

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled.

We, the undersigned, hereby respectfully request that the Government of Western Australia honours its long term commitment to support the construction of a cinema complex as part of the Lakeside Joondalup Shopping City development.

Your petitioners therefore humbly pray that you will give this matter earnest consideration and your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

The petition bears 2 019 signatures and I certify that it conforms to the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly.

The SPEAKER: I direct that the petition be brought to the Table of the House.

[See petition No 40.]

PETITION - TRANSPORT

Concessional Fares

MR McGOWAN (Rockingham) [11.07 am]: I present the following petition -

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled.

We the undersigned, wish to register a complaint that the all day tickets cannot be purchased prior to 9:00 for travel on the buses. This will mean that people who have appointments in Perth, whether they be medical appointments or otherwise have to pay a lot more money than they would have to pay by using the all day fare. The same will apply for any commuters, including school children.

Public transport should be there to assist people not as a revenue raising excise.

Your petitioners therefore humbly pray that you will give this matter earnest consideration and your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

The petition bears 3 417 signatures and I certify that it conforms to the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly.

The SPEAKER: I direct that the petition be brought to the Table of the House.

[See petition No 41.]

BILLS (3) - INTRODUCTION AND FIRST READING

1. Revenue Laws Amendment (Assessment) Bill.

2. Revenue Laws Amendment (Taxation) Bill.

Bills introduced, on motions by Mr Court (Treasurer), and read a first time.

3. Maritime Archaeology Amendment Bill.

Bill introduced, on motion by Mr Pandal, and read a first time.

ABORIGINES - FAMILY SEPARATION

Standing Orders Suspension

DR GALLOP (Victoria Park - Leader of the Opposition) [11.10 am]: I move, without notice -

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would allow me to move a motion of apology for past policies under which Aboriginal children were removed from their families.

MR BARNETT (Cottesloe - Leader of the House) [11.11 am]: The Government agrees to the suspension of standing orders.

Question put and passed with an absolute majority.

Motion

DR GALLOP (Victoria Park - Leader of the Opposition) [11.12 am]: I move -

That this House apologises to the Aboriginal people on behalf of all Western Australians for the past policies under which Aboriginal children were removed from their families and expresses deep regret at the hurt and distress that this caused.

Let me start with the story of Paul. That is not his real name. The story was told in *The Age* newspaper of last Saturday. Paul was separated from his mother in 1964 when he was a baby. It was all done with the stroke of a pen and without his mother's knowledge. Her subsequent efforts to find her son were treated with contempt by the social welfare department in Victoria. Paul spent his growing up years in an appalling series of replacement breakdowns, cold institutions and cruel foster homes. When he was formally discharged from wardship at 18 years of age in 1982 he was given his file, which contained 368 page of old letters, photographs and birthday cards. The last page of his file stated that he was a very intelligent, likeable boy who had made remarkable progress given the unfortunate treatment of his mother by the department during his childhood. Paul said the tears flowed when he read those words. They were tears from a mixture of relief at knowing about his past, of guilt and of anger about what had been done to him.

He then proceeded to seek out his mother. He travelled into the Victorian countryside and eventually found his mother, who was working in an Aboriginal hostel. In the next five years his mother was to give to him his identity, his culture and a sense of security, which is so important to all of us. When she died, he held her hand and said, "This is the second time I have lost you, mum." Many such stories could be told and have been told to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Australia has just commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the 1967 referendum, which created a commonwealth Aboriginal affairs power. That national referendum was supported by more than 90 per cent of the Australian people. Before that, indigenous people did not have the same rights enjoyed by other Australians and could not even be counted in the official census. However, that referendum was the starting point for reconciliation; a starting point for working towards equal rights for Aboriginal people. At the heart of this motion today is not just an apology to Aboriginal people for the past policies of removal of children from families as recommended by the stolen generations inquiry, but also a fundamental turning point in how we go forward with the process of reconciliation. I remind the House that just four weeks ago a motion on racial discrimination had bipartisan support in this House and included reaffirmation of our commitment to reconciliation. I do not pretend that addressing indigenous Australians' profound social and economic disadvantages is an easy issue for any Government or community to resolve. Nor do I pretend that achieving reconciliation will be easy or simple. However, I believe it should be a fundamental aim for Australia to work towards. Reconciliation requires an understanding that our history has shaped indigenous and non-indigenous relationships. For that reason I believe that recognition of and apologies for past wrongs is an essential step forward.

Let us be clear about the practices and policies that this motion addresses; that is, the forcible removal of children from their families due to their Aboriginality. Political parties on both sides of the political spectrum rightly acknowledge families as the cornerstone of our society. Our laws and policies are intended to strengthen and help families and keep them together. The rights of the family have applied to all Australian families. Aboriginal families, however, were torn apart by the very authorities that should have protected them.

The stolen generation report "Bringing them home" found that forcible separation of indigenous children occurred from the early days of European colonisation until the 1960s. This is not just an historical blemish on the early days of the colonies when many people, black and white, were treated harshly; it was also a deliberate policy that continued to more modern and supposedly more enlightened times. In colonial times children were kidnapped and exploited for their labour. By the late nineteenth century, government officials theorised that by removing indigenous children and sending them to work for non-indigenous people, the mixed population would eventually merge with the non-indigenous population.

The report "Bringing them home" describes what came next. It stated that protectionist legislation was used to order the removal of indigenous children without having to establish to a court's satisfaction that the child was neglected, as required under general child welfare legislation. Even when removal was governed by child welfare legislation, the criteria were applied more readily to indigenous children. Between 1910 and 1970, between 10 and 33 per cent of indigenous children were forcibly removed. Almost all indigenous families have been affected in one or more generations by the forced removal of one or more children. These are historical facts about the removal of Aboriginal children. Like many historical traumas, it has repercussions for today. Separation impacted on the children, and also on the parents and their wider families and the whole community. Many non-indigenous Australians might begin to understand how being separated from one's primary carer and being institutionalised can affect children. It leads to psychiatric disorders, damaged self-esteem, emotional disorder and maladjustment, deficits in intellectual and social development, and drug and alcohol abuse, to name a few. To add to the horror, many children also experienced physical and sexual exploitation and abuse in the homes and foster placements.

It is important that non-indigenous Australians come to terms with the dislocating effects that removal has had on the families and Aboriginal communities, and that removal has affected indigenous families through the generations.

The report states that when a child was permanently removed, the entire community lost the opportunity to perpetuate itself in that child.

We know how important identity is to people; how important it is to learn of our identity, our historical connections and our relationships through history if we are to be truly human. The fundamental right people have to establish their identity was taken away through an active policy throughout the States and Territories and the Commonwealth of Australia. That policy was based upon the premise that Aboriginality had no role to play in the Australian community. We now have the opportunity to tell Aboriginal people that they are part of our society, part of our history and part of our community, and that we apologise for the efforts made by earlier Governments to attempt to deny them that right.

The Prime Minister in his address to the Australian Reconciliation Conference on Monday seemed to promote the view that reconciliation required either commitment to the practical needs of Aboriginal health, housing, education and employment or symbolic gestures such as an apology. I do not see the two issues as mutually exclusive; rather that properly coming to terms with the past will make an important contribution to working towards dealing with the disadvantages facing many Aboriginal children and people today.

An apology may well be a symbolic gesture but symbolic gestures can be very powerful. Nor do we expect Australians to forget our non-indigenous history. Anzac day commemorations and the call "Lest we forget" is one example that would go to the hearts of most Australians. In turn, let us offer a similar dignity to indigenous Australians about their own history and its effect on our national history, by acknowledging the past forcible removal of Aboriginal children and offering our deepest apologies for what happened.

MR COURT (Nedlands - Premier) [11.22 am]: It is difficult for many people to understand the depth of emotion that Aboriginal families have felt for some time, and will continue to feel for some time, as a result of their families being forcibly separated. I can think of no more difficult issue for a family to come to grips with than having to cope with such an issue. One cannot ignore the past; one can try, but there is no point in trying to ignore the past, because it is important to learn from the past. There is now a growing acceptance in our community that some policies that were implemented by previous Governments have caused a great deal of pain, not only for one generation but for a number of future generations.

It is appropriate that today, in a formal way, the Parliament should apologise to the Aboriginal families that have been affected. Even more important than an apology is the fact that we have bipartisan support in this Parliament for this motion, and that we will debate it with a great deal of goodwill among members, and goodwill being extended to the Aboriginal families which have suffered considerable pain for some time. We have heard a lot of debate about the report on the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, and no doubt we will hear much debate in future about its recommendations, what should be accepted and what has been accepted. The report will have played its role if it has better informed Australians of the issue being addressed. I believe it has already been successful in that it has created an awareness in the community of a social issue that has caused pain to many Aboriginal families.

The report was made public last Monday night. It was commissioned in August 1995 by the then federal Attorney General, largely on the recommendations of the Commonwealth-State Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. The people responsible for the report have been travelling around the country and have received submissions from a wide range of individuals and organisations, and the States and Territories. I will not address the terms of reference. However, the report runs to 680 pages and contains 54 recommendations. No doubt we will find some common agreement on some of the recommendations and disagreement on others. I will not address the detail during this debate.

The majority of recommendations can be categorised into three headings: First, services for those affected by separation, including access to records and counselling; second, compensation and reparation for those separated, and their descendants and communities, including cash payments from a national fund; formal apologies from Parliaments, Police Forces, churches and others, and an annual national "sorry day"; and, third, commonwealth legislation to regulate state policies and practices on relevant matters, and to enable the transfer of jurisdiction to indigenous organisations as a form of self-government.

The State Government has already done a great deal in providing services to assist people to have better access to records and counselling. That matter was outlined in our submission to the inquiry. It goes without saying that there is an ongoing need to ensure we provide improved access to the justice system and an improved level of housing, health and education. Family and Children's Services and the Aboriginal Affairs Department, or their predecessors, have been running family tracing services since the mid-1980s. The Government has endeavoured to nurture and improve those services. To the best of my knowledge, they have been reasonably successful in providing records to assist many people to trace their family roots. Fortunately the records in many cases have been detailed. Programs

have been implemented for health, education and other services for Aboriginal children and adults. The Ministers responsible in those areas will comment further.

Compensation is a more complex issue, and a great deal has been said about it. The States and the Commonwealth have adopted a consistent position. We will wait until the High Court hands down its decision in Kruger. I do not know the detail of the case but when the decision is handed down it will be easier to undertake a proper consideration of the issues. I understand that the judgment is expected by August this year.

The third category is an emphasis on Aboriginal self-determination. Agreements under the Aboriginal Communities Act 1979 and other arrangements were put in place to try to improve self-government and management in many Aboriginal communities. Currently, new legislation is being drafted relating to increased Aboriginal involvement in government decision making. Similarly we are working through a process of providing more direct Aboriginal control to the large areas of land currently controlled by the Aboriginal Lands Trust.

Many other issues have arisen from the implementation of recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and our own Aboriginal Social Justice Task Force. The point is that public awareness has increased with an understanding that many of the issues involved are complex. There is no better example of a social issue without a quick fix solution than the matter discussed in this motion today, as no quick fix can apply to a policy which separated families and caused disruption which could continue for many generations.

However, it is important that we develop an improved understanding and awareness of this matter because many social problems in the community have resulted from some actions taken often many decades ago. As a result of the task force report, the Government will establish immediately a working party comprising senior officers from the relevant agencies. In fact, the first meeting is next week. They will coordinate the consultation and responses on these matters by making sure that all responsible government agencies are involved.

The work of that body will be progressed in time for a commonwealth-state meeting of the Ministerial Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs to be held at York in early August. That national meeting will be chaired by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Dr Hames. That time frame could well coincide with the ruling which will come down in the High Court on the Kruger judgment.

I reiterate what I said at the outset; that is, that the Western Australian Government certainly acknowledges the trauma caused by these policies in the past, however well intentioned they might have been at the time. Nevertheless, that does not take away the hurt and distress caused by those policies, many of which are now shown to be fundamentally flawed. Many people over many years have worked closely with Aboriginal people with very good intentions. It is often easy to concentrate on problems resulting from the fundamentally flawed policies, but we should never lose sight of the relatively small number of people who made huge and genuine efforts over the years to assist Aboriginal people, often in very remote parts of our State.

No simple answers to these issues exist, but this report has already achieved one of its most important goals; that is, to ensure Australians have a better understanding of these issues, particular the separation of families, which is felt very deeply through many sections of the Aboriginal community. I have pleasure in supporting this motion. Very importantly, the motion is moved with goodwill on both sides of this Parliament. We have a long way to go on these issues as many practical matters must be addressed not in a legalistic way, but in a practical way with a spirit of goodwill.

MR HOUSE (Stirling - Minister for Fisheries) [11.34 am]: I join the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier in extending, on behalf of my National Party colleagues, our apology to the lost generation of Aboriginal children. I extend that apology to the families, colleagues, relatives and communities affected by government policy of that day.

Like many of my country colleagues, I was raised in a small rural community which had a very large Aboriginal population - indeed, it still does today. In fact, 25 per cent of the children at the school I attended were Aborigines. Therefore, I think I can fairly say, like many of my country colleagues, I have a reasonably good understanding of the Aboriginal people, their culture, ideals and the hurt they felt from time to time as a result of a lack of consideration shown to them and the way they were treated and judged by their peers of that time. We have little to be pleased or proud about in that matter.

However, I shared some wonderful experiences with Aboriginal people. I not only went to school with them, but I worked and played sport with them. Some of those friendships and associations continue strongly today. It is fair to say that Aboriginal people have played a very important part in rural Australia since its white settlement a couple of hundred years ago. Views about that role differ, but importantly the general community feels that exploitation of Aboriginal people took place - which is true in many cases. However, it is also fair to say that many families and community members both associated with the land and in small country towns did not share in that exploitation and

treated Aboriginal people in a fair and equitable way. Such people may have been in the minority at the time, but it should be recorded that such treatment occurred.

Nothing that we do today can remove that hurt and lack of understanding shown by the government policy of the day. Nothing we do now by apologising will remove that pain of dislocation and the resulting ongoing problems. Nevertheless, as the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier said, it is time to look forward to tomorrow to ensure that those mistakes are not repeated. We must look forward in a positive way so we can be proud of our future. That manifests itself through simple things, such as making sure Aboriginal people have equality in educational, health and job opportunities. We must make certain that we listen to what Aboriginal people say and act on their requests as a Government and as a society.

Many Aboriginal success stories can be found around Western Australia and Australia generally. Although some of us want to think about Aboriginal people who from time to time commit offences, just as other members of our society offend, we must reflect on the fact that Aborigines are a kind and gentle people. I discovered that as a young community member in a small country town. The changes made to these people were imposed by us, not them. The problem inflicted on them today comes from our society's values and ideals, not their own. We must remember that these people still have that kind and gentle attitude to life.

Looking at the positive contribution Aborigines make to sport in our society, we enjoy their wonderful exploits in football and their sheer skill and ability. Many of us attend the football to witness those passages of magic. The football team in my home town of Gnowangerup won the premiership last year for the first time in 40 years, and 14 members of that team were Aboriginal. That is something of which we are very proud. It is time to reflect on the past, but also to look forward in a positive way and to listen to the Aboriginal people. As a Government, we must pay more than lip service to this motion and be sure we respond in a positive way.

I am sure all my country based and National Party colleagues and supporters would acknowledge and agree that as an organisation and a group of people we want to make a major contribution to that forward thinking and to the establishment of foundations and policies for the future.

MR BRIDGE (Kimberley) [11.41 am]: It is with a great deal of pride and satisfaction that I enter this debate this morning. That pride stems from the very articulate nature of the contributions made by previous speakers, and I observed their sincerity in making those comments.

This is a week during which we are invited to reflect upon two important events in the history of indigenous Australians: First, the 1967 referendum; and, secondly, in more recent times the 3 June anniversary of the late Eddie Mabo's challenge to the High Court. They were significant events in our nation's history with which we have been required to come to grips. No amount of emotion on an occasion like this should take over their significance, the sadness they have caused and the extent to which families today are still in the grip of that sadness.

Members need only consider the way in which those policies impacted upon those families at the time. It is correct to say that even in our present history dysfunctional aspects of lifestyle still exist. In a family structure, that is a massive difficulty and an awful impediment to overcome. In true family circles, the link, association and cohesiveness of the family is fundamental in the establishment of foundations for a meaningful future. The implementation of those policies ensured that the opportunity to create those foundations was denied to many families, and the resulting problems are apparent today. It is a major factor and a source of great sadness for the families affected by those policies.

Above all other things, Australia needs a group of individuals with a calm sense of purpose, a steady head and a coolness of attitude to deal with the current situation. As we look at the solutions which might be implemented and which we might influence in the future, we will rely heavily upon those individuals to become the stewards steering this nation. If we are not prepared to be mature and calm, to be tolerant and to recognise that some factors are beyond our control, we will have difficulties in grasping the issues and arriving at important resolutions and solutions.

One word could hold the key; that is, "respect". If we as a society could train our thoughts to the fundamentals of that word, we could start moving in the right direction and achieve meaningful outcomes. Then, as sensible citizens, we would be committed to respecting the range of values which people have and which they should be entitled to observe, preserve and share. If we do not respect those values, the tendency in our busy life will be not to regard them nor to believe them to be fundamentally important.

Let us consider the value of replacing the word "reconciliation" with the word "respect". If we demonstrate respect, we can judge these values for what they are. The concept of reconciliation does not have the same capacity; it can be interpreted to mean, "You shall"; "You shall not"; "You shall like me whether or not you like it"; or "You shall respect my values whether or not you like them." Society is not about that; it never was and it never will be. Society is about saying that, in the sensible light of day, there are aspects of another group of people, whatever their origin

or background, that allows us to respect them. From that respect, a multitude of good things will evolve that in turn will set the practical parameters for us to deal with these issues that have been with us all these years. Emotive debate will not help in finding solutions. Emotion is a manifestation of an argument or point of view that tends to contradict the values of what we are seeking to do.

Only two weeks ago I had the privilege of launching a new organisation in this State - the Unity of the First People of Australia. I have spoken in broad terms about it with the Premier. Its foundations and purpose are built on respect, and its aim is to work in a very passive and genteel way with the organisational arms of government and the people of our nation in fostering this notion of respect. The elders of our society will be the symbol of that organisation; they are the basis upon which the organisation will develop its strategies. Those of us who are engaged in launching this organisation say that very few, if any, citizens of our nation show disrespect for their elders. It is universally recognised that the wisdom, great knowledge and capacity of Aboriginal elders is not only an important feature of the continuation of indigenous culture but also an area from which the broader community could gain enormous benefits and direction. The Unity of First People of Australia organisation will look back to look forward. We will go back into history, which has so clearly been described today and which this motion is intended to acknowledge, and at the same time we will turn our focus forward and place our reliance on that wisdom and knowledge.

I hope that all members of Parliament, who strongly support this motion today, will gain an understanding of why this new organisation is being put in place: We feel committed to the rebirth of the word "respect" in our society. Respect is playing a diminishing role in society. As a consequence, society is not coming to grips with reality and the need to encompass and embrace fundamentally important changes. The way in which the Prime Minister addressed the convention in Melbourne marking the thirtieth anniversary of Aboriginal citizenship is a graphic illustration of what I am saying. It was vitally important and it would have been easy for the Prime Minister to have been as clear in his apology as is the motion before the House today. However, the Prime Minister included a qualification in his apology. Sadly, that did the Prime Minister an injustice. The apology has marked him as being mean and a little man. That is very sad. Australia needs cool heads, people of wisdom and a powerful commitment to respect and understanding of the values of the people who make up our nation. Only in that way will we fulfil the aspirations of the people of this country - let us make no mistake about that.

This is not the first time I have said that in this Chamber. However, I will continue to say it even if I labour the point. We will not have a truly multicultural and meaningful Australia if race relations cause anxiety, division, confusion and the degree of concern that exists today. We must strive to remove those concerns. The nation will serve us well if our race relations are better attuned.

I am proud to speak today as the only Aborigine in this Parliament. Although articles in "Inside Cover" and by other people commenting on my presence in divisions, my song writing, and rabbits and wombats running away from my singing receive notoriety in the media, I reckon Alston is a good bloke; he writes some good little ditties which I might turn into songs. Those are nice little things to which I react positively, because I happen to be a cool head. Those things do not bother an old bushman, stockman, drover and cattleman, because I have been through all of that. When I am not here during a division I am promoting the virtues of a united Australia with indigenous and non-indigenous people. Everyone living in Australia is my constituent. I am proud of that. It is because of that pride that I am part of this motion today. I thank my fellow politicians for being strong enough and powerful enough as individuals to support this motion.

[Applause.]

MR PENDAL (South Perth) [11.56 am]: I too support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition without qualification. However, it is important on an occasion such as this to emphasise that an apology today, which I express as well, must never be read as a condemnation of yesterday. To do that would result in two undesirable outcomes: Firstly, it would rewrite history, and no-one is entitled to do that; secondly, it would attribute to people of past generations motives that are seen through today's eyes - motives which many in those times did not have. In fact, in the context of their time those motives were a conscientiously held set of motives. For people to say otherwise is to be bereft of documentary knowledge.

I can only begin to fathom how it would have felt for me as a white child to have been separated from my parents. I imagine that I would have felt exactly as Aboriginal children, and some white children today, who were removed from their families by the law. I believe we need an act of national reconciliation. However, we should not seek to impute to people in 1900, 1925 or 1950 motives which they did not have. Their actions then were, for the most part, driven by humanitarian values which were decently held, but which in the 1990s are seen to be inappropriate. I support the motion.

DR HAMES (Yokine - Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [11.58 am]: I reiterate the profound regret that is felt by both the Government and me as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and also as Chairman of the Ministerial Council on

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs conference that will be held in Perth in August. That will be one of the first organisations to consider the report on the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and to plan for what action should be taken as a result of that.

As a father of six children perhaps I have some understanding of what it would be like to have one's children forcibly removed. I pass on my deep condolences to all those people who were affected in that way. Some people have suggested that the forced removal of Aboriginal children was the action of a few individuals. That is not so. History clearly shows that it was government policy at the time. The Industrial Schools Act 1874 sanctioned the removal of Aboriginal children to institutions without their parents' permission.

We can see that from 1874 and earlier, for almost 100 years, this was a policy of Governments of the time. The extracts from the submission of the State Government to the inquiry suggest that the actions of the native welfare and child welfare departments in the 1950s and 1960s were taken with all good intentions, and it is hard to understand how those good intentions could have progressed to what is known now to have occurred and their effect on so many people.

The revelations from the inquiry have suggested that those policies have caused great pain and suffering to very large numbers of Aboriginal people, not only in Western Australia but in the whole of Australia. Despite all that happened, many of these people who were forcibly removed have succeeded within our society, and some examples of those successes are sitting in the Public Gallery. They have reached a very high standard of employment and living, notwithstanding their removal from their families. However, there are many others, and that contributes largely to the problems we have at present with dysfunctional families among Aboriginal communities. These people were seriously and sadly affected by those actions and have never been able to come to terms with what happened to them as children.

I will tell a story about a person who is working in a department for which I have ministerial responsibility. I will not say which department it is to keep that person's identity a secret. This person was removed from her family as a child and did not know who her parents were. As an adult in a senior position within a government organisation, she was walking through a country town. An Aboriginal woman sitting with others on the footpath asked her whether she knew who her mother was. She said that she did not and the woman who had approached her told her that it was one of the women sitting on the footpath. Because of the age of this person, her features and knowledge of when the mother had had a child removed, these women could work out who she was and to whom she was related. This person was finally reunited with her mother after all that time.

The report is a very detailed one and will require a great deal of consideration by this Government. Many departments will be involved in considering the recommendations and also formulating other recommendations for changes that must be made within those departments. Those recommendations will be collated through the committee the Premier has established and I hope a report will be prepared in time for presentation to the Ministerial Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs conference in August. The Aboriginal Affairs Department, for which I have responsibility, can also make a considerable contribution to that report, in particular, some of the specific recommendations regarding the recording of testimonies from those who were removed from their parents and assisting with the tracing of families, which has been done already.

Another project already underway is the review of the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act which was passed in the 1970s. It is regarded as outmoded and contains many references to Aboriginal people which they find offensive. It is appropriate that we should now review the Act as quickly as possible.

Like other speakers before me, particularly the member for Kimberley and the Premier, I say it is time to look forward. We must always reflect on those things that have occurred in the past and make sure they do not happen again. As Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I will make sure we progress this project as quickly as possible, to make sure that, as part of the reconciliation process, we do everything possible to improve the standards of living of Aboriginal people and to improve both their economic and cultural opportunities.

MR RIPPER (Belmont - Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [12.04 pm]: I join with my colleagues in supporting this apology to Aboriginal people for the forcible removal of their children from their families. It is perhaps indicative of the lack of community appreciation of this issue that it was not until I was responsible for the then Department for Community Services that I fully appreciated the ramifications of this issue. Members in this House and people in the community should be in no doubt about the deep distress, sadness and bitterness Aboriginal people feel today as a result of past policies. We say past policies, but it always alarms me that people my age were among those who were forcibly removed from their families. It continues to affect people of my generation.

Some members may not have had an opportunity to speak directly to Aboriginal people about this matter. However, because in recent years we have debated the adoption legislation, many members will have had the opportunity to

speak to those relinquishing mothers in the non-Aboriginal community who gave up children for adoption. Of course, some of those mothers were subjected to social pressures to give up their children for adoption, but at least formally they had some say. No-one could discount the degree of grief they feel. How much stronger must the grief be for those who had no choice whatsoever, when the removal of children was conducted on a systematic and forcible basis?

That policy caused a lasting damage to the structure of Aboriginal families. The individuals involved suffered deep psychological scars. As those individuals parent their children, those psychological scars reverberate down the generations. Those policies have a continuing impact on the Aboriginal community and on the non-Aboriginal community. I hope this apology today will go some way towards healing some of those feelings.

Much more must be done. We must offer practical support to the Aboriginal families, communities and individuals affected by these policies. There are Aboriginal support programs and family tracing programs. Members on both sides of this Parliament must offer continuing financial support for those programs, as well as support for individual counselling for those who are affected by this issue.

It is regrettable that the attitudes that support these policies in the past did not disappear with the policies. As a result it was felt necessary for child welfare agencies throughout the country to adopt Aboriginal child placement principles, to govern the placement of those children unable to be cared for by their parents. It is very important that those principles are given great force; otherwise children who cannot be cared for by their Aboriginal parents are, in a sense, lost to the Aboriginal community. Those children are placed across a fundamental division in our community, and being placed in that very difficult position severely affects their life opportunities.

I hope when new child welfare legislation comes before this Parliament, we will legislate to give the Aboriginal child placement principles the force of law. It is necessary to do that because there are still lingering hangovers of those old attitudes which supported these policies in the past, and in some cases those attitudes will result in the de facto repetition of the removals which occurred in the past. Indeed, the inquiry has found that the removal of indigenous children continues today under new guises and new arrangements. The press release which announced the findings of the inquiry stated -

Indigenous children are six times more likely to be removed for child welfare reasons and 21 more times likely for juvenile detention reasons than non-Indigenous children.

A very significant disruption to Aboriginal family structures still occurs today. Today we meet Aboriginal lawyers, doctors and members of Parliament. There are many success stories for Aboriginal people, but we must acknowledge that for many Aboriginal children life is still extremely difficult. Many Aboriginal children still find themselves in a crisis situation. The number of Aboriginal children who are made wards of the State is vastly in excess of their proportion of the population. The school retention rates from years 8 to 12 for Aboriginal children are disgraceful. I hope in 20 years' time the members in this House will not look back on the position of Aboriginal children in 1997 and reach the conclusion that not enough had been done to meet that crisis. It is probably the most serious social crisis in our community.

The policies for which we are apologising to the Aboriginal people were carried out under legislation endorsed by this House. The policies were implemented by Labor and non-Labor Administrations responsible to this House. It is entirely appropriate that this House should support the motion apologising to Aboriginal people for these terrible practices of the past.

MRS PARKER (Ballajura - Minister for Family and Children's Services) [12.12 pm]: It is with a sense of respect that I support this motion today. I am mindful that I am the first woman and mother to speak in this debate. Those people who have failed to learn from the mistakes of the past are destined to repeat the same mistakes in the future.

I hope this report will be a turning point for Australia and, in particular, the Aboriginal people of Australia. I hope and trust that the acknowledgment by this Parliament, on behalf of all Western Australians, of the fundamentally flawed practices of the past and the resultant trauma will mark a new beginning for all Australians, particularly, Aboriginal people. This is a national report and its recommendations apply to not only the Commonwealth Government but also all State and Territory Governments. In this regard it is important to note that many of the recommendations in the report have been in practise in Western Australia for a number of years.

In Western Australia the implementation of recommendations contained in the report must, without doubt, address the tragedies that arose from the enactment of the Aborigines Act 1905. The Government's submission to the inquiry last year opened with the following quote from the then Minister for Lands -

I may say it may appear to be a cruel thing to tear away an Aborigine child from its mother, but it is necessary in some cases to be cruel to be kind. I am fully convinced a reasonable amount of discretion will be used in carrying out the provision of that clause.

Members can identify, from the understanding they have, with how fundamentally flawed is that position. I can relate to that both as a mother and as a woman. The then Parliament agreed with the then Minister for Lands by endorsing the legislation which provided that in some cases it would be necessary to take a child from its mother.

Members who are parents, particularly those who are mothers, cannot imagine how they would cope with having their child taken from them by law. The grief and the pain endured by a mother, year in and year out, would be heart breaking. She would always wonder where her infant was and how it was surviving.

I also comment on the suffering and the trauma experienced by a child who finds himself or herself in foreign circumstances, away from the normal support of family. As the Minister for Family and Children's Services I am committed to the belief that the family is the fundamental cornerstone of our society. It is important for members, in supporting this motion, to again acknowledge and reaffirm their commitment to the family and its place and priority as the institution above all institutions in our community.

I acknowledge in principle the member for South Perth's comments, and it is easy in hindsight to say that today we could not embrace the policies of 1905. The officers of my department and I are doing all we can to undo the cruelty that was perpetrated against the families and children affected by the Aborigines Act of 1905.

As a former Minister the member for Belmont said, Family and Children's Services is already providing a number of services which address some of the issues raised in the report. An Aboriginal family tracing service is recommended in this report. For some years Family and Children's Services has provided a family tracing service that assists both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to trace their family history. The department has archival records from former departments - the native welfare department, child welfare department and the community welfare department. Much of the information is about people's personal lives and their families. It is recognised that the release of information can be traumatic to people and confidentiality of personal records has been respected. A couple of thousand Aboriginal people - I have not been able to get an exact figure - have received information from this service. Many use the service for formal reasons - for example, proof of birth, proof of Aboriginality, adoption purposes, for documenting family trees and family histories and locating relatives. Information is released in a very caring and sensitive manner and support is given as the information is integrated into the person's life. Twelve months ago almost 700 Aboriginal people had applied and were waiting to access their records for information. The department responded to that growing list of people by increasing the number of staff to deal with that demand. When I checked yesterday only 46 applications were waiting completion.

The other practice to which I refer, the Aboriginal child placement principle, was referred to by the member for Belmont. In 1984 commonwealth and state Ministers made an agreement to implement and support a policy on the placement of Aboriginal children. The main theme of that policy was that placements were to ensure cultural consistency. In line with that decision Family and Children's Services undertook to implement that practice and last year it reviewed the Aboriginal child placement principle to adapt it to the present day needs of children. The department continually looks at practice to ensure it is meeting the needs of the community. In considering the recommendations of this report it will continue to do so.

The most recent practice the department commenced to support Aboriginal families is the Best Start project. That project is an acknowledgment by the department of the need to support Aboriginal families and their children to ensure they do not experience academic disadvantage. In the short time I have been a Minister one of my most valued experiences was when I travelled to Port Hedland and met the Pilbara council of elders and visited one of the communities that was involved in the Best Start project. Department staff worked in partnership with Aboriginal community members and developed a program to enrich the experiences of preschool children so that when they entered the primary school system they were well equipped to thrive and would not meet early failure. The department will continue to implement the Best Start project throughout the State to ensure access to education for Aboriginal children. The Government has a policy of employing Aboriginal staff in the department. In that way we are able to have far more culturally appropriate responses to Aboriginal people who require the services of the department. I am pleased to see a couple of those staff in the Public Gallery today.

Despite the initiatives that have already been undertaken, I acknowledge that the report contains a number of recommendations that will be the subject of more detailed work. The department is already examining the report and looking at ways it can respond. I look forward to ensuring that the implementation of the recommendations is progressed in my portfolio.

The member for Belmont referred to Aboriginal people and their success, and he spoke of achieving the position of lawyers, accountants and politicians. However, today I would rather refer to a different measure of success - not just for Aboriginal people, but for all of us. We can measure our success by the richness of the relationships that our life holds. In considering this motion today, and considering the distress that was caused by the forced removal of children and the impact that had on relationships between mother and child, father and child, and brother and sister,

and on the great kinship system that we know exists with Aboriginal people, I trust this report and our acknowledgment of it and its impact on Aboriginal people, particularly in Western Australia, will result in success in people's lives. That success does not relate to a performance in a career sense, but to a success in the richness of relationships. I hope we will see an enrichment in the relationships of Aboriginal people in their families, in their extended kinship system, and in the way they relate to the broader Australian community. I support this motion.

MS WARNOCK (Perth) [12.25 pm]: I take this opportunity to speak briefly on this important day in this important week in the life of Australia. The symbolism of the great meetings that are taking place on the other side of Australia this week to celebrate that extraordinary event 30 years ago when Aboriginal people, who were here long before the rest of us arrived, fully became citizens of this country cannot be overestimated. It is an important symbolic week and this is an important symbolic day. Members of Parliament representing not only their own electorates, but other members of Parliament and Governments of both political colours over a number of years, have taken the opportunity to speak on behalf of those people they represent in this place, and to apologise to the Aboriginal community for policies of the past that were sad, wrong and terribly damaging. I appreciate these policies particularly acutely because I had the good fortune that my colleague the National Party member who spoke earlier had in that both of us grew up with Aboriginal people in the country. Generations of my family have grown up with Aboriginal people. I went to school with Aborigines and I count among my close friends Aborigines, some of whom, sadly, are no longer with us. It is because of my friendship with Rob Riley as well as my own background that I have chosen to speak today to indicate that I support this motion and that I am pleased to know colleagues on both sides of the House support this motion because of its great importance.

Some people have objected to the idea that people in this generation should apologise for the deeds of past generations. If people have any resentment about that, it is a great pity. People who take that view fail to realise the importance of a symbolic gesture such as an apology. It is important to be able to say sorry. If an apology is necessary and one cannot make it, one's relationship cannot move forward into the future. That is the main reason I chose to speak today. We must be able to seize this opportunity to say sorry for those bad, wrong, sad policies of the past that have caused much pain and difficulty to people whom many of us know personally and to many other Aborigines we do not know. If we can make that gesture, I believe we can achieve reconciliation and we can change things in our community that have been troubling, and that continue to be troubling. Perhaps we will even be able to persuade those in the community who are using the issue of Aboriginality and Aboriginal affairs to divide the community even more than it has been divided in the past.

I have been saddened of late to find that growing numbers of people choose to divide the community in that way. I repudiate their views completely and I hope they come to see the light eventually. I particularly hope they come to see the light before 2001 when I hope that all Australians, black and white, those who came here as migrants and those who were born here, will be able to celebrate the centenary of federation together. That is my hope and that is why I chose to speak today. I support the motion with a great deal of passion.

MS MacTIERNAN (Armadale) [12.30 pm]: I join with the member for Perth in taking the opportunity to contribute briefly to this debate, because I would not want such an important occasion to pass without having stood and been counted on it. My concern is that perhaps many in the community have underestimated the profound effect of the acts of our predecessors in putting in place a policy under which Aboriginal children were taken from their families. However well-intentioned some of those policies may have been, the result in the vast majority of cases has been a great disaster, not just for the past or because it caused a great deal of anguish to the mothers, but also because of its ongoing legacy in making it difficult for many Aboriginal people to take full advantage of what Australia has to offer today. It certainly has been a substantial factor in the degree of alienation many of us witness so unfortunately among the Aboriginal community, particularly young people.

I also grew up in a neighbourhood with a number of Aboriginal families and knocked around with those kids. However, it was not until 20 years ago, when I was working with the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training in the Aboriginal employment and training branch, that I became aware of this issue. I would take down people's employment histories, during which some of these stories came to light. I was absolutely astounded because I had no idea this had happened. In the first few months I thought it was only a few isolated incidents but it became evident that it had been a widespread practice. Some of the stories were horrific. A friend who is about my age told me that when she was about four years old, and her older sisters were six and eight years of age, they had lived in the bush around Meekatharra with their Aboriginal mother and white father. They lived very happily in circumstances that were not materially rich, but they certainly had a very free and open life. They were regularly visited by welfare agencies but as long as their father was alive, they were safe.

The week after their father died, the welfare agency was able to have its way and these three young girls were packed into the back of a truck and taken to Perth. They were given dresses to wear and at each stop on the long trip from Meekatharra to Perth they would hop out of the truck, hang their dresses on a tree, and run around because the

lifestyle they were being quickly cosseted into was different from the life they had led. They were taken to an orphanage in Perth, separated and put into different age group dormitories within the orphanage. Her story is that it was not all bad. There was certainly a lot of interaction and affection between the children in that orphanage but, at the end of the day, there was an enormous feeling of loss that has stayed with those three girls for the rest of their lives, even though some years later in adulthood they were able to find and return to their mother. They have never been able to completely put behind them the trauma of those days.

I also take this opportunity to set out what I found while working in the Aboriginal employment arena which very quickly demonstrates how dangerous and wrongly conceived this policy was. As an employee of the commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, I set up an Aboriginal apprenticeship program, part of which involved visiting every Aboriginal student in years 10, 11 and 12 in the metropolitan area. Many of those students came from the country and were boarding at hostels and schools. I selected students for the apprenticeship scheme. Fortunately, the Liberal Government of those days was prepared to set aside large amounts of money to train young Aboriginal people in apprenticeships.

Many of the students who were high achievers had been adopted by white families and brought up by them. Often they had more stable family environments that were more geared towards school and the children tended to do better. A higher than average percentage of those students took part in this apprenticeship program and did brilliantly in the first year. However, time and again by the second and third years the wheels would fall off the wagon. By that stage the students were 16 or 17 years of age, and they had to confront the issue of their identity. I understand this is a problem that faces adopted people generally, but it is much more profound for Aboriginal children adopted into white families. Overlaying the normal identity problem, was the issue of Aboriginality and the undeniable element of prejudice within the community. It was not coincidental that at the ages of 16 or 17 years this became a real issue. Many of those students were young boys who had been accepted by white families and were in the football team, but when they wanted to go out with the sisters of their friends it became an issue. We must acknowledge there was a great amount of prejudice.

Many of those apprentices, who had been very capable at school and had worked well in the first year of their apprenticeship, were unable to cope with the pressure of identity and prejudice they were confronting for the first time in their lives. A far greater percentage of those apprentices who had been brought up in white families dropped out of the scheme than did those raised in their own home environments. A number of those young people during that period of alienation got themselves into situations that set the die in many respects for the rest of their lives, or certainly the next decade. We must not just be concerned about the immediate sadness or suffering imposed upon the families and children, but also we must understand this has had a profound and long term consequence for Aboriginal people. I am very appreciative that all members have been prepared to come together and make this symbolic gesture. I am heartened by the acknowledgment by the Premier and various Ministers that more government assistance is needed. However, it must go beyond that and become an issue the community is prepared to embrace. At the end of the day, the community must not only say it is sorry but also be prepared to look at the degree of alienation of many Aboriginal people and understand the source of it. We must be prepared not to act in a judgmental and divisive manner towards the Aboriginal community.

MR CARPENTER (Willagee) [12.39 pm]: I feel strongly about this very important motion. I congratulate the leaders of all three political parties represented in this House and the Independents for bringing on this motion in a bipartisan way. In the short time I have been a member of this place I have raised the matter of separation of families in the Aboriginal community a couple of times in the Parliament.

Although I was generally aware of the policies which prevailed in the Western Australian and wider Australian community for a long time, it was not until I attended the old Moore River mission at Mogumber a few years ago that I became aware in a personal way of the impact of these policies. I was surprised that many people at the "Back to Mogumber Day" in 1994 were people I went to school with in Albany; namely, the Loo, Miller, Williams, Wynne, Coyne and Colbung families and numerous others. I had no idea when growing up with these people and going to school with them as friends that this policy had had such an impact on their lives, including a person I met at school who remains a close friend, Alwynne Coyne.

After that day at Mogumber, I began to take a far greater interest in the policies which had applied in the earlier days of the State's history until the 1970s, not the 1960s, as claimed earlier, as far as I could determine. I gained a deeper understanding of the impact of this policy. From my experience in my family, I am aware that a traumatic family event can have repercussions for several successive generations. Such events have arisen in numerous families but, apart from perhaps an experience in war, nothing experienced by the vast majority of non-Aboriginal families in Western Australia compares with the impact of family separation on Aborigines.

When I was a student in Albany at the local primary and high schools, another group of Aboriginal people lived in Albany who were not members of the local Aboriginal community. This group was in Albany thanks to the good

grace of the Palatine mission. This was a group of boys and girls sent to school in Albany from various parts of the State, but mainly from the Kimberley. One of those boys was called Peter Yu, who has gone on to be a very significant player in Aboriginal affairs in Australia.

I take some interest in the comments made by one or two people in Western Australia, especially our new Senator Ross Lightfoot: He claims Peter Yu's Aboriginality should be questioned. Peter Yu was sent to school in Albany as a 15-year-old or 16-year-old boy because of his Aboriginality, and he is now one of the foremost leaders in Aboriginal affairs in Australia. To have someone of the nature of Ross Lightfoot make such comments is an absolute disgrace.

The community is generally aware - certainly its more sensitive parts, anyway - that the policy which separated Aboriginal families was totally wrong. We must realise that a great untruth is told when stating, "It is all right to have wisdom in hindsight, but people did not realise the harm being done". When these policies were enacted, many people, not the least of whom were the Aboriginal people themselves, were telling the church and the government leaders that the policies were wrong. Susan Mausehart's book *Sort of a Place Like Home* exposed a raft of such cases in WA. Members will see by reading that book that Aboriginal people went to inordinate lengths to convince government that the policy was totally wrong. They were ignored, and in many cases they were locked up for their trouble. We cannot now stand in Parliament and say that we know what was done in the past was wrong, but everything will be all right because -

Mr Pental: Did you say that they were locked up for having expressed that view?

Mr CARPENTER: No. They were locked up for the activities carried out in order to demonstrate to the Government that it was wrong; namely, they went to the missions to try to get their children back, for which they were imprisoned. Many of them were tracked down over long distances and over long periods to be imprisoned. It is not good enough to state in Parliament that we now recognise the policy was wrong, but it was applied with the best of intent. Not everybody at the time believed it was applied with the best intent, certainly not the Aboriginal people involved.

In 1997 we face another raft of issues which confront our relationship with Aboriginal people. I refer to Mabo, Wik and a number of other matters. I invite the leaders of all political party to listen to what Aboriginal people say on those issues. I do not want to look back in 20 years and hear people say, "Well, what a tragedy - what a shocking mistake we made, but we did it with the best of intentions." We can learn from the mistakes many people made in the past so we do not make similar mistakes on these and related issues which will affect us into the future. It is very important to learn as political representatives of this State that we cannot make the same foolish errors of the past. Members must listen to people like Pat and Mick Dodson, Peter Yu and other Aboriginal leaders in the community - some have visited this Parliament today - who tell us what we should be doing. Many non-Aboriginal people are also telling us what we should be doing. We must listen to them.

Question put and passed.

The SPEAKER: I have recorded that the question was passed without dissent.

FISHING AND RELATED INDUSTRIES COMPENSATION (MARINE RESERVES) BILL

Message - Appropriations

Message from the Governor received and read recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Bill.

ACTS AMENDMENT (MARINE RESERVES) BILL

Third Reading

MRS EDWARDES (Kingsley - Minister for the Environment) [12.47 pm]: I move -

That the Bill be now read a third time.

I make a couple of brief comments in response to matters raised in debate yesterday. Clauses 61 and 62 will amend the Pearling Act, and the member for Maylands asked about the duration of licences and permits issued under the Act. Section 25 of the Pearling Act provides for the duration of pearl farm leases, licences and permits. A lease can be issued for up to 21 years, and the period is specified on the lease under section 25(a). The Fisheries Department has advised that specified lease periods range from three years to 21 years. Also, under section 27(1)(a) a lease is subject to an annual fee. Licences and permits under the Pearling Act are issued for a period specified in the licence or permit, as covered in section 25(b). The Fisheries Department has advised that the period specified is from 1 January to 31 December.