

KIDSPORT

Grievance

MR I.C. BLAYNEY (Geraldton) [9.41 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation and I thank him for taking the grievance. It concerns two aspects of the KidSport program. As of 1 January 2018, the total available funding for a child in a calendar year has decreased to \$150, clubs will have to meet the definition of “sport” as their primary activity and there is a 90-day expiry on KidSport vouchers. I understand there has been a change from a state to a federal definition of what constitutes a sport. I ask about that. I would also like to acknowledge the father, if you like, of the program, Hon Terry Waldron, for the work that he did in bringing in this program.

I want to talk about KidSport in Geraldton. The most recent figures I could find were for March 2016. We have given out 1 894 vouchers for 1 176 kids, for a total of \$255 000, almost equal numbers between boys and girls. A majority—only a narrow majority—are existing people who are playing with the club and using it to fund their sport. One of the top ten clubs is the Geraldton Police and Community Youth Centre, which has been very active in this area, but it is good to see that the 1st Geraldton Scout Group is number ten on the list. It is also good to see a high level of activity in the program by Aboriginal children. I acknowledge that on 21 March 2016 the program passed a milestone of 10 000 Aboriginal kids active in KidSport. One in five children involved in KidSport is Aboriginal. That is one of the real strengths of the program. I am sure the minister would agree with me in that. Former Minister for Sport and Recreation Hon Mia Davies said that in terms of numbers, we could say that the program created the equivalent of 384 new football teams, 640 basketball teams and 437 netball teams made up of Aboriginal KidSport kids since the program began in 2011. In September 2015, the program celebrated 50 000 unique kids who were new to the program. At that point, 54 449 individual children had accessed 90 903 vouchers.

Coming back specifically to the issue with scouts, which is what I am really focusing on today, the scouts have to meet the definition of “sport” on the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries website. There has been a switch towards national definitions rather than state definitions. I would like a bit of an explanation about that. Studies have shown that involvement in scouts leads to adults who are much more involved in the community and who are much less likely to suffer mental and physical health issues than people who have not. This decision to remove the access of scouts to KidSport funding will save approximately \$150 000. Scouts WA is not a wealthy organisation. It feels it can make up the difference between \$200 and \$150; however, it does not have the financial means to pick up what will be about 750 youth who lose access to KidSport funding.

Geraldton had two scout units. About 60 young people are in that particular scout group and about a third of them are on KidSport. In many cases it is fair to say that, with the removal of access to KidSport funding, those young people will leave the scout system. I acknowledge the volunteers who run scouts. For people who involve themselves with scouts, it tends to almost take over their lives. They give an enormous amount, but it has an impact on their family life and work life. That is the scout issue covered.

The other issue with KidSport is that I have become aware of a couple of schools in Geraldton that are in low socioeconomic areas. Other members have been talking about the index of community socio-educational advantage level funding and whether it was plus or minus a thousand. The schools I am talking about have an ICSEA level around the 700s. Parents have to pay for entry to the swimming pool for their kids to have in-school swimming lessons. Parents cannot pay it, so the kid goes to school and is left to sit in a classroom or something while everyone else goes to swimming lessons. That upsets the kids, so they do not come to school and they generally go and get themselves into trouble. I approached the council and asked it to waive fees for all kids, but it said that that would cost it \$80 000 or \$90 000. The council accepted that if the schools put two weeks of lessons into one week, that would halve the cost to parents. It costs the council money, but the council is prepared to accept that. However, the parents should be able to access KidSport funding for those lessons. It is only \$30. That way, those kids would be able to participate in swimming lessons like all the other kids. The current system means that the poorest kids miss out on doing school swimming lessons and that is unfair. I thank the minister.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie-Preston — Minister for Sport and Recreation) [9.48 am]: I thank the member for Geraldton very much for that grievance. I certainly understand his reasons for it, but at the same time I have a duty to administer very tight funds. In the first instance, I must explain why the changes have come about. It is not a change of rules; it is enforcing existing rules that are clearly set out in the applications. One of the rules is that activities and programs that are part of the school curriculum—such as swimming—do not qualify.

The issue that brought this about was that when I came into office, I was looking through the different programs. I was having a look at one of those programs and wondering where that money is going. I found out that in one of the towns where KidSport was allegedly receiving a reasonable amount of money, allegedly a dog was registered to get some money. That put up the red flag and we looked further and found that in another town more kids were allegedly registered to receive funding than there were kids in the town. Although I thought criminal charges should have proceeded from some of these issues, I found that the rules were very broad. In fact, no rules had applied since it had been first announced; it was just put on the website. No hard and fast rules were indicated. We

looked at it and tightened the rules to the existing criteria. That is where scouts got caught up; it was outside the criteria because it does not come under the Australian Sports Commission criteria of a sport. I certainly understand the arguments, but with limited money we had to do what we did. We then reduced the funding for KidSport from \$200 to \$150 per child. That allows us to get to more kids, such as those in the member for Geraldton's community. When I hear him say that \$250 000 goes into his community, I consider it to be a very large slice of the total pie. It also means that by reducing the funding, we can go further out. There was an increase of between 10 and 20 per cent over the preceding years, so we have to have that money without it being a drag on the budget.

The member for Geraldton said that the scouts did not have the financial capacity to absorb the KidSport reduction. I find that a bit rich, to be quite honest, when last year scouts made a profit of \$300 000. That shows its finances are very well managed and I applaud the scouts for that. In addition, last year, the scouts received a government subsidy, through various means, of \$700 000. I think that is very generous given some of the other organisations the member mentioned got very little. It is about balance. We have offered to work with the scouts to put in its own program for parents with Health Care Cards so that money can come out of the existing funding. We put that offer on the table, but I do not think it has been taken up. That is right at this moment, so I will not cast any aspersions on scouts for that. I am not sure whether scouts has accepted that offer, but we will work with it to develop a very similar program to ours, whether it comes out of scouts' funding or government funding. The amount of \$700 000 is substantial funding. Along with that, I might as well mention that the Girl Guides is subsidised by \$558 per person per annum. Again, it is a substantial amount of money. If we do not make some cuts somewhere or tidy up the rules, it means other areas will miss out.

That brings me to the swimming issue the member talked about. I agree it is a very big financial impost on some parents to send a child to swimming lessons at a cost of \$4. If there are three in the family, it is \$12 and that is very, very hard for some families to find. We must remember that swimming pools are council facilities and they could certainly fund a program from their council coffers through a community grant, if you like, and reduce the cost to probably \$2 per child for swimming lessons. Swimming lessons nowhere near fit within the KidSport program criteria. However, kids who learn to swim by joining a swimming club, the next phase after swimming lessons, will get \$150. Let us look at which end we want that money. The swimming clubs provide income to the councils. It is a bit disappointing to hear the shire president say that the council cannot afford to do that, because the income through the gate is about \$90 000. By my very rough rule-of-thumb estimate, it would not cost a great deal to drop the fee to \$2 for kids whose parents have a Health Care Card. I am not talking about the rest of them; I am talking about kids from financially tight families.

In saying that, I understand where the member is coming from. Unfortunately, I cannot assist due to the government's financial state. With the moneys we have available, I am stretching the lucky band as far as I can. The first part of the member's grievance was about scouts, which are well resourced, well run and well supported by the government, in my view. There are 94 sports that have access to the program, some of which get less than \$5 000 a year and are grateful. I think at this stage scouts is being run very well and should continue to do so.