

INDIGENOUS INCARCERATION RATES

904. Mr P. PAPALIA to the Premier:

I note that tomorrow is the one-year anniversary of the Premier's commitment to reduce the number of Aboriginal people in custody, yet in that year the number of Aboriginal Western Australians in prisons has increased by over six per cent.

- (1) When are the legislative and policy measures that the Premier promised, to avoid the incarceration of low-level Aboriginal offenders, going to be introduced?
- (2) How has the Premier allowed an extra 140 Aboriginal people to enter custody in a year that he claimed he would reduce these numbers?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

- (1)–(2) It is a tragedy that so many Aboriginal people, and particularly young Aboriginal men, are in custody. However, we also need to remember that the offences committed are serious; it is not easy to get a prison sentence. Judges and magistrates are very tolerant.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am answering the member's question.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, I call you to order for the first time. Let the Premier answer.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The judiciary does not lightly send a person to jail and they certainly do not lightly send young people, including teenagers and people in their early 20s, to jail. A number of ministers are working on this. We need to reduce the rate of offending.

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I never said that the rate would come down in one year; I never said that.

Mr M. McGowan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr M. McGowan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, you have asked a question; let the Premier answer.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: At no stage would I or any other sensible person claim that we would achieve that within 12 months. I did not make that claim at all. This government is serious about reducing the number of Aboriginal people in our prison system. We are working on that across several portfolios, with senior ministers involved. If the member would like a briefing on what has been done, I am happy to provide that for him. It is not easily solved, but for the first time we have a government in Western Australia that is taking it on.