



Alcohol inquiry a 'positive step'

■ Andrew Brosnan



WA Aboriginal MLA Ben Wyatt says the announcement of a national inquiry into alcohol abuse within indigenous communities is a “positive step”, but it must be followed by policy development.

Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion told ABC Radio on Wednesday of a wide-ranging inquiry into alcohol-fuelled violence.

The Coalition later clarified the inquiry would target alcohol misuse specifically in indigenous communities.

Mr Wyatt, the shadow minister for indigenous affairs, welcomed the inquiry, but said he hoped the Coalition would take action and implement any recommendations the committee made.

“The Abbott Government has launched a significant number of inquiries and committees, so while it is a worthy topic, my only concern is that will lead to no increased responsibility of funding from the Federal Government,” he said.

“Australian States have been inquiring into this for decades, the Federal Government is always welcome to also conduct an inquiry.

“But ultimately an inquiry by the Federal Government means that the Government must therefore necessarily take responsibility for implementing those recommendations.

“What concerns me sometimes is that new Federal Governments have a flurry of committee and inquiry activity that don’t ultimately lead to any policy development.”

Mr Wyatt also said he hoped WA would feature strongly in the inquiry, given the success experienced by some communities after imposing liquor restrictions.

“What I can recommend to the people doing that inquiry is to have a close look at WA and some of the community-implemented alcohol restrictions that have been successful in normalising communities,” Mr Wyatt said.

“Having alcohol restrictions on any particular community can only ever be successful when that community has demanded those restrictions and therefore takes responsibility for them.

“Ultimately in many remote parts of WA it’s very much up to the community to hold each other to account on the implementation of those particular restrictions.

“WA certainly has a role to play and I hope the Federal Minister ensures there is representation from WA on that committee.”