

## CANNABIS — LEGALISATION

### *Statement*

**HON SOPHIA MOERMOND (South West)** [6.48 pm]: My member's statement will be very short. This is members' weekly reminder that cannabis will be legalised and likely sooner than they think. Blocking legalisation means blocking research and economic development, in particular for small businesses. It also means we are missing the opportunity to safeguard minors.

### *Statement*

**HON DR BRIAN WALKER (East Metropolitan)** [6.48 pm]: My statement will be a little bit longer but I have to also say that members will find in the course of this year that I will be presenting more science and tabling more papers because facts matter. Earlier today, I was talking about the status quo and how difficult it is to change minds. We are prepared to stay in old routines, and looking at new things is actually quite difficult. We really need to follow the science and believe the data. Yesterday, I tabled 500 pages, with 4 000 different papers produced just in 2022 alone. The government of Canada collects data annually so it can better understand how Canadians view and interact with cannabis. Of course, cannabis is legalised in Canada—very sensible people, the Canadians. The government has done this for six consecutive years. I am not going to keep members long for this but there are a number of key findings. One is about the 12 months immediately prior to the survey taking place and cannabis use amongst the youth. Bear in mind that I am not in favour of youth using cannabis. These people had previously used cannabis illegally, but their use had returned to the pre-legalisation levels after an initial increase when things became legal. That suggests that legalisation may have a short-term impact on how young people view cannabis, but it settles down and they go back to normal.

The next finding is that the proportion of people smoking cannabis has continued to decline year on year, which is excellent. Members all know that I am a rabid anti-smoker. Smoking is the worst way to take cannabis, but vaporising cannabis through a vape pen has increased steadily. Members might argue that vaping is dangerous. It actually is not, really; it is much better than smoking. We can see that wellness is therefore increasing, and the Canadian government is proving this with its science. There is a lesson here for WA.

Most interestingly of all, a greater proportion of the population used a legal source as their usual source of cannabis compared with 2021, which means that even with legalisation, people are still accessing illegal cannabis—it may be cheaper or easier to obtain—but, more and more, they are using legally bought cannabis. Storefronts sell it very commonly, and there has been a drop in the retail of illegal, unlicensed cannabis, which means that people are not approaching the criminal fraternity to obtain cannabis. That can be only a good thing for the population.

It is nice to have the Canadian government establishing these facts that it can build its future on. Why are we doing nothing similar for this in Western Australia? We have taken the path of least resistance, at least with the status quo old thinking. We will make it illegal, wash our hands of it and criminalise it, and then the devil will take the hindmost. We are not bothering about why and how people are consuming cannabis and how we can make it safer for them. We are not concerned with that, but we should be, because we are responsible for guiding the safeguarding of our population and minimising harm. This is really quite important, so I would encourage the government of whichever hue or flavour that we need to be focused on minimising harm and medicalising cannabis use rather than criminalising it, because our whole community will benefit.

These surveys are useful. It has put us to shame. I would ask our government to begin to take this seriously. Earlier today, I asked a question here about cannabis use, again asking for some figures about the costs of criminalising cannabis, and there is no data available. Is it not important enough for the government? If it is going to ban cannabis, at least make it important and find out what is actually going on. But I find, time and again, when I ask these questions, I am told, "We don't know; we don't collect the figures." Is it not important? If the government is going to take cannabis seriously and ban it, take it seriously; if it is not that serious, let us legalise it.

*House adjourned at 6.52 pm*