

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

Resumed from 16 September.

*Motion*

**Hon KYLE MCGINN:** I move —

That the report be noted.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I will just make a very brief comment. As members will be aware, this report goes beyond the forty-first Parliament; it goes back to the fortieth Parliament. It was quite a brief report in terms of its content. I made a small statement on the report at its tabling. However, I want to reiterate the important work of the committee in the early stages of this Parliament, and also re-endorse and restate my thanks to the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Mr Colin Pettit, who is finishing up in two weeks' time. I believe that a new commissioner will be appointed shortly. The important work of that committee continues.

As people will know and note, a number of issues must continue to be forensically assessed, and the fact that we have a Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People speaks of the importance of its role in providing bipartisan input into what is integral to our community and, in particular, its future. As people will see from the commission's annual report and website, these important matters include child poverty in Western Australia and the work that has been done in engaging with young people. That massive piece of work was commissioned in 2018, I believe, with the "Speaking Out Survey", whereby almost 4 000 young people were surveyed on a whole range of topics to get an understanding of our children's wellbeing. I urge members to read about and consider some of the challenges facing our young girls in terms of their mental wellbeing and sense of wellbeing. I know that there is a sense of bipartisanship in the work of the agencies and, in this case, the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, in driving better outcomes for young people. Of course, there is the issue of Aboriginal children, which is ongoing and further discussion will no doubt occur, as will further announcements and investigation into how they will be better catered for as the committee does its work with the new commissioner.

I believe it was important to say something about this because that work will continue with the chair, Hon Robyn Clarke, and me as deputy chair. I get a great sense of satisfaction from being involved in the committee. I know from my own position as a member for the Mining and Pastoral Region how important the committee is for our young people, particularly those in some of the remotest parts of our state.

I want to finalise my comments by reiterating—I believe I speak for the whole committee—my thanks to the members who were members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People in the fortieth Parliament during the life of this report, which has been tabled. I want to thank Mr Colin Pettit for his outstanding work, supported by both sides of this house. I wish him all the very best as he goes forward to whatever endeavour he chooses. I trust and I hope that he will continue to have involvement in his area of expertise and skill in whatever capacity he chooses and whatever capacity he can find to exercise his outstanding skills and knowledge in the area of young people. On that, I thank the house for the time and note the report.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I rise to also note the report. I want to recognise first that I am obviously no longer a member of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, but I was in the previous Parliament, and the three reports this annual report refers to were tabled under the previous committee. I want to reflect on a couple of them and make some concluding remarks about the commissioner.

This *Annual report 2020–2021* reflects that the previous committee undertook some significant inquiries. The main inquiry resulted in the culmination of a quite significant report titled *From words to action: Fulfilling the obligation to be child safe*. I have had the opportunity to speak to this report in this house on a few occasions in a couple of different contexts, in consideration of committee reports as we are doing today, and regarding legislation that has recently passed in this house relating to community services reform. This report made a series of quite significant recommendations centred around improving child safety. I will say that the government has responded to the recommendations. I indicate, however, that I have some concerns that there is a lack of detail on progress of matters surrounding, particularly, the establishment of an integrated oversight system. I accept and acknowledge that the government has stated that it is committed to developing such a system here in this state in recognition of the outcomes of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. However, it is easy for matters as important as this to get bogged down in departmental committees, working groups and meetings. I will say that, certainly on this matter and in public hearings the committee held in the previous Parliament, there are a lot of committees and a lot of meetings. I remain concerned that outcomes from those various forums were not seeing any significant movement. Obviously, when such a system is established, it needs to be done properly and correctly, because at the end of the day we are seeking to achieve, most importantly, that children will be

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safe from harm, but we need to act on it, and that is the title of this very report. I want to, I suppose, reflect to the government that I am watching very closely regarding the establishment of this system. I want to see some tangible actions with respect to this matter.

The report also reflected on a number of other matters, including the advocate for children in care. A specific recommendation was made about providing some urgent funding to increase capacity for that position until a long-term solution is found. I have asked some questions in this house about this matter and I will say that I am disappointed that despite the government's perspective on the importance of the advocate, the funding for the advocate continues to decrease and has done so since 2018 when it was \$171 000; now, in the 2020–21 budget it is down to \$140 000. This is an important role, and I appreciate that there are views and perspectives on whether the advocate should be within the Department of Communities or separate. However, while it is within the department, it is important that some additional funds are provided for that very important position.

Equally, the annual report also reflects that the committee tabled a discussion paper towards the end of the last parliamentary term titled, *"In their own voice: The participation of children and young people in parliamentary proceedings"*. I will say that if members have not had an opportunity to read this report, I encourage them to do so. It resulted from a series of discussions the committee had as part of our investigations regarding the previous report I have just mentioned. We found that, certainly overseas—the UK Parliament is an example—there were quite clear protocols for the participation of children, whether that be in parliamentary committees or the like. I think that is something we as a Parliament need to give consideration to and if it is to be done, how it can be done appropriately. I think we need to recognise very strongly that we make decisions in this place every day about children and young people and that they have views and perspectives on a wide variety of issues. Yes, we consult and engage but I think many would like the opportunity to even make a submission to a parliamentary committee. That is not readily available to them right now, so I encourage members who have not done so to have a look at that. I will be keen to know whether the current committee intends to look at that further.

Finally, I note that the report reflected on the fact that the current commissioner will be retiring in November, which is this month, so I presume we will hear from the government in due course about the appointment of a new commissioner. I want to pay my thanks to the current commissioner. I think he has done an exceptional job; he has delivered a number of significant reports on what is impacting children and young people. He certainly has a way of engaging children and young people in all that he does. I saw that both when we were out and about and when he made himself readily available to the previous committee in hearings both public and private. His commitment to children and young people in this state and beyond is undisputed. I think I would certainly be speaking on behalf of the previous committee, and Hon Neil Thomson has referred to the current committee. We all join in wishing him well in his future endeavours, whatever they may be. He can stand with great pride in knowing he has been an exceptional Commissioner for Children and Young People in this state.

**Hon DAN CADDY:** I seek to continue the comments I barely started last sitting week, noting that the previous time I rose I sought the call and talked to the wrong report, which, as time has gone on, has now become the correct report! It is the report at the top of the list for consideration today. In acknowledging this, I would also like to recognise the way the deputy chair dealt with my premature enthusiasm on that day, which avoided a certain level of embarrassment for me!

I briefly want to comment on the annual report and one of the reports referred to within it. For the benefit of the house and *Hansard* this is *Annual report 2020–2021*, being the first report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, as presented by Hon Neil Thomson. I thank and acknowledge the past membership of the committee, and the current membership who are Robyn Clarke, the member for Murray–Wellington; Hon Neil Thomson; the outstanding new member for Albany, Rebecca Stephens, MLA; and Hon Klara Andric, who sits in this chamber with us. I also acknowledge the committee staff, Dr Palmer, Ms Roberts and Ms Parsons. Before I start, I echo the sentiments and comments made by Hon Donna Faragher and others and thank the Commissioner Pettit whose tenure ends this month, I believe. I take this opportunity to thank him for his service and for furthering the interests of children and young people in this state.

A government member: Is he related to Brad?

**Hon DAN CADDY:** I am unsure, member!

I will repeat a little bit of what Hon Donna Faragher said. It was a hardworking committee, with three reports tabled during the reporting period, which was the six months leading up to December last year. I note reading the annual report that of the reports tabled, the one I would like to spend some time speaking to is the report *From words to action: Fulfilling the obligation to be child safe*, which was tabled on 13 August 2020. The two other reports were the annual report from last year and *In their own voice: The participation of children and young people in parliamentary proceedings*, which was tabled in November 2020. The first report I mentioned is nearly 200 pages long and looks closely at child safety standards in Western Australia. I chose to speak to this a couple of weeks

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ago, because the day I stood up two weeks ago was the day that the federal government finally landed on a national strategy, four years after Prime Minister Julia Gillard established a royal commission. I will briefly go to the terms of reference. I will not read them all out, but they included —

- The recommendations made by the Commissioner for Children and Young People in the report *Oversight of services for children and young people in Western Australia*;
- The recommendations from the *Royal Commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse* relating to an independent oversight body responsible for monitoring and enforcing child safe standards; and
- The response from the State Government of Western Australia to the above recommendations.

We should never underestimate the importance and critical nature of the role of the Commissioner for Children and Young People. We should also recognise the importance of continuing to deal with issues, as we are, of child sexual abuse. I note the report is prefaced with a quote from the sixth volume of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Final report: Making institutions child safe*, which appeared on page 42 of that report. I quote —

What if we changed the way we think about child sexual abuse, from inevitable to preventable? ... We need to recognise that, like every form of violence, child sexual abuse is an avoidable tragedy.

Those words from four years ago, I think, when that was first published are still chilling to me. No crimes at all against young people should be considered inevitable. The crimes that fall into the category of child sexual abuse should never, ever have been seen thus. This report specifically looked in the challenge faced by this state government in implementing the 310 recommendations from the royal commission that were directly applicable in full to the Western Australia government. It is a process that is still ongoing. I commend the diligence of the committee. It went to great lengths to assess how governments assess such institutions. Reading from the report, the committee embarked on a series of hearings not just in Western Australia, but interstate and overseas jurisdictions to see how governments and organisations other than ours have responded to the growing demand across the world for these failures to be rectified. One really critical thing to me is the importance of transparency in all of this. I am drawn to a quote from Ms Sarah Blakemore, who is, or was, the CEO of Keeping Children Safe, which is a United Kingdom-based not-for-profit organisation. Her quote is 27 lines. I will read her whole quote. It is centred on transparency. The quote is —

The more transparent we can be the more we can learn from our mistakes. We all know stories of people who turned away when they shouldn't. There are stories of people who have actively covered abuse up, but there are millions of stories of people who have not looked too hard. If we are not clear about what is expected of us as individuals, and we do not support that process in a transparent way, we will continue to have child abuse because the perpetrators look just like the other people who are not trying to stop the situation. If we can be really clear and empower people and make them not be frightened, then they will do the right thing. Otherwise...many people will think—"I'll just stay in my lane."

The key line for me in that lengthy quote is "there are millions of stories of people who have not looked too hard." That, to me, whichever institution may have been covering up child sexual abuse, goes to the core of the matter because the abusers are one thing, but the people around them who could have helped vulnerable young people but did not is quite another. This is the ultimate example to me of the saying that we often hear used in many circumstances, which is that the standard you walk past is the standard you accept. Those particular words of Ms Sarah Blakemore that there are millions of stories of people who have not looked too hard are chilling.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** The matter before us is the first report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People. The committee has tabled its annual report in the customary way. Members will be aware that this committee operates under the auspices of the other place, which requires that these annual reports be tabled. I want to draw to members' attention page 2 of this report under the heading "Briefings", which states —

The Committee invited the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Colin Pettit, to a briefing to meet the new members and outline his recent and ongoing work.

No mention was made at that time of the work that was being undertaken by the Commissioner for Children and Young People on the independent review that he was asked to undertake at the direction of the Minister for Child Protection during the reporting period. In fairness to the new committee, the committee also says on that same page —

One of the Committee's functions is to consult regularly with the Commissioner and review the exercise of the Commissioner's functions. To this end, in the next months the Committee will review and report on the Commissioner's annual report and other key recent reports published by his office.

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One of those reports that the committee is referring to is a report titled *Independent review into the Department of Communities' policies and practices in the placement of children with harmful sexual behaviours in residential care settings*. I want to read from page 11 of that report under the heading "Purpose of the Review" in which the following comments are made by the Commissioner for Children and Young People. He says —

In October 2020, a young person in the care of the CEO of the Department of Communities ... in Western Australia spoke out in the media about her experience of being in residential care and specifically of being placed in the same group home as an older young person who she understood had engaged in acts of harmful sexual behaviour.

On 30 October 2020, the Minister for Child Protection, Hon. Simone McGurk MLA requested the Commissioner for Children and Young People ... conduct an Independent Review ... of the Department's policies, practices and services regarding children with harmful sexual behaviours ... in residential care.

The Commissioner agreed to undertake the Review, and the following Terms of Reference were established and accepted by the Minister and the Department:

1. Identify systemic issues arising from the experience of Macie that affect the wellbeing of children and young people in residential care more broadly, including:
  - a. The extent to which the Department's own policy and practice settings regarding HSB and the safety of children and young people in residential care were met in the case of Macie.
  - b. The extent to which any systemic issues, including Departmental policies, practices and services regarding HSB of children and young people in residential care, are consistent with recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse ...
2. Identify short, medium and long-term changes that may be required based on the findings of the Review.

During the reporting period, this work that the committee refers to as the ongoing work of the Commissioner for Children and Young People included this particular inquiry that he was required to undertake at the direction of the Minister for Child Protection. There is reference here to a person by the name of Macie. Macie is not this individual's real name; she has been de-identified. It is important that members contemplate exactly the circumstances in which Macie found herself and bravely blew the whistle on that which caused the Minister for Child Protection to direct the Commissioner for Children and Young People to undertake this particular report. Members need look no further than page 13 of that report in which there is a short summary by the Commissioner for Children and Young People about Macie's experience. A quote by Macie says —

*"I know from my experience, no one believed me, like DCP didn't really believe me when what happened to me at 12."*

The Commissioner for Children and Young People then summarised some of the information contained in the case records. He says that those case records indicated the following —

- Macie was taken into the care of the Department of Communities at a very young age.
- She lived in a foster care placement for nine years before being placed in a Department of Communities' residential care home early in her teenage years, living in three different residential care placements over a five-month period.
- The Department was aware Macie had been exposed to inappropriate sexual behaviours and HSB both before and while in the Department's care.
- The Department placed Macie in a residential care home with Lee, —

I hasten to add that Lee is also not that individual's real name. The case records go on to indicate the following — a male young person who was known to have previously engaged in HSB towards other children and young people.

- Macie spoke up on a number of occasions about HSB and sexual assaults she had experienced.
- Macie repeatedly raised concerns about her safety when around Lee.
- The Department was aware of multiple incidents of inappropriate sexual behaviour or HSB involving Lee and Macie over the period they resided together, including 20 reports from Macie of alleged HSB perpetrated by Lee.

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The case file then includes this quote from Macie —

*“I don’t know why they would put me in a house with [him] when they know that I have been sexually assaulted before.”*

A further quote is —

*“I don’t feel safe there. I don’t understand why they keep making me go back there.”*

I have limited time this afternoon to make a few points about this matter. Thank goodness we have a Commissioner for Children and Young People who was able to inquire into this matter and shine a light on this despicable episode. I still to this day do not understand why it has taken the McGowan Labor government this long to change its policy settings for children in residential care. Why does it require a report from the Commissioner for Children and Young People to come to the conclusion that we should not be placing these people in the same residential setting? What disturbs me even more is that during the budget estimates recently when I tried to interrogate this matter a little further, it was not apparent that the department has decided to cease and desist when it comes to harmful sexual behaviours. A number of words were used in response by the witnesses during the budget estimates hearing that seem to suggest it is only a particular category of person who is now no longer being placed in residential care settings, but when the minister, the government and the department were asked whether they are still housing victims and perpetrators of harmful sexual behaviours together in residential care settings, we did not get a straight answer. It should not be that difficult, because we know that the government is quite capable of providing a clear and categorical yes or no when it wants to. This should be an example of when that occurs. It disturbs me enormously that this is still going on. It has not been clarified by the Minister for Child Protection. Worse still, we have a situation in Western Australia in which the Department of Education continues this same practice of allowing attackers and perpetrators to be at the same school. When I have asked the Minister for Education and Training, the Leader of the House, about this, the response simply comes back that the minister is satisfied with the policy settings. The McGowan Labor government should not be satisfied with any policy settings that allow attackers and perpetrators to be in the same setting. It is incredibly re-traumatising for the victims. It is no wonder that we have pleas from the likes of Macie, who is reported to have said, quite understandably —

*“I don’t know why they would put me in a house with [him] when they know that I have been sexually assaulted before.”*

It is quite understandable that this young teenage person, who has been brought into the care of the state, would express this exasperation. It is the same type of exasperation that has been expressed by victims in educational settings.

**Hon KLARA ANDRIC:** I rise to make a brief contribution today as a former, albeit very short-lived, member of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People on the committee’s first report for the forty-first Parliament, *Annual report 2020–2021*. I had the privilege of being a member of this committee earlier in the year. However, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my parliamentary colleague Hon Ayor Makur Chuot on her recent appointment to the committee. I am sure Ayor will make an outstanding contribution.

The Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People of the forty-first Parliament met for the first time on 2 June. The reporting period for this first report covers the first three meetings of the current committee and the activities of the previous committee between July and December 2020. With just one month of operation before the end of the financial year, there were limited activities on which to report. However, an important first activity of the new committee, and one that I was a part of at the time, was to meet with the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Mr Colin Pettit, and Mrs Natalie Hall, director of policy, monitoring and research. The commissioner provided an overview of key projects that he and his dedicated staff have been working on, and this provided us with an appreciation of the important role they have in listening to the concerns of children and young people in this state and ensuring that we are acting on their needs. The commissioner’s overview has in fact given hope and direction to the committee’s future work. I also wish to note that Mr Pettit’s tenure as commissioner will end this month, and I take the opportunity to thank him for his six years of supporting children and young people and working to make the world a safer place for them. We will follow with interest the outcomes, in addition to progress, of projects and initiatives that he has established during his time as commissioner.

As mentioned earlier today, the previous committee of the fortieth Parliament tabled three reports within the reporting period, between 1 July and 7 December. The reports were *From words to action: Fulfilling the obligation to be child safe*, which was tabled on 13 August 2020; *Annual report 2019–2020*, tabled on 15 October 2020; and *In their own voice: The participation of children and young people in parliamentary proceedings*, tabled on 26 November 2020. The fifth report of the previous committee, titled *From words to action: Fulfilling the obligation to be child safe*, was laid on the table of the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council on 13 August 2020. This report examined the scope and direction of the work being undertaken by government agencies, regulatory bodies and non-government organisations to improve the monitoring of child safe standards and the role of the Commissioner for Children and Young People in ensuring that Western Australia’s independent oversight mechanisms operate in a way that makes

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the interests of children and young people the paramount consideration. In the chair's foreword to this report, I noted the comments, which were also raised by Hon Dan Caddy, of Sarah Blakemore, whom I can confirm, according to her LinkedIn account, is still the CEO of Keeping Children Safe Global, and president and CEO of Keeping Children Safe USA. To quote the chair's foreword —

... Ms Blakemore observed that while we all know what bad looks like, we are less clear about what good looks like and how we might make real and lasting improvements to our system.

It is worth noting the quote of Ms Blakemore in the chair's foreword, which Hon Dan Caddy also read out. Although it is of some length, it resonates in terms of how transparent we are. It states —

The more transparent we can be the more we can learn from our mistakes.

She went on to talk about how we all know stories of people who turned a blind eye and turned away when they should not have done so, and stories of people who unfortunately actively covered up abuse. But as Sarah mentioned —

... there are millions of stories of people who have not looked too hard. If we are not clear about what is expected of us as individuals, and we do not support that process in a transparent way, we will continue to have child abuse because the perpetrators look just like the other people who are not trying to stop the situation.

What that actually means resonates quite a lot. She went on to say —

If we can be really clear and empower people and make them not be frightened, then they will do the right thing. Otherwise...many people will think—"I'll just stay in my lane."

We all know that it is the responsibility of our entire community to do what it can to protect our children. In closing—I apologise, chair, if I digress from the actual report—there is a quote by Mandela himself that I think resonates in terms of this committee and the work that it does. He said —

There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.

He also said —

Our children are the rock on which our future will be built, our greatest asset as a nation. They will be the leaders of our country, the creators of our national wealth, those who care for and protect our people.

In closing, I wish to express my thanks to the previous committee for its hard work and also to the current committee members: Chair Robyn Clarke, MLA, member for Murray–Wellington; Deputy Chair Hon Neil Thomson, member for Mining and Pastoral Region; Rebecca Stephens, member for Albany; and, as I mentioned earlier, Hon Ayor Makur Chuot, who recently took on this role as the newest member of this committee. Members of this house certainly know that none of the work of these committees, including the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, would be possible if not for the hard work of the incredible committee staff with whom we work, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee's staff: Dr Sarah Palmer, who is the principal research officer, and the other two research officers on this committee, Miss Lucy Roberts and Mrs Catie Parsons. They do some incredible work to assist us and I congratulate them. In closing, I wish the commissioner all the best in his future endeavours and thank him for the great contribution he has made to this committee over the past three Parliaments.

**Hon KYLE MCGINN:** It is a pleasure to talk to the first report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, titled *Annual report 2020–2021*. It was a pretty wild and very busy period in the last term of Parliament I was in, from 2017 to 2021. We had to throw ourselves into many issues. I discovered on page 2 of this report the reports the committee accomplished in the previous term. One of the reports I was interested in was *In their own voice: The participation of children and young people in parliamentary proceedings*, which was tabled on 26 November 2020. As members will discover, November and December are crazy months, particularly near the end of a term, and a lot of reports tend to come up. Unfortunately, I missed the opportunity to talk to that report, so I will take time now to go through some of the parts that I think are interesting.

As I see it, the overall goal is to try to create a better process to allow participation from children and young people in parliamentary proceedings. The report seems to be directed towards engagement within parliamentary committees. I had involvement with a young person in a committee hearing when I was on the Standing Committee on Public Administration in the last term. The committee was conducting a significant inquiry into the operations of WorkSafe and heard about fatalities that had occurred at workplaces over many years. We heard evidence in public hearings from family members of workers whose lives were lost on the job. In those inquiries we heard from a strong and committed young person—I will not name them—who came to a public hearing with one of their parents and put on the record their feelings about the situation, and they handled it very well. They made their points commendably and relayed their memories of when it happened and what took place, which was a significant contribution to the content of that report. It is a very good report; it is big and it took three years. It looked into some of the issues that occurred in WorkSafe prior to 2017.

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The report made me think about how we engage with our community, not just within the committee process, which this report highlights, but as political leaders to ensure that children and young people are engaged in our process and that Parliament is not perceived as a taboo, scary place on the hill and that when they get here, if it is to attend a committee inquiry, it is not daunting and it does not create as much anxiety as I am sure it does. I am not saying that the building is scary, but it can be once one gets inside.

I recently had an experience at an Ability WA event. A young man who has autism, David Atkins, said to me that he knew that people with disabilities could not get into Parliament, but he hoped to have a look one day. It really shook me because I said straightaway that clearly he did not follow the Greens, because they have someone with a disability in the federal Parliament. It was interesting to see how he reacted when I brought him to Parliament for the tour and for lunch, and we talked through the engagements of Parliament. He is now writing a few special projects for me around how children with autism are treated in the schooling system and also in employment.

I turn to the report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People in the fortieth Parliament. There was an intriguing look into the House of Commons and the way it tried to adapt to bring children and young people into the committee process. It chose to strip it back to being open and informative prior to someone getting to the committee situation, which is important to ensure that that child or young person is comfortable. That seems to be one of the key principles in the attachments to the report—the information that goes out to a child or young person appearing before the committee. I note that it was a different committee from the one we have today. I will give an acknowledgement to the chair, Hon Dr Sally Talbot, who sits next to me and looks after me and makes sure I do not get into too much trouble.

**Hon Dr Sally Talbot:** Unsuccessfully!

**Hon KYLE MCGINN:** Unsuccessfully! I acknowledge also the deputy chair and former member for Kalgoorlie, Kyran O'Donnell; Hon Donna Faragher, who spoke earlier; and Jessica Stojkovski, MLA, member for Kingsley. At the back of the report is a colourful, engaging picture with large words. It breaks down very well where people need to go and why they are here. It delves into what are the expectations of being at Parliament. It refers also to speaking to MPs and how that goes; whether they need to bring anything with them, such as pen or paper; arriving at Parliament; where the main entrance is and where they need to walk in; parking that is available; and wheelchair access. All these things break down the barriers. When I was on my last committee, the Public Accounts Committee, I was not aware of anything like this being sent out to someone who was going to be sitting in front of our hearing. This goes a long way to ensuring that they are prepared; that they do not park at the wrong entrance or go to the wrong building. It is a little embarrassing to say that when I first went to a committee meeting in 2017, I went to the other place's committee building trying to find my committee. It was the wrong building altogether.

**Hon Jackie Jarvis** interjected.

**Hon KYLE MCGINN:** Security did not kick me out.

**Hon Jackie Jarvis:** You had a better haircut then.

**Hon KYLE MCGINN:** I did not have this haircut back then. It would have been a little more intimidating, I am sure!

It is good to note that in the House of Commons committees, MPs sit around a table with witnesses. It breaks down the scenario that people are about to be faced with, so that it is not daunting. The report contains a picture that identifies the room that may be used and identifies that six to eight people will be in front of them. It indicates that “live on air” will light up in red and that those are the sorts of things people will confront.

Again, remember it might not be something that they intended to do, but I think it is important to ensure that children and young people have the courage to engage in the political process. It is important for the committees and this house to ensure that people of all ages have the ability to engage with our committee process. As I touched on earlier, I think this report that was tabled late last year goes a good way to describing a potential way forward for us to engage children and young people in the process.

I want to thank the committee from the last Parliament, particularly the chair, Hon Dr Sally Talbot, for putting together a discussion paper such as this that allows us to look into the future on how we, as a Parliament, may engage with children and young people in our inquiries and hearings that we are charged to hold under the standing orders of this house. Thank you, chair, for the giving me ability to talk today. I will leave my comments at that.

**Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD:** At the beginning of the consideration of committee reports, I thought there might have been a will within the chamber to note this report and move on to the next report. I thought that would have been quite interesting because the subject matter, at the present time, would have been quite a lively debate. However, there seems to be a will, particularly from the opposition, for government backbenchers to make comment on every report that comes before the house, so I will accede to that and make my comments on this report, the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People's *Annual report 2020–21*. In looking at this report, although I have not met the gentleman, I want to make special mention of the commissioner, Mr Pettit. From all

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I have heard, he has achieved much during his time as commissioner and will be greatly missed. I wanted to pass on my thoughts in that direction.

Looking at the report, it is fairly short, as most annual reports are. The only thing of particular interest is that it goes across two Parliaments, so the make-up of the committee changed because of the election earlier this year. I do not think there is a lot in the actual report that needs to be dwelt upon in any great detail, but during the last Parliament, the committee tabled a number of reports. I want to turn my mind to one of the discussion papers that was tabled, *In their own voice: The participation of children and young people in parliamentary proceedings*. I think it is quite important. Often, adults adhere to the view that children should be seen and not heard. I think that old-time thinking has led to a dismissal of the views of children and young adults—future leaders—whose views have been discounted. I think that is a pity.

The committee members when that report was tabled were Hon Dr Sally Talbot, member for South West Region; Kyran O'Donnell, MLA, member for Kalgoorlie; Hon Donna Faragher, member for East Metropolitan Region; and Jessica Stojkovski, MLA, member for Kingsley. I want to commend them for what I thought was a particularly good discussion paper. I will quote a couple of pieces from the discussion paper that really caught my eye. I will not take a long time—I do not think I will take up all my time, but I want to reflect on this discussion paper. The executive summary reads —

This discussion paper arises from the proposition that hearing the voice of children and taking into account their views on matters that affect them is important and worthwhile.

The parliamentary system is one that strives to reflect the voices, interests and concerns of the entire population. This includes children.

The definition of a child is someone under 18 years old in this discussion paper. It continues —

Given a quarter of the Western Australian population is under 18 years, incorporating their views on matters that affect them will make the Parliament more representative and inclusive. Further, children's participation within the parliamentary process is consistent with Article 12 of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child as ratified by Australia.

I was quite surprised, when reading this report, because many nations have signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to note that the United States had not. I thought it was quite alarming, to be perfectly honest, for a modern society not to sign up to this convention. I will not cast any aspersions on the reasons for that. I hope it is not the old thinking that children should be seen and not heard. As I said, children make up a large part of the population and they need to be given a voice as they grow into adulthood. It should not be a matter of reaching an age and then their view counts. They have a growing awareness of their rights and responsibilities and it is not an awareness that is not present at 17 and so many months, but all of a sudden at age 18, they are given the right to vote and do many things. It is important to gradually introduce children to those rights and responsibilities. The executive summary continues —

The Committee's view is that the development of detailed guidance will assist future Parliaments and committees by guiding their consideration about how and when to engage with children and young people safely and appropriately.

I think that is a key part; it needs to be done in a safe manner and appropriately to the child's age.

Any process considered should include information about how to treat unsolicited evidence —

**Consideration of report adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.**

**Progress reported and leave granted to sit again, pursuant to standing orders.**