

KELLERBERRIN SHOOTINGS

Statement

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [8.49 pm]: I want to say a few brief words of support tonight for the Kellerberrin community and the wider wheatbelt about a tragic incident that happened a couple of weeks ago. Members may have heard about it; it was the big story of the day, in which two young men tragically lost their lives. The first was shot at his workplace early in the morning, and the situation unfolded throughout the day. There was an active shooter in the community, and nobody knew where he was. The gunman fled the scene and his location was unknown, so it was quite a difficult time for the community. Residents were warned to stay inside, schools were locked down and Great Eastern Highway was closed.

I acknowledge the wheatbelt regional education director, Douglas Cook, for his fast action in having all the schools in the area—seven schools, I believe—closed down so that all the students and staff were safe. I also acknowledge all the principals of those schools, who would have had a very difficult and terrible decision to make, to keep those schools locked down for the day, but they did so to keep their staff and students safe.

The local communities were fearful. Nobody really knows what is going to happen next when there is a shooter on the loose. Even at our place, 100 kays away, people were more than concerned about the situation as it unfolded. The gunman was located after he fired at a vehicle travelling along a country road and narrowly missed the driver, who was able to get some phone reception and alert the police about his whereabouts. The situation unfolded from there and, tragically, the shooter took his own life.

I want to acknowledge our brave police. No doubt, when they went to work that morning they did not expect to have to confront someone with an arsenal of weapons. It was a very difficult situation for those police officers, especially the officers who arrived on the scene early. They were eventually backed up by the tactical response group, but it would have been extraordinarily scary for those officers. I had an opportunity to meet with many of them last week, and I conveyed our thanks as a community to all of them and their staff, who no doubt experienced a day that they will never forget.

I also acknowledge our emergency services volunteers, who also had to deal with a difficult situation. I think this reinforces how much we rely on those in our communities who keep us safe. When we were at our most fearful and wondering how we could keep away from someone in that situation, those people were moving towards the danger zone.

I cannot thank enough all the people who attended the situation on the day—anyone who was involved, from the Department of Education to the Shire of Kellerberrin. Everybody came together. Although it was a day we will remember for a long time, we will never know the cause of the situation, but we will know that we had people to look after us and keep us safe, and we cannot thank them enough.