

*Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People —
First Report — Annual report 2020–2021 — Motion*

Resumed from 11 May on the following motion moved by Hon Kyle McGinn —

That the report be noted.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Thank you. That is my comment.

Hon SANDRA CARR: I rise to comment on the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People's first report, *Annual report 2020–2021*.

First, I note that the report spans both the fortieth and the forty-first Parliaments. Some of the activities of the committee reflect the change of members as a result of the 2021 state election. At the commencement of the forty-first Parliament, the committee comprised four new members; consequently, the report notes that some of the activities of the committee entailed a briefing from the then Commissioner for Children and Young People, Mr Colin Pettit, who was outlining his recent outgoing work. Significantly, this briefing occurred on 23 June 2021. That is an important date because it was my birthday. It is very important to get certain things on the record, so we had better note that one! Briefing new members is obviously an important part of the work of the committee. New members must be well aware and well informed about the role of the commissioner. They must understand the commission's current and ongoing work to ensure that what they are doing is well informed and continues and progresses the work of the previous committee.

The report notes that the fortieth Parliament conducted an inquiry into child safety, and its report *From words to action: Fulfilling the obligation to be child safe* was tabled on 13 August 2020. I will return to that report in a moment, but I will just mention that 19 recommendations were made in that report, of which 10 were accepted by the government and nine were accepted in principle. I will have a little bit more to say about that in a moment.

First, I would like to go to another report that was also tabled during the fortieth Parliament: *In their own voice: The participation of children and young people in parliamentary proceedings*, which the committee tabled on 16 November 2020. The committee delivered an important report because it considered the role of a quarter of our population, the 25 per cent of the Western Australia population who are under the age of 18. I spoke a while ago about ensuring that we value, listen and include the voices of young people and that we do that in all aspects of life. It is particularly pertinent in political life and political participation. When I spoke about it last time, I think I gave the example of working in a school that was commencing the process of employing a new school principal. The school staff had been asked questions about what the principal should look like, but it bothered me greatly that it was not a question that was put to the students, who would be most impacted by that employment. As various students came through my classroom door—usually around 120 students on any given day—I surveyed the students to ask them their thoughts about the kind of school principal they felt they needed. We developed a collection of core ideas and needs that they identified, and we presented that to the then Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, which I was working for. We presented that information to the CEO who was working for Catholic Education WA at the time, and that body used that to help it inform its decision about the kind of principal that the students identified would have value for them. I think that is what is summed up in the report and the work of the committee. It is about endeavouring to give agency to young people and making sure their voices are included.

The report that the committee refers to in its annual report covers some more serious and more contextual issues around giving agency to young people, but there are lots of other ways that it identifies that it is done. More recently, I was invited to speak to a group of students from Nagle Catholic College about what the life of a politician is like. I spoke to them about the role of an upper house member. I invited that group to ask me anything. The things that they chose to ask me were very pertinent questions about the governance of their everyday lives—things about roads and power. I give full credit to the teachers of that year 9 group because those students were essentially lobbying me at the time and asking follow-up questions, such as how to get Western Power to remove fallen power poles from their block. Those students were really proactive, and I think that is a good indication of the value of the work that the committee is telling us in the annual report it has done. It is telling us how important it is to listen to young people's voices, how their voices are very well informed and have great value, and increase in value when we give them the precedence, the importance and the hearing that they truly deserve.

We also saw that happening recently in the WA Youth Parliament. I met one of the young people participating in the Youth Parliament. A young lady by the name of Paris McNeil came and introduced herself to me. Then later, she utilised that connection she developed. She is a final year law student at Curtin University. She contacted me and approached me as part of the WA Justice Association to discuss some core issues that it was concerned about. She also took the opportunity as we were walking past to meet the Attorney General to discuss some of the work that he was doing. I think that is a really great reflection of the work of the committee and brings to the fore the importance of valuing and listening to young people's voices, and that is reflected in the report that the committee delivered.

Page 2 of the committee's report notes some of the work in progress. One of the things that it notes in the foreword of that report is the follow-up that it plans to do. I think that is a particularly important note, because one of the wicked

problems of our democracy is that we operate in four-year terms and things constantly change and the group of decision-makers constantly changes. But one of the good things that this committee identified is the important value of committee work in that it continues and follows similar parameters and it can follow up on the work of previous committees. That is exactly what the committee indicated that it would do. In particular, it identified the need to follow up on the appointment of a commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people and the establishment of an oversight body to enforce the national principles of child safety, which are the principles that underpinned the inquiry that resulted in the report *From words to action: Fulfilling the obligation to be child safe*.

As a result, we have seen that the committee is following up and continuing that work and addressing those wicked problems of changing governments and changing committee members. The committee informs itself and follows up, and people from the various parties form that committee. We see now the appointment of WA's first Indigenous woman as Commissioner for Children and Young People in Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, who replaced Colin Pettit on 4 January this year. This woman has a strong background in advocacy for the rights of young people to be heard and has experience working with the Commissioner for Children and Young People through her membership of the youth justice reference group. There are some good developments happening there.

I will note one final one. Simone McGurk released a statement on the weekend about the committee's commitment to following up on the national principles for child safety. On the weekend, Simone McGurk made an announcement that coincided with Children's Week 2022 about the implementation of the national principles for child safe organisations and that we are making child safety a priority. Those 10 principles identified by the committee as part of its foreword in the *From words to action* report have been committed to at national, state and territory levels across Australia. Minister McGurk said in the statement —

“The State Government is committed to supporting the development of child safe organisations.

I think that is a good indictment and a reflection of the work the committee has done and reported on. Even with a changing membership and four new members, the committee reflected on the work, had the briefings and has been well informed about the ongoing goals and work of the commission. The committee has made its own commitment to follow up on the previous inquiries of the committee and the previous work and reports of the committee. It is doing so in a way whereby we can see genuine action and change taking place and the implementation of those national standards that underpin child safety in our state, as we have seen as recently as Saturday, 22 October, with that announcement delivered by Minister McGurk. I commend the committee for its work and it is great to see it reflected in its annual report.

Question put and passed.