

**ABORIGINALS — SERVICE DELIVERY REVIEW**

*Statement*

**HON COL HOLT (South West — Minister for Housing)** [5.22 pm]: I want to make a few comments on the debate that we had this morning during non-government business, given that we ran out of time for me to make a contribution. I want to put my views on the record. I will start with the letter to which Hon Stephen Dawson referred when he made his contribution. It was an open letter to the people of Western Australia and published in *The West Australian* on Monday, 15 December 2014. At that time there was a lot of commentary around remote communities and their future. That date also happened to be my first day in attendance at cabinet as the new Minister for Housing. I read the letter in the paper that day with particular interest, and I have to say that I agree with everything that the member said about it. The letter was written by eminent Western Australians—I will not read it again because Hon Stephen Dawson did that earlier today. It spelt out quite clearly what I would have thought everyone in this state and government would be seeking to achieve; that is, sustainability of Western Australia's Aboriginal communities and recognising the connection that Aboriginal people have to their land and their country and the benefits that come with that. However, when I read that letter—I was reminded about it by Hon Stephen Dawson, so I thank him for that—I thought that the one thing it was missing was a reference to opportunity. This letter talks about sustainability and standards of living, but it really does not talk about the opportunity that people should be provided with in those communities. One sentence in the letter states —

We believe a multi-sector approach is needed to ensure all Aboriginal communities are economically and socially viable, with strategies to ensure their long term sustainability.

That may go a little way to talking about opportunity. As a little anecdote to illustrate what I am talking about, before I came to this place I ran a small community development company and we did some work in a remote Aboriginal community. I will not name it, but it was a relatively significant one. My colleagues were working with young Aboriginal girls in the community and they asked them what they wanted to do in the future and what their aspirations were. They answered that their aspiration was to work in the local community shop. There is nothing wrong with wanting to work in a local community shop from my point of view, but there are only so many opportunities in the local community shop for people who live in those communities.

Our approach has to be around providing opportunities that provide that sustainability. We talk about education and health provision in all communities, let alone remote Aboriginal communities, and in my mind employment opportunities are a missing ingredient in many those communities, especially in remote areas in Western Australia. Those people who have visited them and know the people who live there will know that that is the one ingredient missing. We want to provide economic and social outcomes—as the eminent Australians wrote in the open letter in *The West Australian* that day: economic and social outcomes for the people living in those communities.

As the Minister for Housing, I clearly understand that one of the things needed in those communities is roofs over people's heads and a place for them to live—a place to raise their families and be safe. The Department of Housing and I have a clear role to play in anything to do with reform and remote Aboriginal communities. I want to put on the record that I will do whatever I can to ensure that we provide opportunities for Aboriginal people in remote communities. I want to change language, if I can, from the words people used in this morning's debate such as “displacement” and “closure” to “opportunity”, so we can work with those Aboriginal elders and people living in those communities and talk about opportunity for their people, opportunity for their children and opportunity for that community as a whole. That is my commitment.

I want to close by saying that Hon Stephen Dawson also raised the fact that the Aboriginal Affairs cabinet subcommittee coordinated a response and that the Minister for Housing was missing from it. Let me assure the member that I worked very closely with all those ministers on that subcommittee and I have a special relationship with the Minister for Regional Development, who is leading some of those reforms and taking a lead role. I assure the member and others that I will work closely to ensure that the Department of Housing does what it can to provide a future for Aboriginal communities.