

BROOME REGIONAL PRISON SITE — 12 MILE COMMUNITY

Statement

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [6.32 pm]: I also extend my condolences to the family of Russell Goodrick.

I rise tonight to report on a meeting that I had with members of the 12 Mile community, which is located east of Broome. It is a beautiful community located 12 miles, which members might find surprising, from the Broome community. I had that meeting on 30 July. So that members can get a picture of it, it is a semirural community with mango trees and a number of people running small operations such as beekeeping, backpacker accommodation and so forth. It is one of those beautiful places just out of my town.

I rise to speak because of the commitment I made to members of the community I met who raised their concerns in Parliament about the location of Broome Regional Prison. For members who do not know what is going on, the government made a decision to build a new prison in West Kimberley. It appears that the decision on where the prison will be located has been made. There is a lot of concern in the community.

The Minister for Corrective Services, Bill Johnston, went to a meeting in the community a week or so ago. About 80 community members turned up. It was a very active meeting. I believe that two-thirds of the people who attended spoke at that meeting. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend but one of my staff members was there. I was in the Shire of Ashburton on that particular day. The feedback I received from the people of the 12 Mile community was that they were disgusted at the lack of consultation that occurred about the location of the Broome prison. There is a general feeling that the government is making decisions without engaging with either local government or with the people in the community in a meaningful way. As members would have heard earlier today, I put a question to the minister representing the Minister for Corrective Services. The answer we received was that the government consulted with the traditional owners and so forth, but we did not receive an answer about working with the shire.

The beautiful thing about Broome is that people work very closely together. In fact, some members of the 12 Mile community are connected to that country through traditional owner linkages. There is a blend of people in that community. There is a harmonious nature of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in that community. That is the case in Broome. It is something that we should be proud of. When we talk to people in the community, whether they be traditional owners or people like myself who come from other places, we find an incredible respect across the community about the different roles of people. In the case of Yawuru, people clearly show their respect to the traditional owners. They are also landholders in the normal sense of the word, holding pastoral stations and freehold lands. That is a very important part of the development of providing opportunities for Aboriginal people in that region.

Sadly, the feedback I am getting from people in the community is that there seems to be a lack of respect for the expertise in the shire. The sorts of comments that were made to me—these are the comments I noted during my meeting—related to concern about the attitude shown by the minister in that meeting. We saw headlines in the paper about some of the appalling comments made by the minister, which he apologised for, relating to the shire president. What kind of culture is being created that would enable a minister to say something like that? He made a comment and took a certain point of view. I will not repeat the comment because it is below me to mention it, and I do not think we should mention it. As I said, he has apologised. The question remains: what kind of toxic culture has been created to enable people to think it is okay to pass on information that is incorrect, about a shire president in that case? We all read the article. That angle was permeated in the meeting I had with those members. They felt left out and felt they were not involved in the decisions made; they were not engaged in any serious way.

The sorts of things that they raised, which are worth mentioning in this place so they are on the *Hansard* record, are the normal things that would be done in a planning process. We did not seem to have any planning process. A decision was made based on whatever the government wanted. The serious concerns relate to issues of water management, water availability, management of a sewer and the smell or odour that might come from it, and light pollution. These issues may not seem to be important but they were raised by members of that very beautiful little community as they may have to face those issues. There are no reports. They know that a prison will be built within a kilometre of their community as the crow flies. There are issues with traffic egress. They all sound like planning issues—things that could be addressed by the shire and maybe the Western Australian Planning Commission. The planning commission seems to be passed over on a range of things; perhaps it could provide input into these matters. There were even concerns about the use of pesticides. There were concerns that it costs members of the community \$80 for a return taxi trip. People come from country down to see their friends and relatives, who might be incarcerated. People who travel often have to use taxis to get to and from certain locations. Apparently, it costs \$80 to \$100 for a return trip. These issues would normally be considered in the planning process. We had hoped that the government would

actually engage with the locals in a proper way to identify this issue, but that seems not to have happened. It looks like the community will have this prison lobbed on its doorstep.

Another very important matter that the community raised with me that I would like to pursue further is the issue of why another prison is being built in West Kimberley. I think we should consider that. A royal commission was undertaken into Aboriginal deaths in custody and we know that one of its findings was that the issue of proximity of family to see those who are incarcerated is very important. We already have a prison in Derby in West Kimberley. Maybe it would have been better to consider the option of building one in Kununurra, for example, so there would be the option of having prisons located at sensible locations across the Kimberley. None of that work seems to have been done either. The comment by the minister was simply that there are no services in Kununurra. I can tell members why that is. It is because the government keeps withdrawing services from Kununurra. These are the concerns that the community members of the 12 Mile community raised with me. I will not name them because some of them did not want to be named, but they were very happy to meet with me. Some were willing to have a photograph with me. There will be more from that community. It is very activated and will pursue this matter more. I implore the minister to get off his high horse and go and talk to them properly, but not with a predetermined outcome, and also to get involved with the shire. The shire president, Harold Tracey, is a tremendous leader. The shire plays a critical role, along with the traditional owners, working closely and in the harmonious way that we are used to seeing in the community of Broome.