

**HOUSING — BROOME
CRIME — KIMBERLEY**

Statement

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [9.35 pm]: I rise to speak on a couple of issues affecting the Kimberley at the moment, and it will not come as any surprise that they relate to housing and crime. Recently, I attended the Broome Chamber of Commerce and Industry sponsored event, the Kimberley Economic Forum in Broome, along with a couple of my parliamentary colleagues from both sides of the chamber. I would make the point to the Broome chamber that it did an excellent job and there was a lot of discussion. One of the sessions that occurred on the second day in the morning, which I assisted in facilitating, was on the issue of housing and the cost of housing in Broome, which very much impacts small business. It impacts on the ability to attract and retain staff and the ability to pay sufficient salaries so that people can actually go to a place like Broome and make a reasonable living. We have all heard the stories about the \$90 000 a year barista and the \$100 000 a year administration assistant. The cost of living in these towns are high. That is the penalty that small business has to pay in order to attract staff, particularly when we see rentals for single rooms in the order of \$500 to \$700 a week. Four-by-two homes are rented for well over \$1 000 a week. This has a major impact and impost on the community and distorts the economy.

These sessions were done with great spirit. There was a sense of rivalry with eight tables of participants getting together and brainstorming around potential solutions. Some very good ideas were put forward. One of the issues that came up was the issue of stamp duty, the challenges that imposes and the reluctance of people who often move to a town like Broome for maybe five, six or seven years, or an extensive period, to purchase a home. The median price in Broome is \$605 000, up considerably over the last few years. Stamp duty on that is \$24 000. Spread that over a five-year term for someone who wants to live up there and have their own home so that they can have pets and rent out a room to a friend or colleague, which seems to be a sensible solution, and that works out at about \$5 000, impacting on the already very high insurance costs, often around \$8 000 to \$12 000 a year, depending on the value of the property. These are figures that people in Perth are not familiar with, but insurance is very expensive business for housing in Broome. It is a big cost. The operating costs for a home could be over \$15 000 a year. When we add stamp duty to that, it is definitely not going to be a situation in which someone moving for a time to maybe work as a police officer or in education is going to look at purchasing a property.

There was some criticism of the impact of government housing, the lack of it, the impact that has on the private sector and the lack of flexibility in relation to the Government Regional Officers' Housing arrangements. The issue of pets and officers being able to share housing came up, which the government should look at. I am passing on the ideas that were brought forward and usefully presented. The Australian Bureau of Statistics data that was presented revealed that only five public sector homes have been built over the last calendar year. Not enough has been done on this matter. These were the sorts of issues raised. Many other issues were raised, which I will not go into tonight. I commend the group for presenting, particularly on the potential for stamp duty reform. The issue of fringe benefits tax and the impact that has on companies not being able to provide housing at a competitive tax rate was also raised—something has to be done. I commend the good people who attended the forum and the spirit in which it was presented. I hope that members of the government are looking at this; certainly, I have undertaken to continue to advocate for my community.

Another matter that has come to the fore recently is the ongoing crime epidemic that we are seeing in parts of our community in the north. Today I met with somebody who is in the retail business in Kununurra. Over a 12-month period, there were 30 attacks on their premises, 20 of which were as a result of break and enters. Usually when that occurs, there is some form of theft. This serious issue is tiring the people of the Kimberley and wearing them down. Police data on the latest crime statistics in Kununurra revealed that between July and September, there were 257 family assaults, which is up from 159 for the same time last year. The number of non-family assaults was 64, which is up 20 from the same time last year. These very serious issues need to be looked at. As part of its pay dispute, the police union has raised concerns about the ability to roll out Operation Regional Shield, which is an issue that I have raised. The Minister for Police absolutely needs to get onto this because, as we know, the summer months present a heavy time for criminal and antisocial behaviour.

Increasingly, we are seeing more assaults; indeed, they seem to be a common occurrence in our community. They should be condemned by all. We must do more because it is impacting on the ability of businesses to attract staff and our communities to function well, and it is undermining the confidence that people have in our region. I know that we can do better. We have seen the media focus on issues at Banksia Hill Detention Centre. These are challenging issues. I would not want to be in the government's shoes at the moment because these are tough issues but I say this: it has to do a better job. There is a vacancy coming up in cabinet and there is a real opportunity for the Premier to look at the second tier in government and the performance of various ministers, particularly around policing, corrective services and the issue of family support. The government has been too tardy in the delivery of the juvenile

justice strategy in the community. So many of the things that have been called for by the community for so long have not been delivered by the government.

The government is trying to do some things, and I commend it for the planned on-country juvenile facility, which I hope will be delivered on time. I will look very closely at the delivery of that service. Clearly, young people are often the cause of most of the problems—although it is not only young people—and the closer to home they are, the better.

We need to take the heat off the community. We need to make sure that people can function and we do not have nightly assaults on premises. It is appalling that in Kununurra, a small town with only 2 500 people, there were 250 family assaults. I think people need to get their heads around it. Please, I call on the Premier to look closely at a cabinet reshuffle and put in some ministers who will perform. Members in this place make a few statements and many think they could do a better job. Certainly, that would not be hard, given the situation at the moment and some of the terrible performances we have seen.

I ask the government to deliver Operation Regional Shield. It should be up and running now. We are coming into the summer months and it should not be delayed. We should not be having arguments with the union about whether it will be operating; we should be providing confidence. The government needs to deliver on the juvenile justice strategy as planned and listen to the community because it is very worried about the future.