

LANDSDALE FARM SCHOOL

Statement

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [5.36 pm]: I rise very briefly this evening to reflect on a petition I tabled in this house yesterday that contained 5 995 signatures, which, for the curiously minded, is a numerical palindrome. That petition called for the reinstatement of government funding to the Landsdale Farm School. The Landsdale Farm School was among many organisations that were on the chopping block when the Minister for Education and Training announced her education cuts two weeks before Christmas last year. The depth of community feeling on this issue is not going away. In fact, I make the observation that it has solidified because of where the government has chosen to spend its money. The \$40 million Local Projects, Local Jobs program is lost on nobody. People find it very difficult to understand why over \$100 000 can be found for a coffee van, why \$250 000 can be found to upgrade lighting for a soccer field and why \$175 000 can be used to replace a bowling green when government funding for a community resource that has been in place for many years needs to be removed. The decision of the McGowan government to cut funding to that facility is simply wrong. Although it is a local issue, it extends into the broader community. It calls into question the government's priorities when it comes to the expenditure of public money. It is also very difficult to reconcile when, at the same time, the government is determined to increase the cost-of-living pressures on all members of the community, particularly those on a fixed income. An obvious assessment of today's budget is that a representative household is looking down the barrel of a \$300 increase in power and water charges that are difficult to reconcile with the level of cost recovery that is already in place. About 15 months ago, the Economic Regulation Authority suggested that water utilities were effectively overcharging. In annual report hearings, the head of the Water Corporation validated that assessment. She quibbled on a technicality, but agreed with the assessment that prices were being gouged and consumers were overpaying for the services provided. That was further validated by remarks made by the Premier subsequent to those hearings. That is unjustifiable, particularly when those corporations have already returned such large dividends to the government.

I return to this farm school. As a member for the North Metropolitan Region, I have been disappointed that partisan politics could not be put aside and that this facility has not received public support from the state Labor members for Joondalup and Kingsley. If they have been engaged in quiet diplomacy, that diplomacy has been exceptionally quiet and about as effective as that quiet diplomacy is likely to deliver. I am also disappointed that the federal member for Cowan has not, to the best of my knowledge, thrown her weight behind this facility and that community. I call on the Minister for Education and Training to do the right thing in this instance, reverse her decision and reinstate the funding for that farm school.

Statement

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Minister for Education and Training) [5.41 pm]: I need to respond to the comments made by Hon Tjorn Sibma. In the correspondence that I have provided to people who have contacted me about Landsdale Farm School, I have made the point that it is a valued community asset. There is no question about that. I have also made the point that the vast majority of people who use it are adults who use it on the weekend. The vast majority of people who use it are not schoolchildren. It provides an excellent service, particularly to students with a disability. So the question is: is it appropriately funded by the Department of Education when the vast majority of people who use it are adults who use it on the weekend? That is the proposition. We are now seeking expressions of interest and going through a process to identify other organisations that are interested—many have expressed an interest—in taking over responsibility for it. Part of the criteria will be that the organisation continues to allow it to be used by students with a disability. It is false narrative to suggest that I have ever said anything other than it is a valuable community asset. I recognise that. The question is: given the usage, is it appropriately funded by the Department of Education?

House adjourned at 5.42 pm
