

RESOURCES BOOM — GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT

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

I first acknowledge in the public gallery today Perth Modern School year 10 students from the member for Nedlands' electorate.

My question without notice is to the Premier. I am proud to be part of a government that is making decisions to share the state's economic prosperity, rather than issuing glossy brochures and sweeping issues under the carpet. The Premier has outlined that this government's good economic management is being used to provide better health, education, police and social services. Decisions for developments such as the James Price Point gas precinct are also giving Aboriginal communities real opportunities for a more prosperous future.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr T.G. Stephens interjected.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The member for Pilbara may not care about Aboriginal communities, but we do over here.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I ask the member for Scarborough to take her seat! I will say two things, members. One is to most of the members on my left: I am struggling to hear the member's question, so I would like a little less rowdiness at this point. The second point I will make to the member for Scarborough is that I would advise that there is some preamble in her question. I would suggest a little less preamble and a more direct question.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Can the Premier please explain some of the actions that this government is taking to ensure that all Western Australians benefit from the current boom?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

I thank the member for Scarborough for the question.

Indeed, as I have said on a number of occasions, I guess the criteria that any government, and this government included, should be judged by is the extent to which it can successfully take the prosperity of the state and share it as benefits across our community, and in reference to this question particularly to the Aboriginal people of Western Australia.

There are about 75 000 Aboriginal people in this state. Two thirds of them live in regional areas. There are more than 100 communities with more than 50 people, and there are another 100 or more communities or settlements with smaller numbers. As members are aware, the results of almost any statistic or measure of the wellbeing of Aboriginal people across their population do not compare well with the broader population, whether it be on life expectancy, infant mortality, chronic health conditions, education attendance or achievement—whichever area we go to. Indeed, while problems of alcohol and drug abuse are present across the whole community, it is a concentrated problem in many Aboriginal communities leading to criminal acts and also antisocial behaviour. It is the greatest social challenge facing Australia, particularly Western Australia. It is an intergenerational issue that will not be solved by any one government. I acknowledge that the previous government did some very good things in this area, flowing in particular from the Gordon inquiry and the collocation of policing and child protection workers in Aboriginal communities. That work is being continued under this government.

I want to draw attention to some other aspects of this issue that this government is taking very, very seriously in addressing the urgent social, health and educational needs in our community, particularly in the Aboriginal population. The Minister for Health today announced a series of measures aimed at improving health across those communities. Along with the Minister for Regional Development a lot of work is being undertaken, particularly in the north, with the Ord River scheme and the proposed precinct at James Price Point, which are not only major economic developments for this nation but are also, for the first time, tying in social advancement and real economic opportunities for Aboriginal people as part of a bigger economic project.

Native title has been a contentious area for a long period. The Attorney General has driven that issue hard, as indeed did the Leader of the Opposition during his time in government, and we are seeing a number of major agreements settled over native title, most recently in the Broome area. That is good for Aboriginal people. It gives them not only an economic opportunity and recognition, but also allows the wider Broome community to develop.

The Minister for Racing and Gaming has shown a lot of courage in restricting alcohol in Aboriginal communities and towns against a lot of criticism from local people. In education, work is being done on literacy and numeracy

and simple things such as breakfast programs and the like. I thank the member for Scarborough for the question. A lot is happening on a lot of different fronts, but there is a lot more to do. Members on both sides of the house have a shared responsibility to make sure that we continue to go forward. I have to say that I am optimistic. I think there are many tangible signs of real achievement and improvement being made in all those areas within our Aboriginal population, but the issue will always be before us.

Over the past few days we have seen situations arise in our justice, prisons and policing areas. This morning we saw a very confronting photograph on the front page of *The West Australian*. The issue will not go away. It will continue to attract national and international attention. I want to assure members, particularly the member for Scarborough, that this government accepts its social responsibility and takes it very seriously in helping the less advantaged people in the community, particularly our Aboriginal people.