

ROTTNEST ISLAND — ANIMAL CRUELTY

243. Ms L.L. BAKER to the Minister for Tourism:

I refer to cases of cruelty inflicted upon quokkas on Rottnest Island, which have seen these harmless and unique marsupials tortured, abused, kicked, set alight and thrown into the ocean.

- (1) Why does the minister intend to ban the perpetrators of these crimes from Rottnest Island for life?
- (2) Is the minister aware of any opposition to this response to animal cruelty?

Mr P. PAPALIA replied:

I thank the member for her question. She is undoubtedly the most passionate and dedicated advocate for animal welfare in this Parliament.

- (1) It is very disappointing to have witnessed the appalling treatment of quokkas on occasion in recent years. Most recently, there was the much-publicised incident of an individual kicking a quokka and having his friend film it and then post it on social media. It is extraordinary and I am sure that no-one here could comprehend why someone would do that or some of the other cruel acts to which the member referred. It appeared, and I think the sentiment was widely expressed across the state at the time, that despite the fact that a severe penalty was imposed by the courts—I think it was a commendably significant fine for the most recent act in the order of \$4 000 or thereabouts—anyone with goodwill towards small furry animals that are notoriously or famously the friendliest animal on the planet was concerned whether a greater penalty could have been imposed.

Noting that section 30 of the Rottnest Island Authority Act enables the authority to remove people from the island for a period of seven days, regardless of any other charges and without that person having appeared in a court, there is an opportunity. The government believes that the potential for that opportunity to extend another penalty to these people should be explored. We raised it with the acting chief executive officer of the Rottnest Island Authority, Michelle Reynolds, and she was enthusiastic about exploring the idea as to whether we could ban such people for life. I suggested that we should not ban them for life but, in the course of imposing this potential penalty, we should offer an alternative to people. I do not think banning someone for life would educate them or change their behaviour necessarily. We should offer them the opportunity to make amends, to make recompense and to demonstrate that they have changed their behaviour by volunteering for an extensive period to assist rangers or other people on the island to support the little quokkas. That is the advice I gave to the acting chief executive officer. She was enthusiastic in her response and will be looking into it.

- (2) I am aware that I was criticised at the time. Extraordinary though it may be, I was subject to criticism. There appears to be someone who is not quite as enthusiastic and not quite as pro quokka. I understand that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition leapt into the media in response to our announcement and questioned whether we would be able to do what we were proposing to do. I do not understand it. All I can suggest is that perhaps the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has become one of those people in opposition who is just always negative.