

ABORIGINAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CENTRES

706. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Premier:

In 2010, the Training Together–Working Together task force, chaired by Dr Sue Gordon and Mr Keith Spence, recommended the establishment of Aboriginal workforce development centres, which saw centres established in Broome, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Bunbury and Perth, training thousands of Aboriginal adults and youth and giving them meaningful employment. In 2017, the government closed all these centres as a cost-saving measure.

- (1) Given the Premier’s statement this afternoon that education and training is a birthright, does he now admit that closing these centres was a mistake?
- (2) Will the Premier commit to re-establishing these centres?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the Leader of the Liberal Party for the question.

- (1)–(2) I am unaware of what the member is referring to, but I can tell him this: there are more Aboriginal people in training and employment than ever before. We have the three per cent policy for government contracts for Aboriginal-owned businesses that employ Aboriginal people. We have Aboriginal traineeships across government. We have the program for rangers across our conservation estate. I might note that we are expanding our conservation estate by 20 per cent and, as I have commented, it is the biggest expansion in conservation and national parks in the history of Western Australia. Literally hundreds of Aboriginal trainees are being employed to manage these areas across Western Australia. I meet them when I go out there. It is a wonderful achievement. Across industry, we work with particularly the mining industry for Aboriginal trainees and apprenticeships extensively. When I go to the north west—for instance, Hedland, Karratha and Newman—I meet many people engaged in employment. I remember back in the early 2000s when the Gallop government was elected, no Aboriginal people were working in the mining industry. I remember the then Premier, Geoff Gallop, and the then education and training minister, Alan Carpenter, having round tables with the industry and saying, “Aboriginal people live here; you need to employ them.” Clearly, there has been a significant improvement there.

When we came to government, we set up the jobs and skills centres. It may well be that the role that the member is talking about was incorporated into the jobs and skills centres. We have 13 or 14 of them across Western Australia—one-stop shops for everyone to go in and get access to services. If the member had given me some notice, I might have been able to give him a more direct answer, but it may well be that the jobs and skills centres, which are incredibly effective, both in the city and regions, in connecting young people with employers and training with personalised service, are now undertaking that role.