

STATE CORONER — UNBURIED BODIES

1246. Hon HELEN BULLOCK to the parliamentary secretary representing the Attorney General:

I refer to the Attorney General's media release of 19 November regarding two bodies that have been unburied for more than a year and are subject to proceedings in the coroner's office.

- (1) Why has it taken so long for the coroner's office to finalise proceedings?
- (2) When is it expected that these findings will be completed?

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN replied:

I thank the member for some notice of the question. The Attorney General advises as follows —

- (1)-(2) Once a post-mortem examination has taken place and an authority for the release of the body issued, the coroner ceases to have control of the body and has no power in relation to funeral arrangements et cetera. In normal circumstances, following the release of the body an undertaker—usually arranged by the deceased's family—will collect the deceased from the mortuary for the burial or cremation service. In cases where there is no family or anyone else willing to claim the deceased, the body will remain at the State Mortuary. If, after three months, the body is not claimed, police will bring the matter to the attention of the Public Trustee who can authorise the release of funds from the deceased's estate to pay for a funeral. In the absence of an estate, the matter is referred to the Department for Child Protection. On application, the department may provide funds for a pauper's funeral.

With respect to one of the bodies, the coronial file is complete. The coroner's finding into the death was issued by the Bunbury coroner on 24 December 2007. Since the death occurred, there has been an ongoing dispute regarding the administration of the will, which has prevented the burial of the body. This dispute is outside the control or jurisdiction of the coroner's office or other state authorities. In addition, the Public Trustee is in the process of contacting the executive of the estate to ascertain whether the government can be of any assistance in relation to the burial of the body. It should be noted, however, that the Public Trustee was not previously involved in this situation as an estate existed that could provide for the burial.

The other body at the mortuary was exhumed at the request of police for the purposes of an investigation. Proceedings were recently completed and the coroner awaits the police report before a finding can be issued. In that regard, on 20 November 2009 a request was sent to police asking for their report. In the interim, the body can be released for reburial.