

**NORTH WEST CENTRAL ELECTORATE — BY-ELECTION**

*Statement*

**HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral)** [9.44 pm]: I was in Shark Bay on Sunday and Monday and was fortunate to spend time with locals from Denham, including shire CEO Dale Chapman, some of the councillors and members of the public. We all know that there will be a by-election in this region in the coming weeks. I think that is really important for the region, as it is an opportunity for issues to be highlighted in the community and the media in a way that they might not otherwise be highlighted. I want to commend Hon Alannah MacTiernan for her strong advocacy of democracy and contestability within the process of —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I would like to commend Hon Alannah MacTiernan for her strong belief in democracy and contestability in relation to that seat. It is disappointing that the Labor Party is not really willing to show its face in that election.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Why are you worried about this? I thought this would be a great opportunity for the Liberal Party to rebuild.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** It should be a great opportunity for the Labor Party to go and test the waters.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, minister! This is not Thursday morning; it is members' statements.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Thank you, President.

**Hon Kyle McGinn** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** When talking to people in the community, the comment I have heard is that they feel snubbed by the Labor Party because they do not have the opportunity —

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** There is an opportunity to highlight matters in the community.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Allow the member on his feet to make his contribution. Perhaps, member, if you addressed your comments through the chair, you might be on firmer ground.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Thank you for your advice, President.

As I said earlier, this is an opportunity for matters to be raised. We saw in the news today some of the challenges in Carnarvon, for example. I wanted to talk about Denham in particular because it is a lovely, pretty little town. I spent a significant amount of time there with my children as they were growing up because it was always a great place to go for a holiday. I think that rubbed off on some of my family members over time, one of whom made it her home.

The big issues that affect that community obviously start with the health services. There is concern about access to general practitioners and health care. Three Silver Chain nurses are based in the town and one doctor is there one and a half days a week. This is an interesting theme that we see across the regions. The town has 850 permanent residents, but from time to time the population swells—I believe there can be up to 6 000 heads on pillows on particular nights. It might average 2 000 to 3 000 people at times. The feedback I got was that the spread of residency, albeit of visitors or temporary residents in that town, is evening out over time because tourism is spreading out to the shoulder periods, which is very important. A lot of these visitors are elderly people. It is important to see those health services develop. I commend the Shire of Shark Bay for doing some work to get a general practitioner into that town for another three days. If the shire is successful with that, I hope the WA Country Health Service maintains its current position or maybe increases its current commitment to the town.

There are other issues relating to housing. Plenty of residential land is available. It is not that expensive to buy a block of land, which is a good thing. When I was talking to people, I found out that another 30 dwellings could be built. They would be filled. It is difficult to find housing. This is a common theme across the regions. It is no different in the Kimberley, where I live in Broome. There are simply not enough homes available for the workers coming into town. Denham is in a World Heritage-listed area and it is an amazing natural asset. The relationship

with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions is very important. There are mixed views about this. When we speak to locals, we find that some of them have negative views about the DBCA and its involvement in the town. They have concerns about being hemmed in and 1080 bait, for example, and how that puts pets at risk. Others say that maybe the DBCA has learnt from some of the challenges it has had during consultations. I hope that is the case going forward.

It is heartening to see some of the renewable energy projects. We know there is a project underway to develop a hydrogen hub. With the local car situation, it will be good to have renewable energy driving the town of Denham. We have waste challenges and issues relating to recycling. There is a massive challenge with fish waste. I believe there is 650 tonnes of fish waste every year. That creates issues. The need for a seawall also came up. Seawalls are a big issue. In my home town, a lot has been invested in that, as we see the need to protect beaches from erosion.

We see opportunities arising from the mineral sands mining operations that are underway to the south of Denham. As with all communities, it is really important that we see the people who are working on those mines actually living in the communities. That will be the challenge. I know that the shire is working very hard with Strandline Resources Ltd, the company that is involved in the development of that mine site, to ensure that we see a large number of people live and work in the area, and drive in and drive out of that mine site. We hope that occurs. One of the scourges of our regional towns is that those resident populations are not as large as they could be because we see such a high number of people flying in and flying out while a large number of people from outside those communities stay for only a short term. I do not think that is good for people's mental health or good for the health of the community.

I have committed to people that I meet everywhere I go around this wonderful state and in the Mining and Pastoral Region to be a voice for people in the regions and to bring their stories into this place in ways that do not often occur. We see challenges. For example, I spoke to a St John WA volunteer. Those regions rely on volunteers. They play an important role. I commend the volunteers, the councillors, those who work in the various industries in the town and the leadership that we see right across the region, particularly in local government. I hope that the voices of North West Central and right across the regions are heard more in this place and that we celebrate the wonderful people who live in the regions.