

INDIGENOUS MILITARY EXPERIENCE WEEK

636. Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE to the Minister for Corrective Services:

On behalf of the member for Joondalup, I welcome the years 9 and 10 student councillors from Belridge Secondary College, who are in the public gallery. Also on behalf of the member for Perth, I welcome the Deputy Lord Mayor of the City of Perth, Councillor Rob Butler, to the Speaker's gallery.

Can the minister please provide an update to the house on the recent Indigenous Military Experience Week?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Churchlands for his question and his ongoing interest in this matter. I think this is a great news story and is something that every member from both sides should be happy to see happen in our Corrections system—that is, the engagement of Aboriginal people within the prison system to try to help them get their lives back on track and give them some opportunities when they get out.

After a discussion in June last year with the former commonwealth Minister for Defence, the commonwealth Department of Defence and the state Department of Corrective Services recently got together and conducted the first Indigenous Military Experience Week with 10 prisoners in the Roebourne area. It is a unique initiative to try to get prisoners to see what options might be available to them, depending on their level of offending, inside the Department of Defence. The program was run by officers and soldiers of the Pilbara regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Paul Smith. It taught 10 offenders how to manage their wellbeing, relate to others, appreciate the discipline required to be fit for work, to reconnect with and strengthen their cultural ties, and to manage the responsibilities of their lives. It included a visit to the Burrup Peninsula where Aboriginal guides and elders from the land and sea council talked to Aboriginal inmates about the significance of the Burrup region. As I said, we consider it a success. The effectiveness of such work can sometimes take years to evaluate, but the opportunities became clear straightaway. I am pleased to announce that already one participant has been offered, subject to approval for parole, a position on the Department of Defence's Indigenous pre-recruitment course. Ultimately, it means that an offender can get out of the prison system and move into a rewarding career, as many members would know, within the Defence Force system, wearing a military uniform. I hope to continue our conversations with the commonwealth Department of Defence to ensure that these types of programs can happen again. I am sure they will into the future. I would like to thank all the personnel involved in helping those Aboriginal prisoners share that experience.