

**JOHN PAT**

*Motion*

**MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park)** [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this Parliament —

- (a) acknowledges that 28 September 2013 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the death of 16-year-old John Pat at Roebourne Police Station; and
- (b) on behalf of all Western Australians, in the spirit of reconciliation and healing, apologises to Mrs Mavis Pat and her family for the untimely death of her son.

I move this motion in a very strong spirit of bipartisanship that I dearly hope will see the support of all members of Parliament in what I can only hope will draw some sense of personal comfort to the mother of John Pat, Mrs Mavis Pat, who is at the front of Parliament today. I think John Pat's sister, Maisie, will be in the gallery shortly. Our Parliament has been determined on a number of occasions to discuss and debate our history. This is always important. In my time in this Parliament, we have debated many condolence motions for former members of Parliament and significant Western Australians. This is always right and appropriate. Our history is worthy of celebration and acknowledgement and it is important that we address our faults, our tragedies and our victories. For the book, *In black&white: Australians All at the Crossroads*, Paddy Cavanagh in his contribution titled "Why History Matters", writes —

The history that Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people have shared in Australia since 1770 matters because it influences our understanding of who we are and how we relate to each other. If we have no knowledge of it we can have little understanding of either our personal identity or of the national identity.

This is why it is important that the WA Parliament, albeit briefly, takes some time to acknowledge the tragedy of John Pat as his death approaches its thirtieth anniversary on 28 September 2013.

The history of John Pat is known and I will briefly go through it. John Peter Pat was 16 years old when he died of closed head injuries in the juvenile cell of Roebourne Police Station. John Pat was arrested after an incident involving a number of police officers and an Aboriginal police aide. Several Aboriginal youths as well as a few police officers were engaged in a fight outside the Victoria Hotel in Roebourne. John Pat was the only juvenile in the incident and sustained a closed head injury that rapidly caused his death. He was first struck in the face and then later absorbed a blow that knocked him to the ground and smashed his head on the road. Witnesses claim that his lifeless body was picked up and "thrown like a dead kangaroo" into the back of a police van. After being unloaded from the police van, the report states that Pat and at least two other prisoners were assaulted to various degrees. Witness reports maintain that the police were yelling at the prisoners while beating them upon arrival at the jail yard in the hope of inciting further conflict. Pat was then placed, in an unconscious or semiconscious state, in a cell and was later found dead after a cell check. A subsequent autopsy revealed a fractured skull, haemorrhage and swelling as well as bruising and tearing of the brain. Pat had sustained a number of massive blows to the head. One bruise at the back of his head was the size of the palm of one's hand; another above his right ear was perhaps half that size. Five other bruises were visible on the right side of his head. In addition to the head injuries, he had two broken ribs and a torn aorta—the major blood vessel leading from the heart.

An inquest commenced about a month after his death, after which four police officers and an Aboriginal aide were committed for trial on the charge of manslaughter. Upon standing trial at the Supreme Court in Karratha, all five were acquitted of the charges and later reinstated to duty. For Aboriginal people, the death of John Pat symbolises injustice and the oppression of Aboriginal people. The anniversary of John Pat's death was marked by demonstrations calling for justice. John Pat's death drew attention from international media, which focused on not only John's death, but also the conditions in Roebourne and the calls of the Aboriginal people for an inquiry to find out the truth regarding his death as well as others. Public outrage as a result of the death of John Pat and the findings of the subsequent inquest and trial sparked one of Australia's biggest inquiries—namely, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The royal commission that began in October 1987 went on to investigate the deaths of 99 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since 1 January 1980; 33 of these deaths occurred in Western Australia.

After the royal commission, the spotlight eventually moved on from Roebourne. In 1993, the Deaths in Custody Watch Committee was founded by Kath Mallott. The committee states that 269 Aboriginal people have died in custody nationwide since the royal commission released its findings. Asked about the legacy of John Pat's death and the subsequent royal commission, Ms Mallott said some level of reform had been achieved in the police and

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti; Mrs Liza Harvey; Dr Kim Hames; Ms Wendy Duncan; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Ian Britza; Acting Speaker

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prison systems. I certainly agree with that. She said that police cell deaths have dropped dramatically, but as far as justice for the Aboriginal community goes, nothing has changed because we still have horrific incarceration rates.

It is worth noting that some 300 mourners attended John Pat's funeral. Mavis Pat, John's mother, said that she has a sadness in her heart that simply will not heal. The loss of her 16-year-old son, John Pat, is still as raw as it was 30 years ago. By way of additional information, more Aboriginal people are jailed in WA per capita than in most other countries in the world. WA Aboriginals are still more likely to be jailed than any other race on earth. I say that without condemnation of anyone; it is just the reality we face. According to my notes, Ms Pat said in her statement to the royal commission, "I don't know what is going to come out of the royal commission, but I hope it makes everything all right for Aboriginal people." Later she told the commissioners, "I'm sick of the royal commission. It has taken a long time; I wish it to be over; I wish something to happen soon."

I refer to volume 1 of the "National Report" of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Page 7, chapter 1.4.2, reflects the importance of history and states —

That Aboriginal people were dispossessed of their land without benefit of treaty, agreement or compensation is generally known. But I think little known is the amount of brutality and bloodshed that was involved in enforcing on the ground what was pronounced by the law. Aboriginal people were deprived of their land and if they showed resistance they were summarily dealt with. The loss of land meant the destruction of the Aboriginal economy which everywhere was based upon hunting and foraging. And the land use adopted by the settlers drastically reduced the population of animals to be hunted and plants to be foraged. And the loss of the land threatened the Aboriginal culture which all over Australia was based upon land and relationship to the land. These were the most dramatic effects of European colonisation supplemented by the decimating effects of introduced disease to which the Aboriginal people had no resistance. These matters are understood to a very imperfect degree by non-Aboriginal society.

That is the context of history upon which the royal commission began its inquiry.

I move this motion not to accuse or condemn. I move this motion in the hope that we as a Parliament may recognise that the death of John Pat was a tragedy and did not need to happen. I move this motion to recognise that John's mother continues to wear and hold the incredible damage that only those who have lost children in such awful circumstances can understand. I hope that all members of this Parliament in 2013 can have the confidence, spirit and courage to apologise to Mavis Pat for the fact that her son died whilst in the custody of the state. I commend the motion to the house.

**MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [4.10 pm]: I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Victoria Park. I hope this is one of those moments that we have in this place whereby we can all reflect upon deeds done in the past and take the opportunity to, as one, acknowledge those deeds and in some way, through that acknowledgment, seek to heal from the fact that these deeds have happened.

I begin by conveying my condolences to John Pat's family, his mother Mavis in particular. In doing so, I want to say that I understand that grief 30 years old is grief that is still felt; and grief that had its birth in such a horrible set of circumstances is grief that must surely feel almost as raw now as it would have been felt at that time. Although time can take us so far in resolving issues that are in our minds and in our hearts, time cannot replace those who have been lost.

John Pat's death was an important and tragic event in our history. It was symbolic of so much that was wrong about the past, and it was a catalyst for what we can change about our future. The member for Victoria Park reflected upon the violence that John Pat experienced on the night of his death. It was a horrible death, and the circumstances of that death must compound the emotions and the grief that have gone along with that death, as we hear a description of a man who received some of the most horrendous injuries imaginable. However, we must seek out of that despair, that environment of alcohol abuse and that environment of violent racism, a way to move forward. In part, the death of John Pat was a crucial catalyst that took us towards the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The work of that royal commission was seminal in taking the whole of Australian society forward in a way that can find some answers out of this despair and lead to institutional change. I dare say also that through the involvement of Pat Dodson in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, it has also taken Australian society towards the path of reconciliation. That is a path that we stand today, in moving this motion, to recommit ourselves to.

John Pat's death marked an important point in my life. It marks the point where I awoke from the slumber of ignorance around Aboriginal culture and rights, and about the way that we as mainstream Australians have impacted upon the lives of generations of our traditional owners. None of these things is particularly pleasant to look upon, because they reflect upon us personally and as a community. But it is important to stare into that

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti; Mrs Liza Harvey; Dr Kim Hames; Ms Wendy Duncan; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Ian Britza; Acting Speaker

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difficult space so that we can learn lessons from that—lessons about how we can change the way we think and act as individuals, and, importantly, lessons about how we can change laws and attitudes in our society.

Although John Pat's death was a very physical and violent expression of racism, we cannot forget that, today, those acts of racism are continuing to take place, albeit in different ways. One of those ways is through the process of invisibility. By ignoring and marginalising Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal society, we are essentially trying to hide from the difficulties and issues that Aboriginal people confront by making Aboriginal people invisible. If we are to overcome that invisibility, and therefore the racism that underpins it, it is essential to write Aboriginal people back into the history that we hold as our own. It is essential that we acknowledge the past—not by apportioning blame, but by bringing Aboriginal people into the mainstream of society. We need to provide a space for Aboriginal people to speak for themselves. An important aspect of that is having people with an Aboriginal background stand in this place to talk about their life experiences and to bring those experiences into our ongoing experiences as a community. If we continue to deprive Aboriginal people of the right to speak and the opportunity for their lives to be normal, we will continue that process of invisibility. I am indebted to anthropologists like Carter et al, who write about invisibility and take that contra aspect of invisibility, which is hyper-visibility. If we as a community reject and fail to embrace cultures that are outside our own experiences, and put them out there as examples of what is wrong, we will fail to accept people for who they are and we will fail to provide them with the opportunity to be considered part of our lived experience. It is only when we embrace that lived experience as normal and acknowledge it on a day-to-day basis that we will remove the veil of invisibility and provide space for people to tell their stories.

I find it extraordinary that this week we have taken the opportunity to fly the Dockers flag outside this Parliament, yet we cannot provide a permanent place to fly the Aboriginal flag outside this Parliament to acknowledge our traditional owners. That is something that we need to reconsider. I also find it extraordinary that we take time to acknowledge God in our prayers each morning when we begin our proceedings in this place but we fail to do what many people now accept as common practice when people come together—particularly people from different parts of the community—and acknowledge country. We receive a welcome to country at the opening of Parliament. But on a daily basis we should acknowledge that we meet here today on the traditional lands of the Wadjak people of the proud Noongar nation and acknowledge their elders past and present. We should make this part of our everyday lives, rather than at particular points in our history that pop up from time to time and allow us to prick our thoughts and our consciences. It is not until we do that that we can say that the lessons from the death of people like John Pat have been learnt. It is not until we bring these communities, marginalised as they are, right around our society, into our normal lives and we lift the veil of invisibility—this new form of passive, yet incredibly destructive, racism—that we will continue to progress.

This is an important motion. I commend it to the house. I commend it to the house by way of expressing our deep regret and condolences to John Pat and his family and to the community that continues to grieve today, and I commend it to the house because we must continue to learn the lessons from our past to make sure that we lift the veil of invisibility and lift those institutions of racism that continue to plague our society, because only then can we move forward together in genuine reconciliation.

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale)** [4.19 pm]: I also rise to speak to this motion. I congratulate the member for Victoria Park for bringing this important motion to the house. As we know, on 28 September 1983 a young 16-year-old man died many years before he should have died. In that situation, there was a grieving mother, grieving siblings and a grieving Aboriginal community in Roebourne. I pay my respects to Mavis and her family. It may have been 30 years ago, but I am sure that every day they suffer, because no mother and no parent should have to bury their own children.

This motion asks us to acknowledge that this is the thirtieth anniversary of the death of John Pat. It also seeks that this Parliament apologise for what happened in a spirit of reconciliation, not to apportion guilt or blame. Acknowledging and apologising are incredibly important to the process of reconciliation, because people cannot move on if they do not acknowledge what went on in the past. People cannot move on if they are not prepared to apologise for what happened in the past. An apology does not necessarily mean that we are apportioning guilt or blame. Sometimes, as politicians, we get caught up with the word “apology” and we are scared to apologise because we think of legal ramifications and guilt being apportioned. The motion of the member for Victoria Park, and his words and the words of the member for Kwinana, quite clearly state that we are not seeking to apportion blame.

Something did go wrong. A 16-year-old boy should not have died. But it is not our place today to look into the merits of the allegations that were around at the time and still persist. As the member for Kwinana mentioned, this death on 28 September 1983 became the catalyst for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The death of John Pat was one of the cases that were investigated. Many people were not satisfied with the outcome of the royal commission and many people still seek answers. We cannot provide those answers here

**Extract from *Hansard***

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 25 September 2013]

p4654b-4661a

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti; Mrs Liza Harvey; Dr Kim Hames; Ms Wendy Duncan; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Ian Britza; Acting Speaker

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today, but we can provide an acknowledgement that a wrong did happen and, in the spirit of reconciliation, we can apologise. This death that occurred in 1983 changed the nation in many respects. It changed the discourse that was occurring at the time in our relationship with the Indigenous peoples of this nation. The death in custody of John Pat shocked the nation and also led to many words being spoken.

Before I read out a poem by a great Western Australian, I want to say a few more words on the issue of an apology and an acknowledgement. We need to acknowledge what happened in order to say that we are interested in reconciliation. There would not be a member of this house who would not say that reconciliation with the Indigenous people of Australia, particularly the Indigenous people of Western Australia, is not important; therefore, I urge members to agree to the first part of the motion, which asks us to acknowledge that a young 16-year-old died in custody. An apology then becomes important, just by saying that we are sorry for what happened. That is important to build respect and trust with the people we are seeking to reconcile with. If we want to live in a civil society and behave in a civil manner, we have to respect and trust each other. It may not matter what we do today; many people and many people in the Indigenous community still will not be able to respect or trust the wider community and this political institution. But that does not mean that we should not try. If we can at least advance the process of reconciliation, we will have achieved many of the purposes that I am sure were in the mind of the member for Victoria Park when he brought this motion before the house.

I will conclude my contribution by reading a poem by the famous Western Australian poet Jack Davis published in 1988. It is simply titled *John Pat* —

Write of life  
the pious said  
forget the past  
the past is dead.  
But all I see  
in front of me  
is a concrete floor  
a cell door  
and John Pat.

Agh! tear out the page  
forget his age  
thin skull they cried  
that's why he died!  
But I can't forget  
the silhouette  
of a concrete floor  
a cell door

and John Pat.  
The end product  
of Guddia law  
is a viaduct  
for fang and claw,  
and a place to dwell  
like Roebourne's hell  
of a concrete floor  
a cell door  
and John Pat.

He's there—where?  
there in their minds now  
deep within,  
there to prance  
a sidelong glance  
a silly grin  
to remind them all  
of a Guddia wall  
a concrete floor  
a cell door  
and John Pat.

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti; Mrs Liza Harvey; Dr Kim Hames; Ms Wendy Duncan; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Ian Britza; Acting Speaker

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**MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Minister for Police)** [4.25 pm]: I rise on behalf of the government to support the motion that Parliament acknowledges that 28 September 2013 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the death of 16-year-old John Pat at Roebourne Police Station; and on behalf of all Western Australians in the spirit of reconciliation and healing apologises to Mrs Mavis Pat and her family for the untimely death of her son.

It is indeed a profound tragedy that we reflect upon today in the loss of a young man. Having visited Roebourne Regional Prison and seen where this soul slipped away, I can feel only sick to my stomach that this sort of thing was allowed to occur. It is true to say that John Pat became a symbol for Aboriginal people around Australia and, indeed, a symbol of the injustice and oppression suffered by Aboriginal people over a long period of time. John Pat's death sparked international media attention. It brought into focus the often appalling police treatment of Aboriginal people and, indeed, the poor attitude towards Aboriginal people by the Australian community at the time. Although some people may argue that nothing has changed, and there is no doubt that there is an over-representation of Aboriginal people in prisons and in our justice system around Australia, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody did effect significant changes in the way Aboriginal people are dealt with in custody and the way that WA Police deals with Aboriginal people in the justice system. I believe there is still a long way to go and we can still make improvements. As a government we need to commit to a culture of continuous improvement in this area.

At the time of the death of John Pat, it is fair to say that the police internal affairs investigation was entirely unacceptable, and it would not be tolerated in this day and age. In my view, the royal commission was necessary and essential to begin that process of effecting cultural change. I believe that police attitudes and policies have changed significantly since that time and, indeed, there has been significant legislative change to ensure that this will remain the case. Some of the changes that have occurred out of the recommendations of the royal commission are to do with the WA Police screening processes that are now enacted whereby any person who comes into police custody is assessed for medical treatment at the time. It is the responsibility of senior police officers and the officers in charge to ensure that any semi-conscious or unconscious person receives medical attention to determine whether they need to be in a medical facility or whether it is appropriate for them to be held in custody at all. Perth watch house and other police stations have access to a registered nursing service; a 24-hour nursing service is available on-call at Perth watch house. Many Aboriginal and other offenders who are brought into custody have far greater and far more timely access to legal services than was ever available back in 1983. In fact, it is the responsibility of senior officers and officers in charge when an Aboriginal person is brought into custody to notify the Aboriginal Legal Service of the arrest. That is part of the WA Police lockup management procedures that are in place these days.

The other changes that have occurred are around the lockup design. All our lockups now have CCTV coverage. We are in the process of upgrading our custodial facilities to ensure that we have high-quality facilities in the interests of the welfare of those people who may be detained in custody and also for the safety of those people to ensure that the opportunities for them to self-harm are minimised. Police also have a routine of checking on offenders who are held in custody. If they are unconscious or if they have medical conditions such as diabetes and other types of illnesses that police are aware of, those checks occur more frequently than checks on people who appear to be healthy when they are brought into custody. Police are apprised and have a much higher awareness of their duty of care in dealing with people who are brought into custody. In the circumstances, with Aboriginal people, part of the police policy and procedures now provides for a preference for Aboriginal people to share cells where appropriate, provided that that is unlikely to cause any cultural or tribal conflicts between people. Police officers also have equal opportunity training and cultural diversity training. Police officers who deal with the watch house and police auxiliary officers all have police life-support training. We also have far better screening procedures for our officers during the recruitment phase whereby we proactively work to exclude officers who appear to have a predisposition to violence, a lack of respect for authority or even a predisposition or racial bias that emerges as part of the recruitment process or in the early stages of the training at the academy. This ensures that we can screen those people out.

I will mention what I think is the most significant change, and I say this in the context that I accept that there is a way to go in this area. Cultural change is very difficult to effect in a large organisation that is tasked with this sort of public order management to keep the community safe. To illustrate how things have changed with the way that police deal with these situations, we have senior officers who oversee the process when offenders are taken into custody. We have had incidents in which there has been utterly inappropriate treatment of prisoners. There is now a culture within police whereby when these things are reported to internal affairs, we have a reporting mechanism at that time to the Corruption and Crime Commission as an oversight body, and things move far more quickly and far more efficiently to ensure that those matters are investigated in a more timely manner. In my view, the culture of cover-up and disregard for the humanity of those offenders that existed at the time of John Pat's death has improved significantly over this period of time. But incidents still occur in which Aboriginal people and other offenders experience inappropriate handling at the hands of police officers.

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti; Mrs Liza Harvey; Dr Kim Hames; Ms Wendy Duncan; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Ian Britza; Acting Speaker

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Thankfully, it happens far less frequently than it did back in the 1980s and, indeed, prior to that. There is a better culture around police officers to reveal who those people are, because the police officers want to have a sense of pride in the way that they deal with all people, but especially Aboriginal people, who are so over-represented in the justice system.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that the government supports this motion. I would like to place on the record my sadness as a mother at the loss of a young man. I can only imagine that that must be a shocking burden that Mrs Pat bears every day of her life. I do not think that there is ever a time of grieving that would end for a mother who has lost a child, especially in these circumstances, having visited that place where this man's life slipped away and knowing he lost his life in that environment.

I thank the member for Victoria Park for bringing this motion to the house today. I appreciate the opportunity given to this place to reflect on the way that we have treated people in the past and on ensuring that we improve the way that we manage these processes to stop injustices such as these occurring in the future.

**DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville — Minister for Health)** [4.36 pm]: I would like to start by recognising John Pat's family in the gallery. In supporting this motion, I do so from a position of having been Minister for Aboriginal Affairs for four years in a previous government under Richard Court when I had responsibility for the Aboriginal Justice Council, under the leadership of the person I appointed, Glenis Sibosado. The member for Kimberley is not in the chamber; I apologise if I should not mention her name because she has passed. But she was a fantastic advocate for Aboriginal people and was well suited to that role. She did an enormous amount of work, as chair of that council, looking at Aboriginal deaths in custody—this was after the recommendations of the royal commission. That council looked at each individual death to see what the causes were and to make sure that everything that should be done was being done.

Of course, Aboriginal conflict with white settlers has been in existence since those very early years. During my short time out of Parliament, I was involved in compiling the Aboriginal history of Kings Park. It was a fascinating experience, particularly in the J.S. Battye Library of West Australian History, to read through the history of all those early landings. James Stirling probably landed about Spring Street, just below where the old Emu brewery used to be, and Yellagonga was there. He was quite welcoming and respectful, because he thought Captain Stirling was the spirit of his ancestors. He moved away, up to areas near Lake Monger, to leave this area of Perth to the white settlers. But almost from that day, as the settlers chopped down trees, killed kangaroos and drove Aboriginal people to the outskirts, there has been conflict. I went on to read the story of the Walsh family. My former policy officer was Neville Collard. His non-Aboriginal side is descended from that family. They lived on the upper reaches of the Swan River just past Guildford, and they wrote fascinating stories of those early years. They wrote about friendship and happiness. They talked about Yagan, the relationship he had with the white community, and his subsequent death. He was killed by a young man and his head was removed subsequently. Those early conflicts with Aboriginal people throughout the state have many components and many stories.

Along the path there were occasions on which significant incidents that occurred led to major change. The death of John Pat, and the subsequent royal commission, was one of those things. It reminds me of Rodney King, the African American who was beaten in Los Angeles. This was videoed, and it led to riots. It was a watershed, a turning point, in the recognition of the brutality towards African people. In the same way, I think the death of John Pat was a watershed, a turning point, in what happened in Western Australia. Not long before that incident, probably eight to 10 years before, when I was a young man in my early 20s, a detective in the Western Australia Police told me a story. My stepfather was a policeman, and this was a friend of his—not a very nice friend—who was subsequently discharged from the police force not long after. He told this story that they would be having a quiet day at work and, just for fun, they used to drive along the Swan River, find an Aboriginal and beat him up. This happened just eight to 10 years before those LA riots, and the treatment of Aboriginal people in those days was similar to the treatment of indigenous populations in other parts of the world. This was a turning point for Western Australia. I recognise the very sad loss of the family, but there is some meaning behind this tragic event in that John Pat's death has changed the way Aboriginals in this country have been treated ever since.

The government would like to pass on its condolences to John Pat's family. The government will support the motion, and well done to the member for Victoria Park for moving it. If the member for Victoria Park wishes to have a minute's silence in support of the motion at the completion of members' remarks, we would be pleased to do so.

**MS W.M. DUNCAN (Kalgoorlie — Deputy Speaker)** [4.41 pm]: It is an appropriate time to acknowledge the traditional owners of where we stand today and their ancestors both present and past. Prior to coming into the house, I spent some time on the steps of Parliament with the Aboriginals and saw Mrs Mavis Pat there, still grieving for the loss of her son after so many years. I thank the member for Victoria Park for raising this issue

today and giving me the opportunity to say that I also support the motion. As the Minister for Police said, we have come a long way since 30 years ago, but there is still a long way to go. We still have the very recent example of Mr Ward's untimely death, and we also have an unacceptable level of Aboriginals in our prisons. As I said in my inaugural speech, the majority of them are there for non-violent offences but, unfortunately, if they go to prison a second time, the majority of them are there for violent offences. The lesson we must learn today is that we must try harder to ensure there are ways other than incarceration to deal with these offenders. This is why I am really pleased to support the work that the Minister for Corrective Services is doing in justice reinvestment and, of course, we have had the opportunity through royalties for regions to support some of the juvenile justice work with Aboriginal youth and in Aboriginal communities.

Recently, I was in Warburton and saw the remand centre and the Aboriginals in there. I had the opportunity to spend time among their families and friends, to see them work in the community and make a difference in how Warburton looks and feels, and help those in the justice system to hopefully come out the other side without an injury like that suffered by John Pat. I also mentioned some time ago how impressed I am with the work done at the West Kimberley Regional Prison—an acknowledgment of the culture of Aboriginals and how that must be taken into account when Aboriginals find themselves in prison. Importantly, we must all acknowledge the issue of culture. I really love the song of the Yabu Band—Delson Stokes and Tony Shaw and so on—which says, “I live in two worlds, lucky me.” We would be a better place if we all embraced both cultures. I strongly encourage us all to include Aboriginal culture and language into our school system for not only Aboriginals, but also the rest of us because it is a strong and wonderful culture, and reconciliation can only really be achieved through understanding. I thank the member for Victoria Park for the opportunity to speak today and I strongly support this resolution.

**MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington)** [4.46 pm]: I will make some brief remarks to this motion. Firstly, I congratulate the member for Victoria Park for bringing forward such an important resolution. The deep personal loss of Mrs Pat and her family should not have been needed to change Australia's attitudes. Why is it that there had to be such a terrible event before society confronted the situation as it was? White society had actually forgotten the truth. In *The Tears of Strangers* by Stan Grant, a prominent Indigenous journalist, he quotes from the settler Godfrey Charles Mundy's book *Our Antipodes*, which was written in the nineteenth century. It reads —

As our flocks and herds and population increase, and corresponding increase of space is required, the natural owners of the soil are thrust back without treaty, bargain or apology.

Nineteenth century settler Australians understood what was happening to Indigenous society but for some reason, 100 years later, we had forgotten. Much has changed over the past 30 years, but much still needs to be done. Part of the change is for us to remember what happened, and whether it is through the case of John Pat or more broadly with the question of native title and the rights of Indigenous Australians, we are now remembering. Some people argue that to remember what happened is to somehow see ourselves as shamed and therefore not able to move forward as a united country with pride. South Africa has had its Truth and Reconciliation Commission process. Modern Germany confronts its Nazi past. They are proud nations, able to acknowledge what happened and move forward for a strong and united future. Australia cannot build for the future without acknowledging its past. We cannot be proud of our nation until we acknowledge what has actually happened. As the member for Cannington, I have enjoyed sitting with people from the Langford Aboriginal Association who have told me their stories about their lives as Indigenous Australians. As white society remembers its past, we can see that we acknowledged what was happening back then but somehow we chose to forget the situation of Indigenous Australians, which is why we have ended up where we are. It is part of our role as proud Western Australians that we must acknowledge what went wrong. For us to move forward and deal with the issues that confront our community, particularly the specific issues that confront Indigenous Australians and Indigenous Western Australians, we cannot forget the truth. The truth was a period of conflict, and the more we can overcome that conflict by acknowledging the suffering and wrong, then the stronger we will all be. I join with all others in Parliament today in supporting this motion.

**MR I.M. BRITZA (Morley)** [4.50 pm]: I too want to extend my thanks to the member for Victoria Park for bringing this motion before the Parliament.

I rise because it is very easy to state on paper what country means to Aboriginal people, but we, with a western mind point of view, can only mentally accept that. We think we understand it, but then I hear my colleagues talking to me about country and I realise that my western mind finds it difficult to fully understand what that means. I see our young Indigenous people struggling to understand their relationship to country and their relationship with their elders. I see the struggle that elders have in wanting to speak to their young people and talk to them about the values that have meant so much to their generation and to the generation before them. Today, we are honouring the memory of a young man who went before his time; we see it as a death, but I also

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p4654b-4661a

Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti; Mrs Liza Harvey; Dr Kim Hames; Ms Wendy Duncan; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Ian Britza; Acting Speaker

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see it as a people having seen their young man leave before his time. Today I acknowledge that I—we—may not have a full understanding of what this means, but it is important to put on the record that we want to take a stand and make a difference, and we want to make a change. Today, as the house comes together in unity on this motion, we say thank you for allowing us to express that we want to understand. We want to see. We want to know what it means. A mother knows what it means to lose her son, but what does it mean for a community to lose a son? I want to say here today, thank you for allowing us that opportunity. I, too, applaud this motion, and I am very thankful for the opportunity to speak to it.

**MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park)** [4.52 pm] — in reply: I must admit, colleagues, that it was with some apprehension I moved this motion today, but the response has done great credit to the Parliament of Western Australia—it really has. When I moved the motion, I said that I hoped that the Parliament today can have the confidence, the spirit and courage to pass this motion of apology to Mavis Pat and the Pat family, and the response has been, I think, wonderful. I know, for our friends in the public gallery, it has been appreciated, just from their responses.

Members, I firmly believe that we as Western Australians really are bound more by what unites us than divides us, and the history of Aboriginal Western Australians and the history of non-Aboriginal Western Australians seems to move closer and closer together as the process of reconciliation becomes more formal, I guess, as we acknowledge the history we share. Deputy Premier, I will conclude, and if we could have that minute's silence, certainly that would be wonderful.

I want to conclude with a small paragraph that concludes *In black&white: Australians All at the Crossroads* —

As a nation it can be argued that we need to focus more on what unites us — what makes us all Australian — rather than insisting on difference. There also should be more attention to what Aboriginal people have in common — what makes them Aboriginal — for the simple reason that the more difference is highlighted, the more commonality — that is, Aboriginality — is sidelined, off the agenda. While ever Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal are seen as at opposite ends of the spectrum, “a united Australia” will remain an aspiration. In fact, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have much more in common than most people suppose. For example, Parbury suggests that many ‘typical-Aussie’ traits derive from both Aboriginal and European life. For example: welcome-stranger friendliness; egalitarianism; Australian humour such as laughing at the absurd; vivid images in vernacular speech: make-do ‘bush’ improvisation; creativity; the sporting life; and having a good time. It is this commonality that should bind us all together as Australians and be the solid foundation on which to forge Australia to flourish as a common goal. Clearly, together we can't lose.

To all members of the Pat family, as the Deputy Premier said, be proud in the motion of this Parliament—this does not happen on a daily basis—and be proud in the spirit of reconciliation that celebrates the memory of John Pat, and certainly the fact that his death did lead to a fundamental shift in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia.

Question put and passed.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker):** The Deputy Premier has asked that members stand now for a minute's silence.

Question passed; members standing.