

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

C1165

QUESTION WITHOUT NOTICE (Of which some notice has been given)

Tuesday, 14 October 2014

Hon Robin Chapple to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

With regard to the threatened demolition of buildings and infrastructure at the Oombulgurri Aboriginal Community, I ask:

1. Which buildings and infrastructure are scheduled for demolition, who will foot the bill and when will this occur?
2. Given the very strong links the community has to the area, and the many people who maintain they have not been consulted about the demolition, has the Minister considered alternatives to bulldozing the buildings and infrastructure, such as assistance with re-settlement?
3. Given the area is understood to contain many culturally significant and sacred sites, has a heritage survey been carried out to ensure documentation and collection of artefacts, etc prior to bulldozing? If not, why not?
4. Would the Minister recommend a similar approach to the one being taken in Oombulgurri in a township or community that is not primarily Aboriginal, where similar events of child sexual abuse and family violence have occurred? If not, why not?

I thank the Hon. Member for some notice of this question.

1. On 24 June 2013, the Aboriginal Lands Trust, as landholder and owner of the buildings at Oombulgurri, approved the demolition of 49 buildings, including houses, power and water infrastructure, sheds and school demountables. The Department of Housing has confirmed that demolition work commenced on the week beginning 29 September 2014. Demolition work is expected to be completed by 31 December 2014. The Department of Housing was authorised to procure demolition work services and will be paying for the work.
2. No. Cabinet endorsed the withdrawal of Government services from Oombulgurri and the formal closure of the community as a place of residence.

This decision followed a process that started with a report released by State Coroner Alastair Hope in 2008. The coroner investigated five deaths in the community, four of which were suicides, and found the community to be in a 'state of crisis'. This included high rates of domestic violence, child neglect, sexual abuse and excessive alcohol consumption.

Despite extensive efforts to address the issues that have plagued Oombulgurri, including extensive work by the Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee, there remained considerable risk of further decline in community dysfunction without Government action. The closure was necessary to ensure community safety.

In addition to the issues of community dysfunction and safety, financial propriety also meant that the community should be closed. At the time of closure, the majority of residents had already left the community voluntarily, and there was an estimated average population of less than 30 people.

3. According to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs records, there are no registered Aboriginal sites or other heritage places located over the Oombulgurri townsite. The area has been the subject of heritage surveys previously, and during surveys by the Kimberley Land Council and the Traditional Owners, as part of the East Kimberley Development Package in 2010, the area was cleared of any heritage issues.

As such, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs can confirm that the planned demolition complies with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972*, which governs the protection of important sites, such as sacred burial and other Aboriginal heritage locations.

4. Yes. The State Government remains convinced that the decision to close a community in a 'state of crisis', was necessary and in the best interests of residents and the wider community.



Minister for Aboriginal Affairs