recently to an Aboriginal person from Geraldton about comments in the community that he has heard. It is terribly sad to see elderly women from remote communities crying and asking, “Are we one of the communities that are going to be closed down?” Similarly, member for Victoria Park, I heard people from Yandeyarra earlier at the rally outside Parliament House saying, “Are we going to be closed down?” I say to the member for Victoria Park now that no communities are going to be closed down as a result of the change in federal funding. I will say that again. Even in the light of what Minister Collier said, no Aboriginal community in this state will be closed down as a result of the reduction in funding from the commonwealth government. I want to make that very clear. The trick is getting that message out that the member for Victoria Park says we have to get out to those communities, because the people in the communities that we as a state government have been funding for years and years are scared that they will close down. The communities at Yandeyarra and Jigalong where we put in swimming pools are scared that they might be one of the communities closed down. That is not the case. When we talk about small communities, remember that a couple of communities in the Kimberley comprise two people. There is one person in Bygnunn—I do not know how to pronounce that; two people in Carnot Springs near Broome; and two people in Djulburr in Broome. There are communities such as those that, although they will not be closed down, it is true that their funding will be cut. Why will their funding be cut? I will go back through the history of the time when I was Minister for Indigenous Affairs. We had a so-called list of 48.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Dr K.D. HAMES: I am not accepting interjections.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! I ensured that the member for Victoria Park could speak in relative silence. I would like that for the Minister for Health.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! Direct your comments to me, Minister for Health.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Yes, and I hope that members opposite will do the same.

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There are communities of only two or three people. I will give some of the statistics. Members keep talking about 270-plus communities, but a lot of them are only seasonal communities. There are 205 permanent Aboriginal communities in this state. Of those, 143 have 30 or fewer people; 113 have 25 or fewer; 63 have 10 or fewer; 28 have five or fewer; and 62 have 31 or more. Relevant to those statistics is the fact that we had a list of 48 communities that the state government agreed with the commonwealth to support. We changed that when I was the minister. We reached a memorandum of understanding with the government of the day that we as a state government would take on responsibility for more and more of those communities. In fact, it was the member for Victoria Park's father who negotiated that deal with the commonwealth. We agreed that we would take over responsibility for those communities, provided that the federal government, which was responsible for them, upgraded its services and put in decent power, sewerage and so on and so forth. Then we as a state government agreed to take on the ongoing management. When I came back into government, after the Labor Party had been in government for seven years, that list had gone up to just over 100 communities. The figure was established for remote communities with a permanent population of 50 or greater that had a health system, an education system, power, water, sewerage and so on. In between that time and in the time of this government as well, the state government has taken over the management of some communities that have fewer than 50 people—some even with 25 people. That is because some of those communities are extremely good communities and they got away from the humbug of the town. I remember presenting a Tidy Towns award just outside Fitzroy. It was a fantastic little community of people. They had painted all the rocks and had amazing flowers in a garden. We gave them a Tidy Towns award because they wanted to get away from the alcohol problem in Fitzroy.

The federal government was responsible for these very small communities and had what it called the homeland policy. I think that was under Bob Hawke, but I am not sure. Under that policy, the government encouraged people to go from whatever town they lived in and back to country, and the government supplied housing and support services to enable them to do that. We said to the federal government at the time, "We think that is the wrong thing to do, because the bigger communities are the ones that can provide the health and education and have the potential to provide jobs for the kids; so don't come back to us in the future for money to fund those communities." What happened just recently? The federal government said that it will not fund those communities anymore.

Members opposite have talked about how there was a long period of negotiation. I am sure they remember that it was not this government that the commonwealth government was negotiating with. The previous commonwealth government—the Rudd government—had made the decision that it would fund local government to provide all those municipal services. There was a close-off date. However, that date was extended by a year and then by another year, because the federal government could not reach agreement with the local governments. I remember that the council of the City of Broome said to the federal government at the time, "How the hell are we going to do this? We have got 50 or 60 Aboriginal communities. How on earth, with the funding that you are giving us, which is nowhere near enough, are we going to do that?" That was the negotiations. Then suddenly, lo and behold, the new federal government came along—I am strongly critical of it for doing this—and said, "We're not doing this anymore. We're out of here. Here's 90 million bucks for one year. Take it or leave it." The member for Victoria Park read out a letter that said that it had been negotiated with the government. I was not involved, I have to say, but my understanding is that that is a load of rubbish.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: It was, "Take it or leave it. We're not doing this anymore. You can either have nothing, or we'll give you 90 million bucks." So, we said, "Bloody hell, we'll take the \$90 million, but you're totally wrong in doing this." I have said that over and over again, and I have said that publicly a number of times. We are now left holding the baby and will have to work out how we will manage all these communities. Some of these communities are far too small to support the provision of education and health services and create job opportunities. How are we going to do that? That is the huge difficulty that we face. We are not going to go out to those communities and say they are going to be closed. We are going to say, in a negotiated way, that we will not be able to continue their funding, because as a state we do not have the money to fund those smaller communities.

Dr A.D. Buti: So it is all about funding?

Dr K.D. HAMES: It is largely about funding, but it is also about providing opportunities.

Several members interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Members should talk to my former policy officer, Neville Collard. I am sure members remember him. He was living in the south west, outside the town, on a native reserve, in squalor, with beds in the dirt. It is much better than that now, but, in his day, that is what it was like. They closed down that

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community and forced them to come to the town. He said that was the saving of him; that was the making of him. All his family felt the same way. His brother did the Welcome to Country at the function here at Parliament House last night. They got to know the white kids and worked with them. He became a police officer. It provided him with great opportunities. However, that is not always the case. A great example is Billard, just outside of—help me, member for Kimberley—Beagle Bay.

Several members interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: She did not help me!

Ms J. Farrer: I can't read your mind!

Dr K.D. HAMES: That is where it is. They had some suicides there, as I remember, about three or four years ago. They moved out there to get away from some of the humbug in town.

Ms J. Farrer: Billard.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Yes; that is what I said. Some of those communities are like that. I am pretty sure those communities are the ones that are getting state government support. I know that Billard is getting state government support. However, we cannot go down to a community of three, four or five people. Members heard what I said. There are 28 communities that have only five people, or even fewer—only one or two. The state government cannot continue to support those communities. Those people have houses and they have somewhere to stay. If they want to stay in those communities, they are perfectly welcome to stay there. But they will no longer be able to do that with state government support. In some ways, it is like pensioners who decide to live in a caravan somewhere. They provide their own power and their own water. They still get commonwealth benefits, and they continue to live in those communities. A lot of pensioners live in a farmhouse and provide their own power and water and other services. That is what will happen to those communities, unless they want to move.

The member for Victoria Park talked about the Minister for Regional Development. That will be his job. His job will be to talk to those communities and see what they want to do. If they want to move, either to a town base or to the nearest regional Aboriginal community, they will need a lot of support. They will need a house and they will need assistance in moving across. That is where we have to look at the funding that might be available through royalties for regions to try to create opportunities for those people who want to move. So, please help us, member for Kimberley. I know that it is to her political advantage to have all those Aboriginal communities think that this government is a load of rubbish. But this is too important an issue for those people. So, please help us to tell the people in those communities that they will not be closed down. They will be supported if they want to move to somewhere where they can get health services and where their kids can get an education and the opportunity to get a job.

The comments that have been made, I think, have distorted the picture of what is happening. Members opposite have significantly assisted in creating that impression.

Several members interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: They have.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Minister for Health, you have the floor, but if you invite interjections —

Dr K.D. HAMES: Blame me, Madam Acting Speaker! I can wear the blame.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Deputy Speaker, you have the floor. Sorry; Deputy Premier.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Thank you! I have been promoted!

The reality is that we have a job of work to do. The critical importance of that job is to stop people in Aboriginal communities from being frightened, particularly those communities that were never in the group that would ever be considered for their funding to be taken away. For a huge number of communities, there is no chance that their funding will be taken away. We already provide funding to those communities for local government services. The Western Australian taxpayers pay for that. The \$90 million that has been taken away was used to fund all the little communities. I ask members opposite to please not go out to the big communities and say that the state government is going to take away their funding, because that is just not true.

A member of the media—who was in the press gallery earlier, but is not now—asked me out at the front of Parliament why we are closing communities, and I said, “Why are you saying that? You know it's not true, because I've told you personally it's not true, the minister has told them personally it's not true, and we have never, ever stated that it is true.” I reiterate that we are not closing Aboriginal communities as part of this program. We are not doing that. We will be working with those communities that are too small to be viable in

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their own right, and if they want to move to where their kids can get a better education and get a job, we will help them to do that. That is not to say, member for Victoria Park, that I think big is better. I know of many smaller communities that are actually the best communities in which to live, including the one that I spoke of earlier that is just outside Fitzroy—I wish I could remember its name—in which there is no alcohol and there is a great community of family groups working and living together in peace and harmony. That is the sort of place that we definitely want to be promoting, even if the education opportunities are not great. I can tell members that in Balgo, the education opportunities are not great either, and there are issues in the town, as the member knows, particularly with ganja and alcohol, that are severely disrupting the community. There are also different skin groups. I think in Balgo there are three or four different skin groups, and there is often conflict between those groups. So that is not necessarily the best place for a child to be.

We need to talk with the people and work out where families want to go. We can see whether they want to go to town, perhaps, and help find accommodation within the town. If they stay where they are, some might be able, depending on the size of the community, to have state funds continued to give them support if that community can prove it has opportunities for the future for its kids in that location. I suspect that some of the little communities with two, three, four or five people were told, “Sorry, guys. Keep the house, enjoy staying there, but from now on you need to look after yourselves if you don’t want to go somewhere else where the government can support you.”

I hope I have made the government’s position clear and I look forward to the comments of the Leader of the National Party and the Minister for Regional Development because I know that he shares the same views that I have. Hopefully, we can get out into those communities and have that dialogue the member is talking about. I accept the member’s statement that that dialogue has been significantly lacking. I accept the member’s dialogue that people out there are scared, and I accept that our government has a very serious responsibility to get out and do something about it.

MS J. FARRER (Kimberley) [5.01 pm]: I would also like to contribute to this motion about the closure of communities. I stand here as the member for Kimberley and most importantly as an Aboriginal woman—a Gidja leader strong in my culture. There is a lot of confusion about this issue. I was home on the weekend and people asked me all sorts of questions. Because I am in Parliament, they tend to think that we all know what the government has planned for the closure of communities. There are a lot of angry people out there. The federal government states that it provided four years’ worth of funding in the one-off payment to the state, which is the \$90 million that the minister talked about. However, this government stated last year that it would start closing communities over the next two years. Did that two-year time frame start when this government made the announcement in November 2014? We really need answers to these questions, and when I say “we”, I am talking about the whole of the Kimberley community. People need to plan their lives and know where they are going to live. There are problems with some families who have started moving; they have moved to the Northern Territory and they have kids going to school somewhere else. They have been told that they cannot get any more funding for their kids because they have moved from one state to another. These issues need to be addressed.

The state government has still not commenced any meaningful consultation with Aboriginal people. Does the Premier intend to travel to the Kimberley this year to discuss this issue? The people would like to know whether he is going to go up there and sit down and talk to them. On 19 March, the Premier stated that he did not want to meet Aboriginal leaders and community members to have such discussions. I believe that as a Parliament, all members should be working towards this; after all, we are the people from this country. We all need to know where our destination lies. When will that happen? What does that consultation process look like? The minister talked about some of these families wanting to move off communities. A lot of these people do not want to move off communities; they want to stay there because it is part of their traditional country. All they want is the best for their children. People such as the minister, the Leader of the National Party, the Leader of the Labor Party, the Premier and all the other members need to sit down and talk to these people or talk to some of their leaders. A lot of these people do not know what discussions take place and what goes on here in Parliament. This government has caused widespread anger, particularly for people currently living in remote communities and regional areas. We just heard that the Minister for Child Protection will be travelling to the Dampier Peninsula on 10 April. Does Irene know about that? Irene is a long-time friend of the minister’s and I spoke to her and she does not know what is going on. What is the agenda for that meeting? What will the meeting structure look like? Have the right bodies for these communities been contacted and made aware of this meeting? Irene is one leader of the community on the peninsula; she sits on the Aboriginal Lands Trust board and she is not aware of what is going to happen with her community. She needs to know. Living in communities helps us to fulfil our cultural obligations of looking after land, plants and animals and passing on traditional cultural practices to our future generations because that is the only education that our kids will understand. The comments from both

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Tony Abbott and Colin Barnett show the extreme ignorance of the Liberal government towards the importance of maintaining and strengthening Aboriginal culture, heritage practices, and responsibilities.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Peter Abetz): Members, can we have a bit of silence, please.

Ms J. FARRER: Last week in this chamber, the Premier made accusations that 39 children in the Kimberley between the ages of 10 to 14 years had sexually transmitted infections. How many charges have been laid in relation to these allegations of child sexual abuse in the Kimberley?

A 2010 internal government document from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs categorised 192 communities as unsustainable. Of course they are unsustainable! The Department of Aboriginal Affairs has the principle that if a person wants to advance or do something with their land, they must have authorisation from the minister. Who holds that portfolio? The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs does. None of the people out there—I know because I am one of them—have that support. That should be part of the consultation process. Still today the non-Indigenous Minister for Aboriginal Affairs claims that the government has no assessment framework to determine which communities will be closed. That is all untrue! When will this government provide me with honest information so that I can take it back to my people up in the Kimberley? I am not going to sit by and let the Premier or the minister make wild accusations against Aboriginal people.

Let us have a conversation about how we can make communities thrive and be viable. We need to be open and transparent. There should be transparent communication between the government and community members. After all, we are people. Why is that so difficult for this government to do? I hope that every member is listening to what I am saying because this is important for our people in the Kimberley. The Liberal government's policies and practices continue to reduce the traditional rights, access to land and security of title that are essential to enable Aboriginal Australians to fully exercise their economic, social and cultural rights. We have been sitting in the back for years because we have not been able to do a lot about those issues. WA Labor believes in the advancement, maintenance, protection, respect and recognition of Aboriginal cultural heritage. WA Labor believes that it is important that all Australians recognise the contribution of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture to the Australian way of life. I know that there are a lot of people in this chamber, whether they are from the Liberal Party or the Labor Party, who know what I am talking about. I know that some members are sympathetic to what is happening, but Aboriginal people need to hear these members' voices. We need to know that this Parliament is here to support us in our fight. We need to know what we can do with the support and consultation of all parties concerned in Parliament. We all need to put our heads together to talk about how we can overcome this. I think that is the best thing that this Parliament can do. Thank you.

MR D.T. REDMAN (Warren-Blackwood — Leader of the National Party) [5.09 pm]: I thank the member for Victoria Park for bringing on this debate. It is a really important issue. I thank also the member for Kimberley for her contribution. I want to pick up a number of issues first and set the scene for discussion that is more appropriate to remote communities than some of the accusations that have been made and some of the issues that have come to the fore. This comes on the back of the point made by the member for Victoria Park about investment and government support. I think he floated the figure of something like \$20 billion that the government is getting in royalties, yet it has not dealt with this issue—or chooses not to deal with this issue. I want to talk about the investment that this government has made into the Aboriginal communities. It is substantial, particularly in regional areas and particularly through royalties for regions. Some \$350 million worth of projects directly benefit Aboriginal people or directly include Aboriginal economic development outcomes. This is significant investment. The sum of \$10 million has been invested in Aboriginal community critical response areas. An issue that the member for Victoria Park has been raising is that of governance and leadership programs, and \$2.3 million has been invested in this area to support the building of governance outcomes in Aboriginal communities so that they can deliver better outcomes for themselves. Remote Indigenous health clinics have benefited from \$22.2 million worth of investment. I actually opened two of those—one in Mulan and one in Billiluna.

Ms J. Farrer: I was there.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: That is right; the member for Kimberley was there. They are fantastic clinics, and another example of significant investment into those communities where it is needed. They were not the only two, as the member well knows; there were another three. Again, this was royalties for regions investment that demonstrates this government's support of key issues that occur in those areas, giving the most isolated parts of Western Australia a chance to achieve better health outcomes than they would have had before. There has been an investment of \$1.6 million for the Edge of Nowhere Thriving Communities project, which was about securing access to fresh food and education to improve health and prevent lifestyle-related chronic illnesses in remote communities in the Kimberley. There has been \$15.9 million for the north west drug and alcohol program for the Kimberley and Pilbara because of the increased demands and challenges. This is another significant investment.

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The Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council, supporting Aboriginal tourism, has been supported by royalties for regions investment. There has been \$13 million for Indigenous visitor hostels in Kalgoorlie and Derby. I know that the member for Kimberley has a lot of passion about supporting a similar project in Broome. I have spoken to her about that, and it has my support; it is really important. The government has a record of significant investments in hostel accommodation. As I understand, although I have not seen it yet, the Derby project is outstanding and working particularly well. Kimberley Aboriginal community housing has benefited to the tune of \$15 million, and \$220 million has been invested in the Ord–East Kimberley project. I see two members nodding their heads, because I know that they have commented that they thought it was a waste of money. I know that when Kimberley Agricultural Investment was clearing the land for the Ord irrigation expansion, about six or seven of the bulldozer drivers in the clearing project were Aboriginal people who got training out of the Ord project, having been directly involved in the job.

Several members interjected.

Point of Order

Dr K.D. HAMES: The previous Acting Speaker was very strict in stopping our side from interjecting, and I ask for you to do the same, Mr Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz): Yes, I have just called on the member for Warnbro to desist, and I would insist on that.

Debate Resumed

Mr D.T. REDMAN: We have made substantial investment. Some of that has been in direct support of Aboriginal communities and Indigenous-related matters, and some has been less direct. An example of that is the Ord–East Kimberley project and also the Water for Food project that the Minister for Water is rolling out through the Mowanjum community. These are examples of the government engaging in the economic development opportunities that some of those regions present, particularly the Kimberley. Again I highlight that there is —

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Let me finish.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston, I call on you to desist. I called on all members to desist. The member has made it very clear that he is not willing to take interjections. I call you to order for the first time.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: We have fundamentally rebuilt Fitzroy Crossing. If we look at the projects that have happened in Fitzroy Crossing, compared with what it used to be, we can see that it has been fundamentally rebuilt in this term of government. We have seen investments into better health for Fitzroy kids through the Western Australian Country Health Service, the courthouse replacement, the Fitzroy Crossing footpaths, streets and amenities—a whole range of things that have fundamentally changed the face of Fitzroy Crossing, in comparison with what it was five or six years ago. There have also been investments into Halls Creek, and support for the Warmun community after the flood. We had to relocate a whole community to deal with it, and that was challenging. I am making this point because the member for Victoria Park, who has put this motion up, made the point that something like \$20 billion has come in in royalties, and what is the government doing about it? I am making the point that it is not being dismissed; there are significant investments; we are listening to the issues up there; and we are trying to address a whole range of challenges.

I think the member for Kimberley highlighted the importance of investment, and the importance of taking a bipartisan approach. I mentioned to the Minister for Health a few years ago when he was Aboriginal affairs minister that it would be good to have two Aboriginal affairs ministers in Western Australia—a Liberal one and a Labor one—who would come together, sit outside of the cabinet and set a plan for moving forward, so that they correctly take the politics out of the challenge. Unfortunately, that is not something that can come to pass.

I do not want to harp on this, but I want to make the point because part of the argument that the member for Victoria Park made went to the heart of the credibility of this government and the investments that we have been making. I want to go back to 27 March 2006, and an article in *The West Australian*. Members will remember when Steve Pennells, as a correspondent—the member for Kimberley will be aware of this—exposed all the challenges in Halls Creek. I want to read some quotes from that article. One was from Hon Tom Stephens, who was an upper house member at the time. The article states —

MLC Tom Stephens said his government had been aware of the high incidence of abuse in the Kimberley but suffered from policy paralysis.

The government suffered from policy paralysis in 2006. Mr Stephens went on to say —

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“At no point in our history have we ever been in a situation of being so morally culpable as a government”

The article also states —

Labor MLA Carol Martin described the rate of sexually transmitted diseases in Kimberley children as another form of genocide.

It was hugely challenging to all of us. Another comment made by Carol Martin was that it was clear that the government had failed the Kimberley people. At the time, the Western Australian government was also swimming in budget surpluses. I make the point back to the member for Victoria Park. With all the royalties coming in—I just laid out a number of investments this government has made, including through royalties for regions—at that time significant investments could have been made, and one community significantly broke down. A follow-up story on 2 December 2006 reads —

The stories forced government ministers and senior department chiefs to fly into the town for a series of crisis meetings and the revelations prompted an outcry from backbenchers and former health bureaucrats who admitted they knew of the problem but had been hampered by “policy paralysis” over the political powder keg of Aboriginal health and child sex abuse.

I think things have substantially improved since then, but I want to make the point that the opposition can hardly stand on the high moral ground with that history. I think the government has made significant investments, but as the member for Kimberley and the member for Victoria Park both rightly pointed out, we always need to do better.

I now come to the remote Aboriginal communities, and I think this point is really important. A subcommittee of cabinet was formed in this current term of government. When we took office after the 2013 election, the Premier asked this group what were some of the things that we should be doing in this term of government. Brendon Grylls at that time said that we should set up a subcommittee of cabinet focused on Indigenous issues and Aboriginal communities. That is actually what happened when we first came to government. That has been progressing on the challenges and the issues that we have laid out. I want to make a couple of comments to back up the Minister for Health’s comments. There will be no sudden changes in this space at all. This issue will be worked through very carefully in strong consultation with Aboriginal leaders, and that has started; it is only the start. I have been to a couple of meetings in Broome. The Department of Regional Development has had a number of meetings across the Kimberley in particular. I have had a chance to go to Canberra to meet with the federal minister, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Alan Tudge, who is involved in the federal government’s responses to these communities, Warren Truss and Ken Wyatt, the member for Hasluck, to talk about a range of issues. Consultation is really important.

I make the point as the Leader of the National Party that I, with my party colleagues, will support change only if we have a viable plan that significantly improves the outcomes for residents of remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves that has the support of Aboriginal leaders. That is fundamental. It is important that when we make future investments, they are conditional on access to services, better education outcomes and better employment opportunities. The consistent position—it has been through successive governments—is that relative to Western Australians overall, relative to Aboriginal people across Western Australia and relative to Aboriginal people who reside in regional towns, Aboriginal residents in remote communities are less likely to have a year 12 qualification, they are less likely to have a post-secondary qualification, they are less likely to have a job, they are far more likely to have personal income of less than \$400 a week, they are far more likely to live in a house with seven or more people, they are far more likely to live in an overcrowded house and they are far less likely to own their own home. That to me is absolutely unacceptable.

One of the things that I found really encouraging during my short time engaging with the Broome community, the Yaru people, the Kimberley Land Council, an alliance of land councils and some other individuals who play leadership roles in some of the other communities, was that all of them—this is the feedback I have had from regional government that is engaged in different areas—said that the current position is unacceptable. I agree that the current status of remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves is unacceptable. If we accept that, we need to look for an opportunity for change. The other thing that was said—I use their words, not mine—is that there is a preparedness to share the risk in the opportunities that might present in moving forward. I repeat: what is there now is unacceptable and there is a preparedness to share some risk to be able to move the issue forward. I thought there was a sense of courageousness in the people I spoke to; they are quite aggressive about going down a pathway that improves those outcomes. I do not think any of us on this side of the house or on the other side of the house over the last number of decades can stand on high ground as far as some of these outcomes are concerned. We need to work very carefully and collectively to try to find a way to move forward.

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I think there is an alignment out there now. I know that the members for Victoria Park and Kimberley might have been disappointed with how I opened my commentary. The member for Victoria Park, in particular, and also the member for Kimberley have the capacity to show leadership on this issue.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Well, they have and do. I am also talking about a lot of significant leaders across these communities—people such as Fred Chaney and Fiona Stanley. All these people make comments about these issues. We have an alignment now that has not been there before. There is a preparedness to look at things such as welfare reform and strategies for change where we have failed in the past. Let us face it, the history in this area is not good. I think there is an alignment there now. Ian Trust is another leader. He is committed to looking at new opportunities, welfare reform and the like—things that are now in the political or the public debate about these sorts of issues that give us a chance to move forward.

I want to make the statement again that I will support change only if we have a viable plan that significantly improves the outcome for people in these communities and that has the support of Aboriginal leaders. We will not be able to progress anything that improves outcomes unless we have the support of those Aboriginal leaders within those communities. I also say that in my view it is not about money. If we talk about the \$30 million that the federal government withdrew, in the scheme of how much money gets invested just in remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves, it is a pittance. This is not about money; it is about getting better outcomes. It is also not about the forced closure of communities. I am pleased that the member for Victoria Park is back in the chamber. I know he might have been disappointed with my opening comments. I think it is really important that he hears my view about how we can try to take this issue forward. It is not about money and the forced closure of communities; it is about getting better outcomes. In being brave enough to tackle the strategy of moving forward, a lot of leaders in those Aboriginal communities, including the member for Victoria Park, have a greater preparedness than we had before to get some planning right and get those better outcomes. It is about choice and opportunity. If I have anything to do with it, I want to see a clearly articulated plan that has the support of Aboriginal leaders and that allows people to pursue opportunities and make choices. The only way forward will be with a plan. It will not happen without the support of Aboriginal leaders. I am starting a role myself, and my agency will be engaged at a level at which I hope we can come up with a plan and support a plan from a whole of state government level that can make a difference.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I have committed to use royalties for regions funds to support a better outcome. I will not support royalties for regions funds being used to simply backfill what was pulled out, which holds the status quo. The feedback from the people I have spoken to so far are saying that the status quo is unacceptable. If we start from the premise of the status quo being unacceptable, we know we need to make investments to make a difference. I put on the table, obviously through our government processes, that royalties for regions funds will support and improve the outcomes but will not be used to backfill what the federal government has withdrawn. There are some risks in trying to take this forward. There is a risk that the discussion may be hijacked by misinformation —

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Let me make the point that I think there is a risk that a level of public commentary, misinformation and misunderstanding could lead to the issue being hijacked. What happens when that happens? We go back to the status quo and we finish up with what we had before, which, from my small bit of engagement with and small amount of time that I have spent talking to Aboriginal people, they have said is unacceptable.

Mr R.H. Cook: Do you think the Premier's commentary on this has been unhelpful?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The Premier will be accountable for his commentary and I will be accountable for mine. I am the Leader of the National Party in an alliance government. I will be accountable.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz): Members, we do not want unnecessary interjections. The person who has the call made it very clear that he was not entertaining your interjection, member for Kwinana, so please desist.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I will be accountable for my comments—absolutely. I think there is a risk when there is a lot of goodwill out there now from Aboriginal leaders, broader leaders in the community and also leaders at a national level. I am trying to engage with some of those. I have already done so to try to support —

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Mr R.H. Cook: Have you engaged with the Premier?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Of course I am talking to people around the subcommittee table. I am on the cabinet subcommittee.

I make the point that we should proceed with some caution, because I do not want a community of 400 people, which in my view does not have the opportunities and which does not have the chance of having the opportunities as the broader community, in 10 years' time becoming a community of 800 facing the same issues. I do not want that to happen. I want us to look at issues of mobility. One of the things that has been fed back is that some generation Y, the younger people, have the scope, capacity and the support to be mobile. Some of the commentary coming out of northern Queensland, which Noel Pearson has been pushing, is about something called "orbiting", whereby young people go out and engage in the economy and then come back to the community and their homeland. There are strategies available out there, and I am told via the feedback I have received that because of the nature of the young people out there we can put up opportunities and make changes that will, hopefully, make a difference.

I have also been asked what if the outcome is worse than what we have now. Again, that is a do-nothing approach; I do not accept that. I do not accept a do-nothing approach, because if we are afraid of the outcome of this situation being worse than it is now, we will never embark on a path of change that improves the outcomes for people. There is risk in this. In the past, everyone who has tried a better pathway has faced risk. It is challenging. It was fantastic to hear a preparedness to share that risk, certainly among the people I have spoken to. There are a few little things coming out. I am cautious about talking about my views, and I will tell members why: it would do injustice to a level of consultative engagement. If I talk to people and try to ground-truth it, that is the view I want to take. If I put out my view of the world, it is not ground-truthed or calibrated against people who live in those communities and Aboriginal leaders. One of the things that came out from one of the Aboriginal people that the Department of Regional Development spoke to—it might not be the view of others—was that there are 70 temporary seasonal remote communities; that is, they are going out there and coming back. That is the number that I have been given. I was told that if we sort out the tenure issue—this is the point that the member for Kimberley made—and we come up with an answer to tenure and ownership, all government services can be taken away and they will deal with it. I do not know whether that position is shared by other people or whether the people who are part of those seasonal communities have a view on that position. However, straightaway we have something that gives me the potential to sink my teeth into. If that view is supported, 70 of the 272 seasonal communities may be able to sort out a tenure issue and the government can pull away. I do not know whether that is the right outcome, but I am saying that we are engaged in a process to ground truth those views. That did not come from me; it came from some of the people we have spoken to so far. I worry that the opportunity will get hijacked. I do not want to see the communities become twice as big as they are now with the same issues. It is not acceptable to do nothing. It is not acceptable to fear an outcome that will be worse than it is now.

I want to make a couple of closing comments before I finish. The first relates to the Kimberley. I know that Aboriginal and remote communities go into the Pilbara, the goldfields and the lands, but something that has come through in the development of the Kimberley blueprint is that unless we address the issue of engagement in the economy of the Kimberley this issue will be a showstopper to the economic development of the Kimberley region. If the projections work out and we take the Water for Food project to its natural end, we have full-blown engagement in the Ord and the Kimberley, further development of the Fitzroy Valley with agricultural opportunities on some pastoral leases that are Aboriginal owned and some that are not, a workforce will be needed. If we do not sort out these issues, it will be a showstopper to the economic development of the Kimberley. That in itself is a driver, amongst the other issues of trying to seek some better outcomes. I restate for the third time that, as the Leader of the National Party and someone who is playing a role in this and is playing a senior role in government, I will support change only if a viable plan significantly improves the outcomes for remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves, and only if it has the support of the leaders of the Aboriginal community.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [5.35 pm]: It was interesting to listen to the contribution of the Leader of the National Party. I believe his speech improved as he continued, and if he had had his time again I think he might not have started the way he did.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Let us move on.

The Leader of the National Party mentioned that the history of Indigenous affairs for all political parties in this state has not been good, and there is much truth to that. However, the problem is that we are in danger of repeating that sordid history—a history in which the state has controlled Indigenous people and where they

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should live. We have a history of taking complete control over Indigenous people because we think we know better.

The Leader of the National Party also mentioned the statistics on children who live in Indigenous communities, and their education and employment opportunities et cetera. There is no doubt that is true, but it is also true in other communities. The Leader of the National Party would be aware of the imbalance between the city and the country in employment and educational opportunities—full stop. One could argue that part of the impetus for royalties for regions was to try to fix that imbalance. We did not seek to close down those communities or remove people from those towns; we tried to fix the issue. That is what we should be doing in this case. Yes, this issue was brought about by the federal government, but what was the instant reaction of the Premier? It was to close down the communities. Rather than trying to work out the problem, or speaking to the Indigenous people and their communities about how to work around this situation, what did the Premier say last year? He said the government is going to close down the communities. Last year, he said that he was closing the communities because the federal government was pulling out its funding. As far as I was aware, that was still the position until last week.

On Thursday, the Premier brought in the issue of sexually transmitted diseases. That was a disgraceful performance by the Premier. It is interesting that neither the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party nor the Leader of the National Party supported the comments of the Premier, in which he sought to denigrate Indigenous people last Thursday. The member for Victoria Park, in his questions to the Premier, has put very well the misleading statements of the Premier. The Premier today said that he inadvertently forgot to mention it was the Kimberley. The Premier is a smart man and is one of the best political operators in this state. He did not inadvertently forget to mention the Kimberley. I know that the Leader of the National Party would never stoop to that level, and I hope that the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party would never stoop to that level.

As I said, communities in the regions, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, have for many years been at a disadvantage compared to the city. To its credit, the National Party—we would say in certain instances to the credit of the Labor Party—would go in and try to fix it; it would not go into a community and try to close it and tell them to move on. Farmers have a particular relationship with their farm and with their land. In some instances it might be spiritual; it is definitely economic. Farmers have a very close economic and often intergenerational relationship with their land. What do members think it is for Aboriginal people? Their connection to the land is everything. The member for Kimberley will tell members about the significance of land to Indigenous people. The land is their religion, their spirituality, their history and their culture. Even more so, it is legally recognised under our system of common law. The Mabo decision was all about the connection Indigenous people have to their land. It was not about land rights. Land rights are about governments instigating legislation to award rights to land. Native title, as recognised under the Mabo decision, was recognition that Indigenous people had rights to property before white men came to this land. To retain that right, Indigenous people have to retain their connection to the land. If we remove Indigenous people from their land, they are vulnerable to losing their native title rights. People do not have to always maintain a physical connection to the land, but there has to be a connection to the land. If the government forcibly removes Indigenous people from their land, they run the danger of losing their right to native title. That was the problem for the stolen generations. This is possibly history repeating, members of the National Party. The stolen generations were forcibly removed from their lands and their families, because we thought it would be better for them. Of course, history has shown us that it was not better for them. Yes, there is the odd exception of people who did very well—but at what price? Indigenous people should not have to be removed from their families to receive an education. Many Indigenous people go to boarding and private schools—schools in Melbourne et cetera—but that is done in consultation with families; it is not forced on them.

I think many members in this house are confused about the reason for the closure of Indigenous communities. It started as a financial reason when the federal government pulled the plug on funding. Then the Premier last week brought up the issue of sexually transmitted diseases. What is the reason for the closures? If we are confused, how do members think Indigenous people in Indigenous communities feel? They have no idea why they are under threat of removal.

Dr K.D. Hames: Member, can I say, you still haven't accepted my point. They are not under threat of removal.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I honestly do not believe that because the Premier has stated that communities will be closed. The minister should look in *Hansard* and see what the Premier said. He said the communities will be closed. Last Thursday, the Premier said the government will close communities because of sexually transmitted diseases. I cannot believe it. The Leader of the National Party had meetings up in the Kimberley. Good on him—he went to the Kimberley, unlike the Premier who has refused to meet Indigenous leaders. It is not a figment of our imaginations that these remote communities will close. The Western Australian government—the Premier no less—has stated that they will close. The Premier may be trying to backtrack now, but that is what he stated—and it is in print. We did not start the conversation about the closure of Indigenous communities.

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The Minister for Health and the Leader of the National Party mentioned that having big communities may not be the way to go and that sometimes smaller communities are better. For instance, Balgo is a larger community, and in some ways that community is not functioning as well as the smaller communities. This issue is not necessarily that they are small communities. If there are problems, let us try to fix them. In the end, there may be the situation that it is not possible to fix a community, but let us give it a go. Let us not start off like the Premier stating that we will close the communities; let us see what we can do. In many remote communities, as I know many National Party members realise, there is long-distance education by air —

Ms J. Farrer: It is the School of the Air.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes—the School of the Air. Why not look at education alternatives, rather than going back to the historical way we have always decided issues on Aboriginal affairs: we know better and we will control where Aboriginal people live. How can we do that? How can we do that, especially when the High Court has recognised that Aboriginal people have rights to their land? We would not think of moving a farmer away from their land. We would not think about moving someone who lives in Armadale away from their land. The National Party leader mentioned some of the education statistics in Aboriginal communities. There are some pretty bad statistics in some of the schools in my electorate, too. We will not close those schools down and move people away; we are not going to move them to Cottesloe. Maybe we will move them to Cottesloe. How about that! Maybe they will get a better education. How silly! Let us try to fix those communities.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz): Member, your time has expired.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I am surprised actually; something has gone wrong. Continue, member, and we will get it sorted.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will seek an extension as a safeguard.

[Member's time extended.]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I have an article written by Natalie Cromb in which she refers to the Kimberley Land Council chairman, Anthony Watson, who expressed great disappointment at the Premier's announcement of the closure of remote Aboriginal communities after the announcement of the cessation of federal government funding. I quote —

“It illustrates that the Government did not give thought to the social and cultural implications that such closures would have, not only on the directly affected communities, but the metropolitan communities too”

I think the Leader of the National Party may have alluded to the following questions: Where will the people who are removed from their communities go? What announcement has the government made about additional housing? What additional housing has been built? What funds have been allocated for additional housing? Which communities will these people be moved to? Where will the members of the closed communities live? Will they receive relocation assistance? Will the community be able to move together or will it be split up? That is what happened to members of the stolen generation—families and communities were split up and people went 40 or 50 years before they could link up with family members, and in some cases never linked up with family members.

Mr I.C. Blayney: Who said anything about moving people?

Dr A.D. BUTI: If a community is to be closed, member for Geraldton, I presume the people in that community will be moved somewhere.

Mr I.C. Blayney: We are talking about moving services from places where people go for only a month or two.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, we are not.

Mr I.C. Blayney: That is what I took from the Minister for Health.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member is not right. Did the member for Geraldton not listen to the member for Kimberley? Maybe the member needs to have a discussion with the member for Kimberley. I think the Leader of the National Party talked about the Noel Pearson program in which some people were moving around, but a lot of Aboriginal people stay within the community area 24/7, 12 months of the year.

Mr I.C. Blayney: You are trying to create this picture that somehow it is the stolen generation recreated and that we are going to take trucks in there to cart these people away.

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Dr A.D. BUTI: I never mentioned trucks, but I will leave that for the member's commentary. If the member wants to get up and speak, he should do so.

I believe the Premier was invited to meet the Aboriginal land councils, but he refused the invitation. I do not think I am creating that impression, member for Geraldton; this is coming from the Kimberley Land Council and the people the member for Kimberley is dealing with—not me.

Natalie Cromb's article quotes the chairman of the Kimberley Land Council, Anthony Watson, as saying —

“We have not been told which communities are being targeted or why, we haven't even been provided with a criteria to clarify the basis of decisions being made”

The article continues —

There was hope given in the form of a suggestion by Terry Redman, regional development minister, that the “Royalties for Regions” fund could be used to support 274 remote communities threatened with closure after the Federal Government announced their plans for closure.

I do not know whether that is true, but this report is out. The Premier has since quashed this hope by saying that Mr Redman was misunderstood and funds will be used for more appropriate investments such as power generation or water supply systems to regional, not remote, areas.

Mr D.T. Redman: Just before Christmas I made the comment that I supported using royalties for regions funds—I think I used the word “reform”—to support reform in this space. I have never made the commitment that it would backfill the funding the federal government withdrew. There was a little misreporting of that. My starting position was always that.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Thank you for that. The article continues —

Dispersals and forced assimilation looks a little different in 2015, as it comes under the guise of “funding” limits, but it is the same net result; Indigenous people forced from their homes with no choice but to assimilate into another community. This is, frankly, all we can expect under a government that is simply a group of puppets for multinational corporations —

I will not continue with that.

The fact is that forced closure of Aboriginal communities is, unfortunately, repeating history because the government is forcing people to move from their lands. Where is the guarantee that the whole community will be able to move together to a new area?

Dr K.D. Hames: I am saying they're not.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Minister for Health is saying that, but when the Premier comes in and gives a categorical assurance in this Parliament that that will not happen, the opposition will believe it. The Premier started this last November—it was not the opposition! It was not the member for Victoria Park, the Leader of the Opposition or the member for Kimberley who said that they would close Aboriginal communities; it was the Premier of Western Australia. Now the Minister for Health is saying that the government will not close them. It is confusing. The government said it would close communities because of funding issues. That was the commentary last November and over Christmas. If the government was not going to close Indigenous communities, why was the Leader of the National Party holding meetings in the Kimberley about the closure of Aboriginal communities? Why did the Prime Minister go on radio or TV recently saying, “Well, you can't expect to keep these communities open; it's a lifestyle choice.” It was a despicable choice of words, I must say, and it is despicable when people do not have these choices about their connection to land, to their identity and to culture.

The government told us the reason was funding and then it was child abuse, followed by better education et cetera. Let us fix those things. Let us give these people the best opportunities. We do not have to remove these communities in order for that to happen. As the Leader of the National Party stated, he is concerned about the tone of debate that is being generated, and rightly so. He should be worried, as the opposition is worried. How can the tone be any better when the Premier of Western Australia stood in this Parliament last Thursday and stated that sexually transmitted diseases are occurring only among Aboriginal people? It was a despicable, disgraceful act. In my four and a half years in this place, I am hard pressed to remember a more despicable piece of commentary denigrating a whole community. May I add that yesterday in Parliament, in answer to a question, the Premier stated —

It will be this government, the Liberal–National government, that will do more than the former Labor government ever did to improve the condition of Aboriginal people. We will not run away from the facts.

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That was followed by an interjection.

If Mr Barnett does not actually present the facts, it is a bit hard to run away from them. The point I want to highlight follows, when the Premier's stated —

What we are seeing opposite is a big part of the problem—denial. They are in denial.

What an absolute disgrace, when the member for Victoria Park and the member for Kimberley are members of the opposition, to say that we are the problem. How are we the problem? Were we the federal government that decided to withdraw funding from Indigenous communities? Were we the Premier who decided he would close Aboriginal communities? The Leader of the Opposition did not say that he would close Aboriginal communities. The opposition spokesperson on Indigenous affairs did not say that he would close the communities. How is the opposition the problem? The problem is being generated by the Premier. It is very hard, Leader of the National Party, to have a proper conversation, a dialogue and a rational debate on this issue when we have the Leader of the Government, Leader of the Liberal Party and Premier of Western Australia denigrating Indigenous people by his comments about sexually transmitted diseases. It is absolutely disgraceful.

Maybe if the member for Geraldton looked at the history of the stolen generation, he might see the linkage and that it could possibly be repeated if there is forced closure of Aboriginal communities; he might then understand the situation. It might even be better if he could spend just half an hour with the member for Kimberley. Let us try to have a rational debate about this, but I fear whether that is possible when we have a Premier who seeks to score political points and denigrates the Aboriginal community.

MS A.R. MITCHELL (Kingsley — Parliamentary Secretary) [5.58 pm]: I rise to speak because I believe that it is important that debate on this very important issue has the emotion taken out of it and that some sensitivity is put into it. I commend the Minister for Health on his words about taking the fear out of this process, because the longer we keep fear in the process the worse it will be. I commend the Leader of the National Party because he sensed the opportunity to do this. I also wish to speak about the opportunities that may arise, which have not arisen for quite a while because of the situations that have occurred. There is no doubt in my mind that all of us in this chamber have the same intent: improved outcomes for Aboriginal people. How we go about that will make a difference. Those are the things we need to focus on. We need to accept that there are ways to do things and situations that will need to occur, but we need to do those things through a sensitive and cooperative approach in a non-political atmosphere so that we can achieve what we are trying to achieve.

It was very distressing when the federal government decided to withdraw those funds—I think everyone feels the same—but it has probably achieved something. I recall the days when there was duplication of resources. People could go into a community and find that the commonwealth was doing something along the same line.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: That might have been the intent, but it was not happening on the ground.

Mr F.M. Logan: What was happening on the ground was that federal money was funding resources.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: But other state departments were also getting money and doing things as well. The member for Cockburn is perhaps talking about something else and not what I am talking about.

There was duplication of resources and lack of communication. Often the right hand did not know what the left hand was doing. The Aboriginal Affairs Cabinet Sub-committee was mentioned earlier, and I congratulate the cabinet on the formation of this subcommittee, because even within state government agencies quite often there was a lack of communication—that is probably still the case in some instances, but I am sure it has improved. There was a lack of communication between agencies and probably a duplication of programs, resources and things such as that. It is very difficult for people in the communities. Everyone feels as though they are doing the right thing, but they are not necessarily achieving their intended outcomes.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz): Members, there are too many conversations occurring. Can we have a little shush.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I think that the formation of the Aboriginal Affairs Cabinet Sub-committee will reduce those issues that have occurred in state government agencies. The commonwealth will still be in the field, but it will do things differently. Collectively, this opportunity will give us a chance to do something. Often it takes a situation to create the opportunity for things to change. As has been stated by the Leader of the National Party and our Minister for Health, I believe this is an opportunity and in the right atmosphere and the right environment we can make a difference. There is no doubt that this government is very keen to work with the communities, the leaders and the Aboriginal people to empower them. We have all seen over many years that we do not go in and do it for them or tell them what will happen. Members in this place have said that people have not been involved and communities will be closed and all those sorts of things. One of the things I have learnt in

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my life is not to rush in and do things. We need to make sure that we have the framework right and that we understand where the formations will come from and how things work together before we start communications. At the moment we have an atmosphere of fear, because people have not had the information; it is being prepared.

It is important that those situations are worked out and that the framework and work are done through that whole process so that we can minimise the fear and concerns and be constructive. But there is no way that this government would go into communities without having discussions with the leaders and the people to make sure that a collective process is worked out for how best to serve our Aboriginal people—not the Aboriginal people but our Aboriginal people. We are part of that process and we will facilitate that process, but it will be very much based on Aboriginal people in their communities. I, like other members, have been to some Aboriginal communities, of which I am very proud. I was very pleased to see what has been achieved and was very grateful to the people for their hard work. This government will do as much as it can to support those people and those communities.

Likewise, I am sure that many members know Aboriginal people who are very concerned about what is occurring in some Aboriginal areas, just as I am, as a white person, very concerned about what is happening with a lot of white people. Some members and I have been in a community that was not so nice; it was not something of which any of us were proud. We know that the people in that community were probably not proud of it either. Quite often we will sit with people—invariably it is the women—who say, “How do we get out of this situation? Can you help us? Can you give us some ways of improving this, because it’s our children, it’s our grandchildren, it’s our families? This is not what we want, but we actually don’t know how to make a difference. We don’t know how to turn things around now.” It is in these situations, when we can give the community the support it needs, that we can make a difference.

Fitzroy Valley has been mentioned a couple of times. There is no doubt that the community there is one of the shining lights of the area—certainly, the community in the Fitzroy Crossing town site and some of the communities outside. However, the process needs to be worked through. It is a process that we need to work through with the leaders and the people in those communities. That needs and takes time. We need to also work with the local governments, because they will be part of the process. It is not something that we do lightly. It is not a matter of having to race out and cross off people and close off things, because this is not about closure; this is about improving the life of Aboriginal people and what they can achieve in their life and in their environment.

People have talked about many areas of concern. I am concerned about the standard of education. I am excited that perhaps there are ways in which we can create job opportunities so that Aboriginal people can be employed, but at the same time there has to be good, basic education. I know, and I am sure other people in this chamber know, of local companies that would love to employ Aboriginal people but often find it difficult because some Aboriginal people do not have the basic numeracy, literacy and education standards required to bring them into those job opportunities. It is a critical factor. That problem is not just in communities—I will accept that—but it seems to be highlighted in communities.

I have some statistics with me but I do not necessarily want to read them out. However, areas need to be addressed, and addressed very specifically and rather quickly. At the same time, unfortunately, the number of children in care is much higher in Aboriginal communities. It is not something of which we are proud. We do not aim to take children away from Aboriginal families. In fact, we try to keep them with Aboriginal families. However, there is concern about that, and I know that Aboriginal people are worried about their children. They are worried about how their families are going. Concentrated and real effort has been tried and been successful in some locations. Unfortunately, those services have either not been offered or not been taken up in a number of locations, often because community leaders do not see their value. There has been many a difficulty in finding people who can and will make a difference. In this case we will make a significant difference within communities and in regional areas. We recognise and are very conscious of that connection to land. It is unique to our peoples and we are very cognisant of that. Nobody will take people off their lands without leaving them with access to it. It is important that we realise and understand and it is important that we listen to the issues around culture, heritage, their history and their lands. We are very cognisant of that. I am certainly heartened to learn about what is going on quietly within government—not necessarily telling everyone all that is going on—about the things that we will be able to achieve, and we will be doing it with Aboriginal people.

At the moment, emotive words in conversations such as “closure”, “fear” and those sorts of words are very unfortunate. The Minister for Health mentioned that several times, and highlighted over and over that these words are not going to help us. These words are not a problem for us, but they will cause an ongoing problem for and will impact on our Aboriginal people.

This is a chance—I will not say a chance in a lifetime but it is probably a chance in my lifetime—to make a real difference. I think that we all accept that there is a situation here. I see it as an opportunity. I certainly hope that members opposite see it as an opportunity. It is very important that we make the most of this situation, because

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such a situation does not come around all that often. As the Leader of the National Party said, working collectively with leaders of the Aboriginal people and members opposite, this situation can really achieve results for the Aboriginal people in remote areas of our state. We are all proud of this state; it has its own unique circumstances of distance and other aspects. But this is an opportunity. Let us treat it as an opportunity; let us make the most of this opportunity; and let us do it in a very sensitive and non- emotive way so that we keep our Aboriginal people close to us and work with them to get great outcomes.

MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham — Leader of the Opposition) [6.07 pm]: I congratulate the member for Victoria Park for moving this motion. It is very well worded and has some very sensible suggestions about a major issue for thousands of Western Australian citizens—the most voiceless and disadvantaged people in Western Australian, and perhaps the whole country, who are being treated absolutely shamefully by the federal and state governments.

I was walking through the Supreme Court Gardens on Saturday after the march by the service people who served in Afghanistan in the recent operations there. I met a group of Aboriginal women from the Kimberley who recognised me, and the first thing they said to me was, “What’s happening to our homes?” They come from a community in Fitzroy Valley and have no idea what the future holds for them; however, they know that it is potentially very dim. This motion calls for clarity and certainty to ensure that there is some communication with people whose lives will be impacted by these decisions of the state and federal governments. Surely they deserve that. Surely they do not deserve this outrageous rhetoric that I have been hearing from people—such as the outrageous rhetoric of the Premier out the front of the building last week, and his rhetoric in this place, which essentially people like Josie Farrer, the member for Kimberley, see, with some just cause, as an assault on all Aboriginal people. They do not deserve that. They have it tough enough already.

I will go back to the beginning. The Prime Minister has announced that a funding arrangement that is recognised and that has been in place since 1968 to provide core services—water, power, perhaps some road grading, and perhaps some education—to these most remote communities will be ripped up. The Prime Minister decided that. That agreement between the commonwealth and the states has been in place since 1968. The Prime Minister unilaterally decided that he would rip up that agreement. The Prime Minister was elected on the basis that he would be—this is what he said—the best Prime Minister for Indigenous Australians ever.

Mr R.H. Cook: The Indigenous Prime Minister!

Mr M. MCGOWAN: The Indigenous Prime Minister is what he called himself. He then ripped up an agreement that has been in place for the best part of 50 years to provide essential services to the most remote disadvantaged communities in Australia. I think some of the people, like Warren Mundine and Noel Pearson—in particular Warren Mundine—were sucked in. However, suddenly they realised, “Hell; maybe this guy isn’t the guy we thought he was going to be.” Perhaps they had an epiphany and realised that Tony Abbott is not the friend of Indigenous Australia that he said he was going to be. I hope they have learnt an important lesson; if they have, they have certainly learnt it the hard way.

Tony Abbott ripped up that agreement. Senator Nigel Scullion came to the state government and said, “We are going to give you two years’ funding, \$90 million, and after that you will have to make your own way.” What did the state government do? It did a few things. First of all, members might recall that last year, the Premier started complaining about this in some statements that he made in this house. He said that the state had big problems with the commonwealth government about this. He said in this place that this would be a difficult issue to deal with. He actually complained about it, initially. What then happened is that the state took the money and ran. The state government said, “We will take the two years’ funding, and we will not fight.” That is totally contrary to what the state did when it came to Gonski, when it came to the National Disability Insurance Scheme —

Mr F.M. Logan: And the GST.

Mr M. MCGOWAN: Yes, and the GST. The state government took a totally different viewpoint on this issue from the approach that it took on those other issues. The state said, “We will take the money and run.” It should have stood and fought. It should have said, “No, we are not accepting that.” That is what the state should have done. The state government did not do that. It took the money and ran. This is the first time that I can remember in recent times—I suspect this example will be repeated more often—that the state has just rolled over on an issue as important as this one. First of all, last year, the Premier said it was going to be a big problem. I heard the Premier say that in this place. He was right. His tone was to object to what the commonwealth was doing. But he then took the money and ran, without fighting.

Mr C.J. Barnett: That is not true.

Mr M. MCGOWAN: The state did not fight. South Australia fought.

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Mr C.J. Barnett: How do you know? You weren't at COAG.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The state fought on Gonski, it fought on the NDIS and it fought on Kevin Rudd's health funding agreement. It went out there and it stood up to the commonwealth. Sometimes, I think that was contrary to the state's interests. The commonwealth tried to give us more money for education, but the government fought it on it; the state took on the commonwealth. However, on this one, the state did not do that. The Premier said, "How do I know?" I did not see the Premier doing press conferences. I did not see the Premier standing out the front of Parliament House in Canberra and fighting. That is what the Premier should have done. He had a meeting with Senator Scullion recently, and he did not even raise it, he said. So, the Premier elected not to do that. But then the state's rhetoric changed. Initially, last year, it was, "We do not like what is happening." It then became, "We had no choice. We had to accept the money." Then, in the last couple of weeks, the rhetoric changed completely. Maybe the Premier could have gone to Indigenous Western Australians and said, "We cannot afford to pay the \$45 million a year, or thereabouts." If the Premier had said that, people would have argued and said, "Why can't you do that when you are able to fund your priorities elsewhere?" Maybe the government could have done that. At least it would have been an understandable argument if the state had said, "The commonwealth is cutting the funding and we cannot afford to put the funding back in." Maybe the government could have argued that. But it did not do that. It converted it into an argument around Aboriginal kids and the abuse of Aboriginal kids, without any proper analysis around that.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Are you in denial about that?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I was in this Parliament when the Gordon inquiry happened 10 years ago and all those police stations were put into Aboriginal communities, 20 or so. I was here in Parliament when that happened. I was here when mandatory reporting was put in place. I saw the Gordon inquiry report. I saw Geoff Gallop on the day he read the report of the Gordon inquiry. I went to his house, and he was visibly shaken by that report. He put resources into that matter. But he had a report with justification behind what he wanted to do. The Premier is just saying that the government will withdraw funding for 150 or 170 Indigenous communities, without any justification as to the communities in which the Premier is claiming these events are taking place. I know for a fact that some of the smaller communities from which resources will be withdrawn were established because people wanted to get away from the big communities where the problems were. The Premier is saying we will close the small communities, and we will send those people back to those big communities. It makes no rational sense for that to be the argument. The Premier has created a straw man. Everyone of course has great sympathy for Indigenous kids and women who are bashed or physically or sexually abused. Of course there is no right-thinking person in this country who does not have respect for that. But do not subsequently create that as the argument and imply to people like the member for Kimberley that all of her people are responsible for this. If the Premier wants to do something about that issue, do something about that issue. The Premier should not just say he is going to close all those communities and use that as a post facto justification for a funding cut. That is unfair to those communities. If people left the larger communities and established the smaller ones 40 or 50 years ago because they wanted to escape grog or abuse or conflict, how are we helping the situation by closing down those smaller communities and sending those people back to the larger communities? How is the Premier helping those smaller communities and those children that he is talking about by making them fringe dwellers in Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing, Hedland or Kununurra? How does that help? It does not help. Tony Abbott, who grew up on the north shore of Sydney, would not have one clue about those communities.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Do you go and spend a week a year in those communities?

Mr M. McGOWAN: First, he did not spend a week.

Mr C.J. Barnett: He has for years.

Mr M. McGOWAN: No, he did not. Secondly, I would have gone to more Indigenous communities in my lifetime, and, also, I grew up in a country town with lots of Indigenous kids. I know a lot about it. I grew up with Indigenous children. As I said, I saw Geoff Gallop on the day he read the report of the Gordon inquiry into how Susan Taylor was treated at the Swan Valley Nyungah camp. I remember it well.

Those communities are there. We are dealing with people whose lives are being thrown into turmoil by what is going on today. It is not a lifestyle choice for them. Their families have lived in those communities for many generations. I think the way this has been handled has been tricky. The justifications are post the decision. I think the Premier should have been honest with the people when he stood out the front of Parliament House and said —

Mr C.J. Barnett: I was.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The Premier said—I heard it the way the Premier wanted it to be interpreted—"No-one is going to be forced from their homes." If I heard that when I was standing in that crowd, I would have thought:

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What is all this about? Why are we rallying here? Why are we angry? Then we came in here afterwards and asked the Premier the question: will those communities continue to have basic municipal services that every other Western Australia community gets? The answer was no, they are not going to have those basic services. When the Premier says that no-one will be forced from their homes, that is fine—so when people are living in a town that experiences 47-degree heat, and they get no water, power, roads, education or health services, they are free to continue living there. It is completely disingenuous to say that to those people out there. The Premier should have been honest. If his reason is that the government cannot afford it, he should go out and tell them that. If the Premier's reason is that he is not prepared to take the money from royalties for regions and spend it on those communities, he should go and tell them that. He should be honest, and not come up with these justifications that do not have any thought or analysis behind them. If the government identifies communities, as the Gordon inquiry did, that are places of despotism, dysfunction and horrible treatment of children, he should go and deal with them, but do not lump the people in every community together just because they happen to have been born Aboriginal.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Last week you called me a racist; are you going to do that again?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Why has the Premier not listened to what I was saying? Why does he not listen to what some of his ministers have said?

Mr C.J. Barnett interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I did not say that to the Premier; he is verballing me again.

Mr C.J. Barnett interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I have not called the Premier a racist. When did I say that? The Premier says things that have no facts behind them. I did not say that. It is a pretty big allegation to make.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Do you deny it?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I am denying that I said that. I am denying absolutely that I said that. It is a pretty big allegation to make—just to throw it across the chamber that somebody called the Premier that, when I did not.

This motion, carefully drafted, says that the government needs to look at these matters carefully and deal with individuals as individuals, not as an entire group, and it needs to deal with communities as communities, not as an entire group. As I said, and I want to repeat it, if there is a dysfunctional community out there that exhibits the behaviour that the Premier is referring to, fine, he should deal with it—but do not say that 170 communities are all guilty of it, and therefore we are closing them. That is the way this is being interpreted.

I will just close on this. These are the most disempowered and disadvantaged people, without any of the opportunities that we have had in life, and we are treating them like this. We did a eulogy the other day to Malcolm Fraser. Despite his patrician upbringing, he saw it and he understood, as did Gough Whitlam. They both saw that sometimes there is an obligation to people, and there is probably not that many votes in it, because the state, the country and the community should be bigger than this.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [6.25 pm]: I will start by commending some of the members for their contributions to this debate. The comments by the members for Victoria Park and Kimberley were an outstanding analysis of this issue, but I also want to commend the Minister for Health and the Leader of the National Party for their contributions, notwithstanding the Leader of the National Party's propensity to lapse into dorothea dixie numbers from royalties for regions funding this, this and this.

Mr D.T. Redman: The point was made by the member for Victoria Park at the beginning of this debate that there was something like \$20 billion worth of royalties, and he asked what we are doing about. The point was made that there was a lack of investment from this government, and that is what I was responding to.

Mr R.H. COOK: Okay, fair enough. I respect the member's right to be able to talk about his government's record in this area. There will be debate in history about whether the opposition did enough when it was in office, or whether the government has done enough, and all that sort of stuff. I understand that, but I think the second part of the member's speech was very good, and it was a really useful contribution to the debate—as was that of the Minister for Health, who put this in the sort of context in which we would like to see this debate take place. But, of course, that is not the context in which this debate is taking place. The background to this debate is about money and resources, and that is the great pity of it. This debate, and this policy situation, has occurred because the commonwealth withdrew from the long-standing arrangement between the state and federal governments of working together to fund a lot of these remote communities.

Mr D.T. Redman: The subcommittee of cabinet was put in place before the commonwealth decision to withdraw resources. The commitment to look at better outcomes for these areas and making decisions around

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how government policy should be set came well before any decision by the federal government to withdraw funds.

Mr R.H. COOK: I acknowledge the goodwill that the member brings to this debate.

On 17 February, the Premier stood up in this place and said —

In response to the commonwealth's withdrawal of funding for remote communities, the government's priority is to focus on how to provide opportunities for people, particularly young people, in remote Aboriginal communities.

It was "in response to", not as a sideline or as an unrelated consequence. The Premier went on to say —

This will require changes to how and where the government invests its resources. For some communities in which children are not cared for—or worse, in danger—job opportunities are scarce and health care is minimal, essential services will not continue to be provided by the state government.

There is the context for this debate. I accept that this may be an issue that the government has focused on in the past and that the government has policy aspirations that go beyond the closure of communities, but there is the context for this particular debate—that is, the dimension of this debate is about resources, not communities, and the extent to which the government is prepared to fund these communities. The Minister for Health said that we simply cannot afford to take up the slack—that is, to make up for what the federal Liberal government has so cruelly done, which is to withdraw funding from these communities. That is an honest assessment, I accept that, but it is an assessment that therefore this falls down the list of priorities. This is about costs and finances. The issues around concepts of child safety, sexually transmitted diseases, conflict, criminal behaviour and drug abuse are all subsequent to that context. Let us be honest about this debate. This is about resources, priorities and political commitment. I accept the reluctance of the National Party to simply allow the feds to cost-shift to the states. It is not a valid policy response, but this is the circumstance that they have been dealt.

The Premier very unhelpfully drew the issue of sexually transmitted diseases into this debate. As a result of that, as the Minister for Health observed, we may have lost the opportunity to have a proper debate about this. As the Minister for Health also observed, people are scared. The clear message from both the mainstream and the Aboriginal community is that remote communities will be shut down. To retrieve that situation—I do not know how the government will do so—from these careless remarks and inappropriate policy dimension or context will be nigh impossible. As the Leader of the Opposition said, this is a community that is perhaps the most disempowered, disengaged and disadvantaged in our community. To pretend that this community can somehow see through the nuance of the debate, through the misrepresentation of health statistics and through the remarks that the Premier made to the rally the other day that this does not mean that communities will be shut down is quite simply unrealistic.

The Aboriginal community has a history of dispossession and dislocation. People were taken from their country historically, either dispossessed by pastoralists who moved them off country once the issue of equal pay came to light or, ultimately, were moved into townships for a range of reasons. Poverty and dispossession is one of those reasons. The opportunity to live back on country was important in reconnecting with their culture and their land.

It is incumbent on us not to compound the problems of the historical mistakes that we have made. It is incumbent on us to move beyond that dimension of the debate about "us doing to them" and move forward in a way which, as the member for Victoria Park observed in the context of the agreement with Chevron, provides self-determination. That cannot happen from the basis of a debate around which people are characterised as having endemic sexually transmitted diseases, dysfunctional communities and hopeless cases that we have quite simply given up on. As the Minister for Health said, many communities are thriving and doing very well, thank you very much. We have to move forward in a manner that allows communities to be consulted with, to be respected and to value their culture.

A senior Labor member of Parliament once said to me, "You cannot expect Aboriginal people to thrive in a community until they can participate in the economy. You cannot expect people to sit in remote communities because they simply cannot participate in the economy. Therefore, their lives will be hopeless." That does two things. First, it undervalues or devalues the concept of people living on their lands continuing to observe a culture that is many thousands of years old that does not of itself enrich us as a community. Second, it also demonstrates quite clearly what this is about. As you know, Mr Acting Speaker, economics is about the distribution of resources and about things that we value. If we do not value people observing their culture, carrying on their lives in culture, caring for country and undertaking activities, which is about caring for country, we cannot allow them to participate in the economy. We have said in the past, "Your culture is meaningless to us. It is of no value to us. Therefore, that will not be represented in our economic system." I hear right

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 25 March 2015]

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throughout this place and right throughout our community that we value the Aboriginal community, Aboriginal culture and heritage and we see it as an important and distinctive part of our broader national identity.

Mr F.M. Logan: And then we do nothing about it.

Mr R.H. COOK: As the member for Cockburn interjects, we do nothing about it. We have an economic system that does not value either of those dimensions of our national identity. As a result of that, of course people cannot participate in the economy.

To reflect what the Minister for Health said, we have to move beyond that and have a different discussion.

I am drawn to an article in the *Medical Journal of Australia* in 2009, which refers to the health dimensions of people living on country and how important they are in the way people thrive in their communities. It states that there is an economic dimension to this as well. The article states —

Pressure to centralise remote Indigenous populations and services into townships has increased despite evidence suggesting this would lead to worse health outcomes. Depopulation of remote areas has contributed to ecological degradation through the decline of Indigenous land management; introduced weeds, animals and wildfires now damage landscapes unchecked by the dislocated owners. Indigenous Australians have long asserted the importance of their enduring relationship to ancestral lands and seas.

This article is trying to say that, as the Minister for Health said, we have to move beyond the current debate, which is simply about how we are going to provide water, sanitation and power in Aboriginal communities, and say to those Aboriginal communities, “How can we help you continue to thrive and how can we continue to be partners in your ongoing living culture?” In the health context, the article quotes the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council and its strategic framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in 2004. As set out in the article, it states —

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples health does not just entail the freedom of the individual from sickness but requires support for healthy and interdependent relationships between families, communities, land, sea and spirit. The focus must be on spiritual, cultural, emotional and social well-being as well as physical health.

That is part of the discussion we should be having. How did we get to the point now at which people feel that their lives and lifestyle will be threatened and their community shut down, all off the back of some crass health statistics spouted by the Premier in this place? The Premier said that we have accused him of being a racist. We do not accuse him of being a racist, but this is a racist debate because Aboriginal people are not accepted as a distinct community—a community that has very distinct cultural and heritage values—and as communities that have different needs from each other because they are very diverse communities. We want this debate to move beyond the crass political pointscoreing that there has been to date. That has driven the outrage and the fear in the community. I dare say that that is what drove the member for Victoria Park to be expelled from this place last week and the member for Kimberley to walk out of the chamber in disgust. It is in that context that we drill down around a question of resources, and we justify that question of resources around the hysterical, nonsensical and, quite frankly, offensive use of health statistics to prop up a position. As the Leader of the Opposition said, if this is about resources, let us be honest about it and have that honest discussion. But it has not been. It has been turned into a hysterical mess. As a result, I do not know how it can be retrieved.

If we are to create sustainable communities, we have to go beyond this current debate of what simply is health, sanitation, power and education for communities. If we are to go to a discussion about sustainable communities, it has to be about how we can respect people’s culture and continue to value that culture in a way that allows people to participate in the economy while observing their cultural heritage. However, we cannot do that through the prism of the crass and rank debate that has been generated in this place in the last couple of weeks trying to justify a question of resources around issues such as sexually transmitted diseases, drug abuse and criminal behaviour. Quite frankly, I suspect the “R” word is drifting dreadfully close to the people who are using that sort of language in this place.

Anyone who comes into government in Western Australia will always face the challenge of how best to assist one of the oldest cultures on earth to continue to sustain its way of life in a way that makes sense to its community. We cannot ask people to simply uproot and leave their communities; it is where they live, it is their country. Their country is where they live and we must respect that in the same way that we respect farmers and small communities in the wheatbelt and we respect other cultures across the world and their land and heritage.

I commend the member for Victoria Park for bringing this motion to this place. I also commend the Minister for Health and the Leader of the National Party for trying to provide some form of refuge to those on this side of the debate and maintaining some dignity when faced with the arguments waged by the Premier on their behalf.

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I think they have gone a long way to retrieve their dignity today. I note, with regret, that when the Premier re-joined the debate, it degenerated once again. If the government is to carry this matter forward so that it is not set up as an international pariah for driving people off their country, the government has to continue to debate the matter in this particular way and it has to disassociate itself from the arguments raised by the Premier. However, let us not forget that he raises them on behalf of government members. We have to move forward in a manner that allows people to be properly consulted so that they are given the right to negotiate and have proper, informed consent. To do that, we have to move beyond the prism of simple resources, crass quoting and misrepresentation of health statistics.

MR F.M. LOGAN (Cockburn) [6.42 pm]: I will not be as generous as the member for Kwinana in my contribution to this debate on the motion. First of all, I ask the Minister for Health, how much funding from the federal government are we talking about?

Dr K.D. Hames: You are better off asking the Leader of the National Party. Do you know the exact number?

Mr D.T. Redman: Withdrawn?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes, the amount per annum.

Mr D.T. Redman: It includes some capital, but the \$30 million was the MUNS funding, plus some others, so \$40 million to \$50 million a year.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is my understanding also. The Leader of the National Party has said that it is between \$40 million and \$50 million a year, and that would probably be correct on the basis of the commonwealth government.

Mr D.T. Redman: We have about 18 months' worth of that resource left in investment.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is right. The commonwealth, then, is saying, here is \$90 million for two years. One would assume that it was \$45 million per annum, or thereabouts, in terms of the commonwealth funding.

Members should be reminded that I speak on this matter not only as the member for Cockburn, but also as a former Minister for Housing, responsible for the commonwealth–state agreement and responsible for overseeing a lot of the work, investment and services put into remote communities. I travelled to those remote communities to ensure that that was carried out properly, as have the Leader of the National Party and the Minister for Health, and that is the reason I want to make a contribution to this debate.

As the Leader of the Opposition has said, this agreement has been in place since 1968; it is a bilateral agreement. It has gone through a number of different formats and called a number of things over that time, but it is effectively a bilateral agreement from which the commonwealth has walked away. This motion calls on the Western Australian government to stand up to the commonwealth and calls for the reinstatement of that funding—funding that in one form or another has been there since 1968. The Leader of the National Party talked about the contribution of the Liberal–National government to remote communities prior to this funding being cut, and he tried to argue that the commonwealth's action was not the trigger point for that. I am afraid it was. There is no doubt at all that the Liberal–National government was committed to remote communities prior to this commonwealth action. In fact, on 30 June 2010, the then Minister for Housing, who I assume was Mr Bill Marmion, the member for Nedlands, committed to building 75 houses in remote Aboriginal communities—some of the same remote Aboriginal communities that will see their services cut.

Dr K.D. Hames: No.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes.

Dr K.D. Hames: I do not think that is true.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: There is the list of the communities. Remember, I have just referred to a statement made in this house by the then Minister for Housing, the member for Nedlands, to the Leader of the Opposition indicating that 75 houses were to be built in remote communities in Western Australia, and he listed the communities. The Minister for Health said that they are not the communities listed as unsustainable that will have their services removed. I find it quite interesting that the Minister for Health said that so quickly. Today the ABC put on its website a leaked document from the federal government showing a hit list of remote communities from as early as 2010 that the federal government had provided to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs for its comments on whether those communities were sustainable. Those communities were reviewed by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and later a hit list was drawn up. I find it interesting that the Minister for Health was saying that the communities mentioned in 2010 were not going to be shut down, yet information has come to hand that a Western Australian government department had a hit list that lined up communities for possible removal of services.

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I will go on to talk about the types of negotiations that have been taking place between the state and federal governments. Effectively, the state argued with the federal government that there would be a single-source service provider for those communities; therefore, all the funding should come through the state, and then the Department of Housing, or whoever, should take that service over. Clearly, that will not be the case. Apparently, that list of possible unsustainable communities lines up with the 150 communities indicated by the Premier.

Dr K.D. Hames: You have to remember that the commonwealth has withdrawn funds from the communities it funds. Where we build houses, they are the communities that we fund.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I know it has been a long time since the Minister for Health was the Minister for Housing, but he should remember how it works. The commonwealth puts in a certain amount of money, which is two-thirds of the value of the resources. One-third is put in by the state. Something that has been overlooked in this debate is that the community puts money in also. The Minister for Health should remember that whether that money is collected by way of chuck-in money or through electricity or water meters, the community pays for that. There are three sources of funding. There is commonwealth funding, which makes up two-thirds of the resource funding, one-third is contributed by the government of Western Australia and then, of course, there is the money that is paid for by Aboriginal people. That money may well come from community development employment projects or some welfare benefits or it may come from the fact that they work, as some Indigenous people work in the Argyle diamond mine and others. That is where the funding comes from. That has been completely overlooked in this debate.

The other point that seems to have been overlooked in this debate, particularly by the government, is why people live in these remote communities in the first place. The Minister for Health said that it has been happening over a number of years; people have been moving from where they were first dumped around major regional towns of Western Australia after the clearing policies of various governments pushed people off their land for the pastoral industry. They have gradually moved back. The Minister for Health said in his comments that they had moved because of the effects of alcoholism, drugs, gambling and humbug in those communities. There is a series of reasons. However, the Minister for Health did not refer to the most critical reason why people are moving back—they are moving home. They are moving back to their country. That is their home, remember. That is where they and their relations and their family have links going back tens of thousands of years. Their relationship with the country is still not clearly understood by whitefellas. Whitefellas who have been in this country for three or four generations still do not understand the relationship between Aboriginal people and their country. I do not know whether they do not understand because they just do not want to know about it or because they have never been exposed to it, but they still struggle to understand the relationship between Aboriginal people and their obligations to that land. That is the reason they are there, and when they had an opportunity to move back to country, they took it. The services followed. Some services, as the member for Victoria Park knows, are not provided to the very small family communities. The Minister for Health knows this. They do not get any services at all; they simply live by themselves in various parts of the Kimberley in Western Australia. Others are in larger communities that have grown even bigger over time since the move back to country program started. That is the reason they are there.

What I find to be absolutely disingenuous in this argument—it was referred to by the Leader of the Opposition—is when statements are made, either in this house or outside on the steps of Parliament House, that the government is not closing these communities and it is not forcing these people off their land, as our forefathers did. That is just not true. The funding has stopped, and the Minister for Health and the Leader of the National Party know, as they have both been Minister for Housing, as have I, that that funding pays for the fuel to the power stations, repairs to the electricity system, the power to the pumps to run the sewerage system, clean water and road infrastructure in those communities. Other funding for health and education comes from other sources, as the Minister for Health knows. That is where that money goes. If that funding is cut and the government blames the commonwealth and does not take it on for breaking a bilateral agreement, obviously the members of those communities will not be able to live there. The government is not walking in and telling people in those communities that they can no longer live there. Basically, the government is giving them no option to live there, because there will be no water, sewerage, electricity or grading of roads to get in there in the first place. Effectively, the government is shutting those communities, but it is doing it by removing all infrastructure from those communities. I find that despicable, because the government is not telling that to those communities and it is not being spoken of in here. The member for Kingsley called this an opportunity! What planet is she on? How can cutting off the infrastructure to 150 remote communities be called an opportunity? It is unbelievable that this is happening in 2015.

I refer to the member for Victoria Park and the member for Kimberley. Members should remember that by far and away most of the communities that will be impacted are in the member for Kimberley's seat. When those members say that this is a repeat of history, it is a repeat of history. Those people, who moved back to their

Mr Ben Wyatt; Dr Kim Hames; Ms Josie Farrer; Mr Terry Redman; Acting Speaker; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Andrea Mitchell; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Colin Barnett

country because of a 40 000 and 50 000-year association with their country, are once again being pushed off country because the government is cutting off infrastructure and, basically, they will be living on the outskirts of places such as Kununurra, Port Hedland, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek and Broome. Anyone who has been to Broome in the last couple of years will know the problems in Broome from the influx of people from communities further into the Kimberley. Members need only talk to members of the local shire there and they will tell members all about it, if they do not know. This policy will significantly increase those numbers because the people who live in those communities will no longer be able to live there because there will be no infrastructure.

Let us look at who is behind this policy, at who is supporting it and who agrees with it. Of course, there is Tony Abbott, who calls living out in those communities looking after country a lifestyle choice. Tony Seabrook, head of the WA Pastoralists and Graziers Association said —

“There’s no future, it’s not integrating them into our society and we’re too frightened to step up and help them.

He says, “You’ve got to be integrated into our society.” I remember people saying that in the 1950s and 1960s!

There is also the Premier, the Liberal Party and Alan Jones. We are not too sure where the National Party stands on this. Who opposes the closures? Of course, there is the entire Indigenous community across the whole of Australia, WA Labor and federal Labor. Virtually every church in the whole of Australia and a wide and influential range of Western Australians absolutely oppose this. That is just in Western Australia, and that opposition is growing day by day.

What we are seeing here is disgraceful. The closure of these communities—let us call it what it is—is being done without any consultation whatsoever. The worst part is that the majority of those communities are in the electorate of the member for Kimberley and she has not even been consulted. It is an absolute disgrace.

MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier) [6.59 pm]: I have been listening to this debate. When I spoke to the crowd outside the Parliament last Thursday, I made it clear that what I said would not be popular. That proved to be the case. It is so easy to come in here and talk about the good parts of Aboriginal communities, and there are many good parts; I agree with that. It is so easy to say the nice and politically acceptable comments. That is so easy. That has been the problem for decades. Everyone wants to make the comfortable, politically correct point. What I said as Premier of this state is that I will not resile from my responsibility as Premier to address some of these issues. It will not win me one vote or one friend, but I can tell members that we might save the lives of some young Aboriginal children. That is what we might do. I do not care if it offends members opposite. They can call me racist as they did last Thursday—go for your life! It will not hurt me one bit. I will look after and do all I can with this government to improve the conditions of Aboriginal people.

Mr M. McGowan: I hope you’re not talking about me.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: You yelled it across the chamber!

Mr M. McGowan interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I do not care, because that is part of the problem. The opposition politicises the issue and tries to take the high moral ground and the like, but it fails to address the issue.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.