

LIQUOR RESTRICTIONS — CARNARVON

922. Ms L. DALTON to the Minister for Racing and Gaming:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to keeping Western Australians safe in their local communities.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how the recent introduction of liquor restrictions in Carnarvon is improving outcomes in the community?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how members of the Carnarvon community have responded to the new restrictions?

Mr R.R. WHITBY replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for Geraldton for that question and her advocacy and concern about the harm that alcohol abuse does in our community. The member is right. We had a real issue in Carnarvon earlier this year. It was of extreme concern. Members may recall that some of the numbers coming through showed that alcohol consumption was almost 2.5 times higher than the overall Western Australian rate of adult consumption of alcohol. Deaths attributed to alcohol were 151 per cent higher in Carnarvon than the rest of WA. Alcohol-related hospitalisations were 82 per cent higher in Carnarvon than the rest of Western Australia. Alcohol-related crime said were 16.2 times higher than the metro area, and alcohol-related family assaults and family and domestic violence related to alcohol was eight times higher than the case in the metro area. What was going on with alcohol abuse in the town of Carnarvon was a pretty grim picture.

The first thing I did in February against this backdrop was to go and see the liquor accord. The very first engagement I had with the community was with the business community, the licensees and the liquor accord. I can tell members that my experience—the member for North West Central was in the room at the time; she was there, too—is that it was very disappointing that the liquor accord there was basically dysfunctional and incapable of making a decision to protect the community. There was a severe lack of leadership in relation to what had to be done. There was excellent leadership from Eddie Smith, the shire president and from the police, community services and hardworking often women who pick up the pieces, but there was no leadership amongst the licensees in that community who were prepared to make the decision to protect their own community. It was a pretty appalling situation. I engaged with them. I heard what they had to say. I spoke to them. My message to them was pretty clear that if they did not step up and do something, the director of Liquor Licensing would, no doubt, do something very soon—and, indeed, that is what happened in May. Some of the toughest restrictions were introduced, including the ban on the sale of takeaway liquor on Sundays and Mondays and other volume restrictions and time restrictions on the purchase of takeaway alcohol.

Six months later, last week, I went back to Carnarvon for a check on the ground to see how things were going. I took my colleague Hon Peter Foster, and I visited and met with the incredibly hardworking Eddie Smith, the shire president, who, by the way, was attacked by certain people in that community over these restrictions in a pretty appalling way. He had to put up with a lot of nonsense. It was good to see that he was returned at the recent elections with an increased majority. Good on Eddie Smith. I met with the police who are now taking a proactive attitude to crime, not reactive and not picking up the pieces from violence in the town. They told me that Sunday went from one of their busiest days to one of their slowest days. It is a complete turnaround in what has happened in that community. It was very, very encouraging. To quote *The West Australian*, whose journalists accompanied me to Carnarvon —

Crime and antisocial behaviour in Carnarvon have plunged ...

...

... the streets are no longer strewn with broken glass ...

The town is no longer a nightmare where people could not get a full night's sleep.

Eddie Smith, the shire president, said he went to an emergency department on Saturday night and he got straight in—unbelievable! There is little doubt that crime and antisocial behaviour in Carnarvon has plunged significantly since these restrictions were put in place. We estimate a reduction in crime in the order of about 40 per cent. It proves that our actions as a government by taking responsibility and the director of Liquor Licensing stepping in has had an overwhelming positive impact on the town. It reflects on my disappointment that the local liquor accord and licensees—certain licensees in the town—were simply incapable or unwilling to make decisions that would benefit and protect the town. I can remember even the lightest touch changes proposed by that liquor accord that really would not have had an impact were still opposed by certain members of the liquor accord. We know who they were. We saw who they were. They were opposed to even the lightest touch. That liquor accord was going nowhere. It was dysfunctional. It was not doing what the community required. Eddie Smith, the chair of the liquor accord, gave up in

frustration, and I do not blame him. He has been leading the charge for these changes in supporting them and I support the shire president.

The director of Liquor Licensing will continue to monitor how these changes have helped the community in Carnarvon. There may be the ability in future to seek public feedback and make necessary adjustments based on that community feedback, but, overwhelmingly, every element of the community that I consulted said these had changed Carnarvon for the better and had had a much better impact than anybody suspected they would. It is an example of this government standing up and dealing with the situation, which was very serious at the time, in terms of minimising the appalling impact of alcohol abuse. I thank the member for the question and I am very pleased to report what has now happened in Carnarvon.