

OPERATION FLINDERS ANNIVERSARY – 15 September 2011

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (12:33): I fully support this motion by the member for Schubert and support all the words made by members on this side of the house. In the last couple of months, I had the privilege of going out with Operation Flinders. I know that John Shepherd and the crew had been trying to get me up there for a little while. Things just clashed, but I was very, very pleased to go up and have a look at the operation.

They are now based at Yankaninna Station, which adjoins Mount Serle Station. Mount Serle Station had power connected in quite a few of its buildings, but now (for a range of reasons which I will not go through today) it is an abandoned property; but it is adjoining Yankaninna. We see that Mount Serle has power—the power poles are put through, and all the infrastructure is there—and then at the next property, Yankaninna, we see Operation Flinders having to set up its new base. As a result of another range of reasons it has had to move its base and depend on government support and corporate funding.

I certainly appreciate the support that the government is putting in there, and it should stay that way. I certainly also support all the corporates that support this program. It is a very, very worthwhile program to support children who are essentially at risk—basically kids who have not quite found their way in life. It puts them in an environment that takes them out of their comfort zone. They cannot run down the road to Macca's or Hungry Jacks, and they cannot go down the street and perhaps get into some strife. They are up there for eight days, hiking around, totally out of their comfort zone, carrying all their equipment, and setting up camp.

An interesting point was made by some of the volunteers at Operation Flinders. They said that if the kids do not like the food, they go hungry, essentially. They have reasonable food. Good camping food goes out with them. If they do not set up their hutchie (their little cover for their swags) and it rains, they get wet. They learn some valuable lessons that you need to be part of the team and you need for own survival, to a degree, to be part of the action.

It is interesting that we heard a story from one of the members in regards to someone throwing rocks. We heard a story about that when we were up there, about one of the participants throwing rocks. They were made to carry quite a heavy rock for quite a while, and I think they lost the urge to throw rocks after that. It is a very, very good program. I must admit I was not that keen to be involved in the abseiling, and I certainly made my feelings known in no uncertain terms to the abseiling coordinators.

The Hon. R.B. Such interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: Well, when the rope did move at one stage, I said, 'What was that?' They said, 'It's just pulled against the rock.' I said, 'Yeah, no worries.'

Mr Whetstone: It's called the stretch factor.

Mr PEDERICK: Yes, it's called the stretch factor. As I was backing over the edge and my whole body was literally shaking—and I am quite happy to admit that—they said, 'Look down.' I said, 'No, no; I've looked down once and that's enough. If I look down again I'm not going down.' They do a good job in taking the sponsors and politicians out of their comfort zone as well in doing the abseiling activity. I must admit that I had to complete that activity once I heard that the member for Schubert had successfully completed it. I could not let him get away with that and hold it over me.

It was great just watching that one activity, and the kids being involved in it and coming down the 35 metre rock wall and seeing their confidence levels increase and how pleased they were at completing the task. It was good: I ran into a few participants from my electorate and had a good chat to them. I said, 'I hope that you make yourselves known to me when I see you in the electorate.' They were having a very good time on their eight days.

I have heard anecdotally that a lot of these participants do not realise that straight after they have participated in Operation Flinders—and it may be a little time down the track—they suddenly realise it was the best thing that happened to them. It is great thing that John Shepherd and his crew, and all their volunteers, do for this state. They do great work, and it is making the lives of so many children and so many people in this state so much better. I felt privileged to witness the operation. I wish it all the best in the future and personally thank all the corporate sponsors for being involved as well.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mrs Geraghty.