

ASYLUM SEEKERS — DETAINED IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

525. Mrs L.M. HARVEY to the Premier:

My question is for the Premier, but, firstly, I acknowledge the year 11 and 12 students from Penrhos College. Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Take a seat, member for Scarborough. Members for Girrawheen and Albany, I formally call you both to order for the first time. The member for Scarborough has the call.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Firstly, I acknowledge the year 11 and 12 students of political and legal studies from Penrhos College who are in the public gallery.

I understand the Premier recently received figures from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship regarding —

Ms M.M. Quirk: Okay; get out the dog whistle!

The SPEAKER: Take a seat. Members for Albany and Girrawheen, I formally call you both to order for the second time today.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I understand that the Premier has recently been provided with figures from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship that show that Western Australia is shouldering an unfair burden in the housing of asylum seekers. Could the Premier please outline the detail of these figures and how federal Labor's failed asylum seeker policy is having an impact on our state?

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

I thank the member for Scarborough for the question. Before answering, I wish both Claremont and Swan Districts well for the Western Australian Football League Grand Final this weekend—especially Claremont!

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: A lot has been said in recent times about asylum seekers who arrive by boat, and Western Australia is very much on the front-line of that in every respect. The Attorney General recently drew attention to the fact that 95 per cent of the people in custody convicted of, or charged with, people smuggling are in Western Australian prisons. That is manifestly unfair, and it is a real burden on the Western Australian taxpayer.

Yesterday I obtained some information from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship on the current number of asylum seekers and where they are in detention, and it is interesting reading. These figures are current as of 14 September, and 4 772 asylum seekers are currently in detention; this figure is only those who arrived by boat. A slight majority—55 per cent of them or 2 600—are on Christmas Island. Christmas Island is full to the brim, so any further arrivals will end up on the mainland unless there is some change of policy. Currently, 2 162 asylum seekers are in detention on the Australian mainland—45 per cent of the total number—but if we look at where they are around Australia, it paints a very, very interesting picture. New South Wales, the state with the biggest population, is carrying a reasonable number; it has 8.6 per cent of asylum seekers. Victoria, South Australia and Queensland each have only about three per cent of the total. Out of the 2 162 asylum seekers, Western Australia —

Mr E.S. Ripper: You can't govern the state; why do you want to govern the country?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Because the government in Canberra is not doing much of a job, that is why!

Several members interjected.

Mr E.S. Ripper: When they get their electricity bills, they will know about your performance!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The opposition does not like it because federal Labor does not know what its policy is.

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Of the 2 162 people in detention on the Australian mainland, 1 010, or 46.7 per cent, are in detention in Western Australia. Therefore, nearly half of them are in this state. If we look at the individual sites, Curtin Immigration Detention Centre has 753 people. Rumour is—it is only a rumour because the commonwealth government does not talk to anyone—that the number will increase to 1 200 or 1 800 people. Leonora Alternative Place of Detention, which is under state jurisdiction, was meant to have 70 people, and it now has 195, and that number is about to grow further. Northam is about to be redeveloped for 400 people or more. I would suggest, given those figures, that Western Australia will soon have two-thirds of all asylum seekers in Australia in its detention centres, which is unacceptable.

This state is prepared to share more than its burden, and I would not grizzle if we were taking one-third, but this is totally out of proportion. This situation places pressure on our education, health and police services. Indeed, it would be very difficult for Western Australia Police to respond to a security issue at a place such as Derby, which is isolated and it takes time to get police there. The commonwealth government has very much adopted an attitude of “Let’s put these people, over 2 000 of them, out of sight and out of mind in Western Australia. Let’s not have them along the east coast cities.” That is unacceptable. I call on the federal government to at least share that burden reasonably evenly across Australia, and to at least talk to the Western Australian government, instead of making us rely on innuendo, rumour and the odd document that makes its way out of Canberra.