

COMMITTEE REPORTS — CONSIDERATION

Committee

The Chair of Committees (Hon Adele Farina) in the chair.

*Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People — Seventh Report —
“Everybody’s Business: An examination into how the Commissioner for Children and Young People can
enhance WA’s response to child abuse” — Motion*

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting on the following motion moved by Hon Sally Talbot —

That the report be noted.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I assume that I have only three minutes remaining to me today. It is always a bit of a problem keeping the continuity going if these remarks have to be spread over several hours, or even several weeks. I was suggesting that, if any member has not actually engaged with the topic of keeping children safe in our community, with the dreadful lessons of St Andrew’s Hostel in Katanning very much in our minds, they begin dipping into the report on page 63, at paragraphs 4.15 and 4.16. The genesis of this inquiry conducted by the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People was the recommendation made by Hon Peter Blaxell, who conducted the inquiry into St Andrew’s, that there should be some kind of one-stop shop for the reporting of child sexual abuse in Western Australia. As I briefly mentioned before we moved into question time, that recommendation was referred by the Attorney General to the statutory review of the commissioner’s act, which was at that time nearing completion.

Peter Blaxell’s recommendation caused a little bit of a flurry of alarm amongst those concerned not to have escalating costs in the sector, even when that is associated with the protection of children. Although the statutory review adopted Peter Blaxell’s recommendation in principle, it was not unequivocally embraced by the government. There is some discussion about just how equivocal the government was being; nevertheless, it was sufficiently equivocal that the committee decided to look more deeply into exactly what Peter Blaxell meant by that recommendation of a one-stop shop. When the committee held a hearing with Hon Peter Blaxell, his response was quite illuminating, because it boils down to an awareness on Peter Blaxell’s part—for many of us, Peter Blaxell was the first person to really articulate this key concern in the whole troubled area of child sexual abuse—that the reporting by the child of an experience of being sexually abused can be as traumatic as, if not more traumatic than, the sexual abuse itself. That is a shocking indictment of our system. In a community like ours, that should simply not be the case. If one is looking for consolation, one might rush to the fact that this is about historical abuse, and that various simple and straightforward changes have been made to systems of reporting.

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