VACSWIM PROGRAM

1068.   Hon COLIN TINCKNELL to the Minister for Education and Training:

I am sure the minister will be pleased to answer this question as well!

Last year, there were 276 drownings in Australia, an increase of 10 per cent on the previous year. Statistics show that people are 2.3 times more likely to drown in remote and regional areas than elsewhere in Australia.

(1)   Given these startling facts, what is the government doing to ensure that the residents of the 11 towns excluded from this summer's country early start program will receive the same opportunities to learn to swim as the rest of the children in the state?

(2)   As VacSwim fees have already increased from $13.50 to $30 per child, an increase of over 120 per cent, does the government plan to offer some form of compensation or discount to these families as an acknowledgement of the additional financial burden placed on them to travel back and forth to another town for the duration of the seven-day program; and, if not, why not?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

(1)   The country early start program usually runs in the week between school finishing and effectively the Christmas holidays. It is a five-day program. This year there are only three days between when school finishes and Christmas celebrations begin. I asked the department to ensure that we can bring the country early start program forward and do it in the last full week of school. I am delighted to advise the honourable member that the Department of Education has liaised with the local schools and venues in these 11 locations and they will now be offering an afternoon program in each location from 16 to 20 December 2019. Registrations are now open and parents can apply online.

(2)   The Department of Education is providing a local VacSwim program in all locations in which the country early start program is usually offered, so this is not required.