

BRIAN WILLIAM EDWARDS, ESCAPE

27. Mr P.D. OMODEI to the Premier:

I refer to the fact that after extensive questioning in this chamber and continuing media scrutiny, his Attorney General has been forced to admit his responsibility for the escape of double murderer Brian William Edwards and, consequently, for the immediate and serious threat this poses to all Western Australians. I remind the Premier that he made the final decision that led to Edwards' transfer to the minimum-security Karnet Prison Farm. Does he accept responsibility for Edwards' escape?

Dr G.I. GALLOP replied:

I notice the use of this word "forcing". We see it quite a lot in the commentary on these matters. We read that ministers have been forced to do this or do that. I was asked a question on Tuesday, which I answered and indicated that I needed to clarify a very important point. First thing the next morning I came into the Parliament and absolutely clarified all those matters. No-one was forced to do anything, including the Attorney General and me. We answered the questions that were asked of us. If we did not have the information, we went and got the information and then answered the question, as was required. Also on Tuesday when I answered the question I used the expression that we accept full responsibility for this matter. By "we" I am, of course, referring to the government of Western Australia.

Mr M.J. Birney: I was asking you, of course.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: I am the head of the government of Western Australia. That is a very clear statement about my accepting my responsibilities. I also indicated that we must make sure we deal with the consequences of these issues; indeed we are currently looking at the terms of reference for an inquiry. We will make sure that there is better security at minimum-security prisons. I have yet to hear from anyone on the Liberal side of this Parliament the acceptance of any responsibility about any important matter that comes up in Western Australia. On this side of the house we accept our responsibilities on these matters. It is a very onerous responsibility when making a decision like this. We must balance off on the one side the most important issue of risk to the community with the other important issue of reducing reoffending rates in Western Australia which are too high. That is the issue we must all face. Yes, we do accept our responsibility. Yes, the minister accepts his. Yes, I accept my responsibilities. Yes, we accept our responsibilities collectively as a government. That means that we must look at the situation and make sure we improve the way in which the Department of Justice operates in Western Australia. I repeat my point: we have always answered questions on this issue.

Mr M.J. Birney: No, you have not.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: Does the Leader of the Opposition wish us to put forward answers to questions when we do not have the information? We will always provide the information to this Parliament. There is a clear difference between the two sides of the house. We accept our responsibilities, which are onerous and difficult and require decisions. I made the point yesterday very clearly that the previous government had made many, many decisions that resulted in what had been very serious offenders being put into minimum-security prisons. Members opposite are in no position to criticise the government on this.

Mr M.J. Birney: That is our role and our responsibility.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: We have made a mistake in this matter and we are willing to admit it to the people of Western Australia.