

JUVENILE OFFENDING — DERBY AND BROOME

Statement

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral) [10.33 pm]: I rise this evening to bring to the attention of members some of the things that are happening in the regional areas of Western Australia. Basically, there is a wave of crime. People in communities such as Broome and Derby are very aware of and concerned about the underlying issues that create the conditions that they are now experiencing. People are also losing patience and are becoming very frustrated and, quite frankly, angry because of the impact that this level of crime is having on their daily lives. Very worryingly, there is a lot to indicate that a significant number of these crimes are committed by very young people. It is not unusual to see very young teenagers and children as young as nine years old on the streets without any adult supervision. In the last few weeks in Broome and Derby, there have been numerous instances.

On 12 November, five hire vehicles were stolen from Broome airport; one of the vehicles did not even make it out of the airport, as it ran into a tree. On 16 November, there were break-ins at the post office, which was smashed in; a building company; a restaurant at Cable Beach; my electorate office—self-interest is a marvellous thing—and neighbouring health provider offices. On 18 November, a major shopping centre, Broome Boulevard, was ramraided; a small business in the industrial area was also rammed with a car; two liquor outlets in Derby were broken into; an ambulance suffered a broken window from a deliberately thrown rock; and a pizza delivery driver on a scooter was also hit by a rock, but, thankfully, they were not seriously injured. On Sunday, 24 November, Broome Senior High School was broken into and damaged, a day care centre in Derby was broken into and trashed, and that night there was another attempted break-in at my office and at the other offices. Hopefully, they have redone the locks. The forensic team was so inundated with work, it was nearly four days before it was able to inspect my office just for fingerprints. A locksmith was following the police around—he has never had it so good! I guess some good always comes out of everyone else's misery. Those offices have now changed their security totally.

People living in towns such as Broome, Derby, Port Hedland, Newman et cetera already face significantly high insurance premiums, shire rates and travel costs. The level of ongoing crime will put pressure on insurance premiums. Of course it will happen. Members in this place have talked about the difference in the cost of house insurance there and the cost of house insurance in Perth city.

There certainly appear to be very good lines of communication between the community and the police, despite the strain on their resources. The frustration in the community stems from the fact that there does not seem to be an adequate way of dealing with young offenders in the region and a lack of intervention before they reach this level of offending. I am aware that the government is working on a plan to overhaul the juvenile justice centre. Hopefully, this will create pathways so that young people can be dealt with in the region rather than being sent to Perth. I support this effort, but I want to make it clear that community safety and security must remain an absolute priority. We are seeing children, sometimes as young as 10 years of age, roaming the streets and getting into very serious trouble. This is the result of long-term and highly complex social problems and family breakdowns.

A Telethon Kids Institute-funded study of young people in detention in Western Australia published in 2018 found that nine out of 10 people in youth detention in Western Australia are severely impaired in at least one area of brain function. The study also found that approximately one in three of the young people assessed had foetal alcohol spectrum disorder and that of the 36 young people diagnosed with FASD, only two had been diagnosed prior to entering the justice system. Early childhood screening for these conditions, as well as ongoing education support for families with children with these conditions, is essential. These conditions have not sprung up overnight; it is from decades of failure to address very serious social issues that lead to drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment and disregard for the community.

The current system of sending children up to 2 500 kilometres away to Banksia Hill Detention Centre for a few days or a week at a time just seems to be creating a worsening cycle and exposing children to new levels of criminality, which they bring back to their communities, not to mention the cost. A few weeks back, I asked a question without notice on what it costs to fly offenders to Perth and back. I sat next to a security guard on a recent trip who told me that on the flights up and back they have 15 minutes to get a prisoner onto the plane at Broome in order to get them to Banksia Hill Detention Centre. I saw youngsters in handcuffs getting on the plane and then coming back three days later I saw the same youngsters with no handcuffs and happy as Larry. The costs for travel in the last financial year was \$1 306 792.

Last year, I was privileged to visit the educational facility Yiramalay/Wesley Studio outside Fitzroy Crossing, which is doing amazing things. I have spoken about that facility in this house before and I will not go into it much more. I believe it is an alliance with Wesley College in Victoria. The schools swap year 10, 11 and 12 students. I think that set up could certainly help with the problems we have in Broome and other regional areas.

I cannot stress enough that we are facing a crisis. These communities require decisive, short-term action in the form of more police resources and programs to get the kids off the streets in the middle of the night. In the medium-to-long

term, we need well thought out, constantly funded and regionally appropriate programs. I call on the government and all parties to pay close attention and look at options to deal with these huge issues. We need a whole-of-government approach. In the short term, these communities are reaching breaking point and need action now, especially with the long, hot and wet summer coming on and school holidays about to start, when kids do not have enough to do before they get better.

In November 2019, I wrote a fairly condensed letter outlining all the issues to the Premier. I received a notification that he had received my letter. I wait for the answer. I think we need to continue to do something. Of course, we did have a new jail built at Derby. From memory, it costs \$120 million. I was always very impressed with that jail, but, of course, it is now full. It was designed to take seven prisoners to a cottage, but now it is 11—it could even be a bit higher. We could add a juvenile detention centre to that jail, which could be separate but administered from the same jail. Thank you, Madam President. I look forward to the Premier's letter in response.