

ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE ACT — LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PETITION

422. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Premier:

I refer to the Legislative Council parliamentary petition with almost 30 000 signatures asking the Premier to pause the 1 July start date of the Aboriginal cultural heritage laws, and his comments yesterday downplaying the importance of this parliamentary petition.

- (1) The Premier referred to Western Australians concerned about the new laws as “dogs returning to their vomit” and referred to “dog whistling”; will he apologise —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Dr D.J. HONEY: Will the Premier apologise to those almost 30 000 Western Australians for those comments?

- (2) Will the Premier genuinely listen to the Western Australians who have signed this parliamentary petition expressing concern and pause the start date by six months?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members, I know a lot of you would like to answer the question, but only the Premier will be answering it. Thank you.

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

- (1)–(2) Of course the member knows full well that I was not referring to those petitioners when I referred to dogs and their delight in tasty morsels; I was referring to you, member. No-one else, just you. Oh, and maybe the five other hapless souls opposite us.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr R.H. COOK: Yesterday I was simply clarifying a point. I did not understand the nature of the petition that was put forward, and I fully respect that people have concerns in relation to this; I acknowledge that and have done so day in, day out this week. I have acknowledged that there are anxieties and questions associated with these laws that will modernise a 50-year-old law to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage. I noticed today that the opposition is claiming that this is the biggest petition since 1979. I thought that was interesting. Technically, it probably is because the Legislative Council’s standing orders were amended recently so it can accept e-petitions. Technically, this is the biggest one, according to the standing orders, that has been presented since 1979. That made me wonder what the 1979 petition was about and why was it so huge. I looked at it. It was a petition presented by the late Dr Tom Dadour, who was the member for Subiaco, as it was called back in those days. At that time, Tom was a Liberal member of the Legislative Assembly. He had a petition against the Court Liberal government for closing the Perth–Fremantle rail line. The records of the Parliament are a little bit shady in terms of how many people signed that petition. The public records show that it was anywhere between 95 000 and 103 000. That is a petition! Obviously, signatures were collected in the more traditional way of going out, talking to people, engaging with them and getting them to sign the petition.

I do not criticise the people who signed this e-petition. I have acknowledged that there is concern in the community, which is the reason we are doing so much work to make sure that we provide answers to people’s questions, and work closely with industry in a collaborative and educative way to make sure that these laws are simpler, fairer and essentially produce like-for-like activities that will fall outside these laws. I understand that there is a level of concern, and we are obviously taking every opportunity to make sure that they are understood as they are implemented.

Of course the last observation I would make is that Tom Dadour did the only decent thing that a man faced with those sorts of policies from a Liberal–National government could do—that is, he resigned from the Liberal Party!