

YOUTH CRIME — KIMBERLEY

Statement

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [9.55 pm]: I rise to provide a short clarification on a matter that has been in the news lately. Over the last few days I have been travelling throughout the Kimberley meeting with people in the community who have been concerned about the terrible crime rates that we have been having, particularly in December. December had the highest rate of crime in almost every category of crime, with the exception I think of motor vehicle theft, which was the highest in September. There has been a growing sense of urgency around this issue. I must say, and it deserves correction in this place, that the Minister for Police, Paul Papalia, really does deserve correcting, and some of his comments are quite disappointing.

At the start of the process, I was organising forums because this was really coming from the community, and the minister made comments in the media. These comments actually assisted the promotion of those forums because when we started in Broome, about 60 people turned up to have a discussion, a very fruitful conversation that I will speak of in more detail at another time. We then went to Kununurra. By the time we got to Derby, over 150 passionate people had gathered and came up with some very positive suggestions. The community really came together and as I said in that meeting, it was a matter of people power.

We heard very recently, and I think it might have been two days ago, on 6PR and again on Nadia Mitsopoulos' show on ABC 720, that the minister was pleading with the federal communications minister to deal with the issue of videos on TikTok and other social media of competitions between gangs of youths to outdo each other. There was this sort of plea, as though it was a problem from the federal government. Fortunately, we have another part of government it is called the federal government, and it has committees. The Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee met today. In fact, my colleague and friend Senator Dean Smith sought some clarification on this matter. I think it really put paid to the terrible distortion of the facts that were put forward by Minister Papalia. What became very apparent in the interrogation of the public servants, the eSafety Commissioner and her other staff, was that there is a very good relationship between the WA Police Force and the eSafety Commissioner. In fact, the eSafety Commissioner's role is to be advised by law enforcement agencies across Australia in different states to provide information when there are problems. The eSafety Commissioner then assists those law enforcement agencies in order to deliver outcomes.

We heard Minister Papalia say that this had been an issue since September, and there was some media on this previously. The interesting fact is that despite this letter of pleading that somehow the eSafety Commissioner had not been acting, this whole narrative has been debunked. It highlighted that the minister has not been doing his job. It is quite clearly not the case. After some to-ing and fro-ing with staff it came back that this letter was dated 4 February. The first time the eSafety Commissioner had been asked to do anything about this was on 4 February, yet here we have the minister saying he has been aware since September. What has the minister been doing in that time? We know that this has been building, and, of course, December was a terrible month. Really, what has the minister been doing? It was on 4 February. How did the minister receive that letter? The minister received the letter through *The Australian*. How cynical. Here is the minister, with probably a few spin doctors in his office, seeing that the community is pulling together in these forums. We have local governments, shire presidents, all jumping up and down about the situation.

Hon Kyle McGinn: There had been other forums, too.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: Absolutely there had been other forums, and the minister has done absolutely nothing. The pressure is coming on. This is the thing I said to people in the community. I said, "Do you know what? People power will deliver an outcome; because this government is so hooked on spin, the only way you will get them to do anything is to get together and present."

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon NEIL THOMSON: That is the cynicism of it. He puts this letter into *The Australian*. He does not write a letter back in August or September; he sends it to *The Australian* so he can get some sort of narrative that somehow he is the saint in this matter. Actually, the minister has been asleep at the wheel and should be ashamed of himself. He should have dealt with it much earlier and got on to this issue and sorted it out.

I might leave that there, thank you, President.