

ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE BILL 2020

Statement by Member for Kalgoorlie

MR K.M. O'DONNELL (Kalgoorlie) [12.56 pm]: Greetings, Madam Acting Speaker.

Today I would like to talk about the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill 2020, which is set to replace the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972. The bill is aimed at protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage sites in this state. Let me be clear: I am completely and utterly supportive of safeguarding these sites. My concerns lie with the technicalities of the bill, not its main purpose. I recently attended a briefing on this bill at the Railway Hotel, Kalgoorlie, which was organised by the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage. The briefing was well attended by local Aboriginal people, prospectors, small miners and anthropologists. I was concerned to note that every person at that meeting rejected the bill. In fact, I do not recall anyone from the crowd speaking in support of the proposed bill. The people at that meeting put an advertisement in the paper that states —

TO ALL MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC
We disgruntled Aboriginal Elders
REJECT
the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill 2020
IN ITS ENTIRETY.

The advertisement is signed Ron Harrington Smith, Ivan Frazer, Gary Sambo, Bronwyn Newland, Eric Thomas, Delson A. Stokes, Leo Thomas, Dion Meredith, Dennis Sambo, Vivien Dimer, Aubrey Lynch and Bruce Smith.

Worryingly, even the big community based in Warburton also rejected the bill in its entirety when it had its briefing a day before ours in Kalgoorlie.

Other than that, I also understand that the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia, as well as the Kimberley Land Council, have their own concerns about this bill. It is not just us in the goldfields but also important representative groups across the state that are opposed to this. It is most concerning when local Aboriginal people, the very people whom the bill is aimed at looking after, are not at all supportive of this. A major argument is that the bill is ambiguous, especially because of the lack of regulations. It has too many grey areas that are open to different interpretations and need to be addressed.