

GORDON INQUIRY, NEW ALLEGATIONS OR EVIDENCE

167. Mr R.F. JOHNSON to the Minister for Community Development, Women's Interests, Seniors and Youth:

I refer the minister to the report of the Gordon Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities and the disclosure in that report that evidence taken in secret from victims and witnesses will be destroyed.

- (1) Were any new allegations or evidence of child abuse or other criminal matters raised with the Gordon inquiry committee that had not previously been made to the police or other authorities, including the minister's department?
- (2) If so, were such allegations forwarded to proper authorities by the Gordon committee or the Government?
- (3) Were police or Department for Community Development officers given access to allegations and evidence given in secret in order to maximise their ability to take action against child abusers?
- (4) If not, can the minister explain why the Government would allow the evidence to be destroyed rather than be used to prosecute child abusers?

Ms S.M. McHALE replied:

- (1)-(4) I thank the member for the question. It is a complex question. My understanding was that a very small number of allegations of abuse were referred initially to the Gordon inquiry. The counsel assisting the inquiry then referred those allegations to my department. From memory - I need to be a bit cautious, because it is my memory, but this was also a question that I asked - the number was in the region of three. It was not a huge number of allegations. Whether the allegations were new or otherwise is hard for me to say; in fact, it is impossible for me to say at this stage. The allegations were referred for inquiry to the various agencies. With regard to the management of the evidence, again the question is complex and I would need to refer back to the Gordon inquiry.

Mr R.F. Johnson: It suggested destroying all the evidence that it was given.

Ms S.M. McHALE: I think the member will find that that recommendation was related to managing the overall process of the inquiry. It is not, in my view, a suggestion that evidence has been destroyed or there is the possibility that evidence will be destroyed.

Mr R.F. Johnson: That was its recommendation. I want to know whether it will be destroyed.

Ms S.M. McHALE: I would be very surprised if the evidence or material before the Gordon inquiry has been destroyed. That is a matter for the implementation committee of the Gordon inquiry. As the member knows, the Government is preparing its response. There were about three allegations, and they have been referred for investigation.