

FOOD SECURITY

Motion

HON SANDRA CARR (Agricultural) [10.05 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house —

- (a) recognises the rapidly changing and developing issue of food security;
- (b) acknowledges the efforts of the McGowan government to address the broad and developing issue of food security; and
- (c) commends the work and continuing efforts of community groups and not-for-profit organisations in addressing issues around food security.

Tomorrow, 18 November, is National Agriculture Day. I also note that this week somewhere in the world the eight-billionth person was born. By 2050, we will need to feed an additional two billion people. The pressure on our agriculture and water supply is significant. The agricultural industry already uses 70 to 75 per cent of the global water supply. That paints a global picture that will be under significant pressure and will need significant thought, planning and consideration. I argue that Western Australia is very well placed to be on the front foot to address what is a global issue and problem. We are facing issues of climate change, global geopolitical instability and the rising cost of living, along with the looming risk of a global recession. Locally, floods, fires and cyclones have definitely had an impact on our supply chain, and the geopolitical situation has certainly impacted the cost of fuel and the cost of and access to fertilisers for our primary producers. We can see it driving up the cost of our fresh produce. Recent crises and Russia's war on Ukraine has had an impact on what is an already vulnerable food system. We are increasingly seeing people experiencing bill shock and financial crises that are making them face food insecurity.

This is the first food crisis that we have all confronted in which 90 per cent of the world is facing high food prices and inflation. Additionally, the environment is not invoicing us for those costs. It was recently estimated that the natural environment's contribution to our food production is approximately \$3 trillion. Our impact on the ecosystem and natural environment and how that impacts the food produced and the nutrient value of what we consume is significant, and we must factor that into our economics and planning. The next transformation of our food system needs to be aimed squarely in the space of facing the issues of climate change and soil degradation.

When I talk about food security, it is without doubt the core issue of our time and one that seems to have been given limited attention in the past. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a statement on then federal Liberal-National government's website said that there was no food security crisis in Australia. When we look at the quantity of the food that Australia produces, 70 per cent of which we export, we can see that on the face of it that is probably true. However, it failed to recognise the core definition of food security and what that means for everyday people on the ground. Food security is not just about how much food is produced. There are four pillars to food security: availability, access, utilisation and stability. Food security means that all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences so they can live an active and healthy lifestyle.

I am pleased to note that federal minister Murray Watt has recently announced an inquiry into food security. This is important because one-sixth of all Australians do not have enough food. Another alarming development is that 64 per cent of people who are seeking food relief have a job. Our notions of who is seeking food relief are not necessarily those clichéd notions of the homeless or people who are unemployed or experiencing other life challenges.

We also waste a lot of food; \$36.6 billion worth is wasted. Food waste is closely connected to food security. We can think about our supermarket duopoly of Coles and Woolworths and the standards they set around the produce that they will present in their stores and how that equates to food waste. Sheds of farmers produce in Western Australia are considered unsuitable for delivery to the consumer. There is definitely work to be done in this space to ensure that we are creating and delivering a sustainable and food-secure service to all people so that they can have food at all times.

I am going to focus on the issue of food waste very briefly and talk on some of the work that is being done to consider how we can address food waste. One of the ways that we can consider food waste is to ensure that people are aware of, and connected to, the source of their food—where their food is coming from—and eating food that is in season. I recently had the opportunity to participate in the Farmer on Your Plate event supported by Buy West Eat Best, a state government initiative to support our local producers. That connection to our producers ensures that people buy appropriate food, food that is in season and food that supports our local producers, allowing them to deliver sustainable well-utilised food supplies—rather than finding their supplies wasted because they do not meet the size and shape expected by a large supermarket chain.

I would also like to speak about some of the issues faced by our farmers in terms of addressing climate change to ensure food security. Our farmers have historically been highly adaptable and efficient. We have some of the best farmers in the world. That is most certainly the case in Western Australia. Our farmers produce high-quality produce that is in high demand. However, they also face the challenges of climate change and the impacts of a changing environment, increased natural disasters and an evolving consumer demand that is increasingly developing the expectation of sustainable food with minimal environmental impact. If we look to the recent free-trade agreement between the European Union and New Zealand, we see that part of that agreement focuses on a commitment to regenerative agriculture. There is clearly a demand across the world for us to be focused on our practices. We all need to continue to focus on, and pivot in, that direction.

Recently, in June of this year, we amended the Soil and Land Conservation Act to allow for a skills-based membership of the advisory council. Six new members have been appointed to that council. The changes were made in consultation with industry, government and academic research. These are really important developments because they ensure that we are looking at our soil biodiversity. We can consider how research and policy can impact the soil that farmers use to produce the food and ensure that it is well cared for and sustainable. As a result, we can feed the best possible research and information to our farmers to allow them to incorporate it into their practices, where they are at and willing, to ensure that we have great soil biodiversity and longevity. What we do know for farmers at the moment is that access to fertilisers is becoming more complex and the price is incredibly high. Ensuring that our soils are robust, healthy, have good biodiversity and that we are looking after the carbon and nitrogen levels in the soils will enable our farmers to produce more and decrease their reliance on some of those synthetic components. Obviously, the chances of us never needing those again is a bit pie in the sky, but having a council that is putting in some really strong work, informing policy and practices, will ensure that our farming practices improve and have longevity for the future.

Western Australia is in an excellent position to ensure this given that a lot of work has been put back into research and development since around 2019. That has been a significant contribution to agriculture. For those who are willing, there has been work around soil masterclasses—which I was fortunate enough to attend in Northampton—carbon sequestration for interested farmers and diversifying the economic possibilities for farmers in terms of utilising things such as solar and wind farms to create multiple streams of income. These all feed into improving electricity supplies and fuel supplies and enhancing the practices on farms and the possibilities for farmers as they incorporate other practices.

I am going to shift away from farming and speak briefly on food security. These 15 minutes have moved much faster than I thought they might. I want to speak briefly on the Premier's round table held on food insecurity and the work that was done to bring a whole heap of core organisations together to look at the way that food can be delivered to reach the right people at the right time and provide nutritional and appropriate foods for those groups. One of the things they have done that is particularly impressive is provide a website to allow people with an ABN or Australian Company Number to log in and deliver surplus supplies to core agencies. It can be delivered in a way that is strategic and planned. It does not necessarily need to be a surplus supply of good food; it can also be a surplus of logistics, such as transport. It is an outstanding initiative that was launched by Minister McGurk. It is one that is being investigated and replicated in Victoria. I also note that President Joe Biden seems to have recently replicated it in the United States. We are looking at the way that we can bring agencies together so that they are not all delivering, replicating and reinventing the wheel.

We want to ensure that we can provide food security and supply the people experiencing things like bill shock, temporary food insecurity and crisis. What is seen over times of crisis or natural disaster—which we are seeing increasingly more of—is that people are very willing to help and deliver services. The result of an opportunity like this that has been created as a result of the Premier's round table is that it can bring all those groups together and ensure that they are delivering in a timely way.

The Western Australian Council of Social Service has also created a prototype that maps all the key demographics of Western Australia and where people are most likely to experience food insecurity. The excellent thing about that is that it ensures that all the efforts of the not-for-profits and groups, which are predominantly funded by Lotterywest—I note that the Premier has also committed \$10 million a year for two years to ensuring that those groups can continue to deliver those services —

Hon Donna Faragher: It's not government funding; it's Lotterywest funding.

Hon SANDRA CARR: It is still committed to by the Premier and he signs off on that funding. It is an outstanding contribution to those groups to ensure those services continue to be delivered. It is important there is a focus on these issues and we work towards ensuring there is food security. It is a complex picture. That is why I have skipped from one subject to the next, from food waste to food security. We need to support our farmers and invest in research and development to allow farmers to focus on the practices that they are comfortable with and competent in.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon SANDRA CARR: We need to allow other farmers, if they wish to, to look at regenerative agriculture and sustainable agriculture, participate in soils masterclasses and look at grazing as a potential way to improve carbon sequestration. Research is important. Thank goodness the McGowan government in around 2019 stepped back in to reinvigorate agricultural research and development for our primary producers. Without that research, our producers would not be in an excellent position to harness the opportunities presented by the challenges of climate change and food insecurity. We need to be on the front foot to embrace this new significant economy. Our agricultural economy is the second-largest contributor to our economy, and it has the potential step up and compete against fossil fuels, which is exactly where we need to be. Food security is the issue of our generation.

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [10.21 am]: I rise on behalf of the opposition to speak to the important motion brought before us today by Hon Sandra Carr. It is important that we as a chamber consider the issues of food insecurity and food security in Western Australia and across our nation. It is somewhat of a contradiction, I guess, that in a nation with such a rich history of agricultural production and food production, there are still people who do not have access to food, and food insecurity is an issue in our thriving modern Western society. That is worthy of some discussion. I intend to talk to parts (1) and (3) of the motion. I am not sure that there is a lot to say about part (2). Indeed, I note that the member did not really address to any degree that particular aspect of the motion.

I want to start by talking about the cost of living, in particular the *Regional price index 2021*. The report was published in 2021, so it is not new, but it still gives an indication of some of the differentials in the price of food around Western Australia. This is the tenth biannual report. Interestingly, the 2021 report was the first to use the community resource centres network to collect data on prices. I find it interesting that the government that came to power in 2017 looking to close down the very important CRC network, which had been established some years ago, is now using that wonderful network of organisations to do this important work. Where would we be without the royalties for regions funding that keeps that network going?

Hon Kyle McGinn interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! One moment, member. It goes for both sides of the chamber that if there is constant mumbling, the chair will call members to order.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: Thank you, President.

Let us have a look at the 2021 results in this excellent survey on the cost of food, in particular. The survey is based on Perth being the 100 per cent marker. The survey shows that areas outside the Perth metropolitan region have significantly higher food prices. Obviously, that is not a surprise. There are vast distances to cover in the state of Western Australia, and the transport and logistics costs to deliver food to those communities are great. Obviously, that places a great deal of pressure on the price of food in those communities. As recently as yesterday, we learnt retailers in some parts of Western Australia have been advised by email that they will have to now pay a 35 per cent levy on the cost of transporting food products to their businesses because of issues around the floods in the east and the derailment in Victoria. That is a significant impost on regional businesses—on any business—in Western Australia. As a nation, we really need to have a good look at ensuring that our transport and freight networks have some redundancy in them in case of events like these. The honourable member talked about climate change and the issues that that will create and is creating already. It is one of the great challenges that our society has to deal with at global and national levels. With an increasing number of floods, fires and other such events, we need to ensure that our freight and logistics networks—our food distribution and production networks—have some sort of redundancy in them. That requires states and territories to work together to ensure we are addressing critical infrastructure needs as we go forward.

I have talked about the *Regional price index 2021*. An obvious impact on regional prices is the economic circumstances; we are facing inflationary pressures. That is a global issue. As Hon Sandra Carr said, we are perhaps heading towards a global recession and that will have an impact on all sorts of products that we import and export. In turn, that will impact consumers' ability to pay for the products they need. Obviously, that will affect what people can purchase and, therefore, their food security. As I said before, Australia is somewhat of a contradiction. It is a very food secure nation. In fact, we are ranked twelfth of 113 nations for food security. We produce more food than we need and we export most of it. That is not new; it has been the case for a very long time. Nevertheless, despite our agriculture industry's great work producing food and fibre for the world, we still see local challenges ensuring consumers have access to and can afford quality food.

Most of the issues we saw during the COVID pandemic related to local supply chain issues. The empty shelves we saw in our supermarkets were driven largely by supply chain issues, not production issues. Our agriculture

industry has a wonderful ability to produce food very economically from limited resources compared with many other nations. I want to give a shout-out to our agricultural industry, which is always innovating and adapting, and has done for many years. The industry changes its production methods somewhat gradually but it is always adapting to new challenges, including the challenge of a changing climate.

One of the concerns I have around agriculture and the security of agricultural production in this country is the push, if you like, for regenerative agriculture and biological production systems. I have no problem with those systems, but on a wide scale they simply will not produce enough product to ensure that our agricultural industry is sustainable in the long term. They will be a part of the system, but they are not the solution to food security issues, for sure. Certainly, we need to be less reliant on imported fertiliser. Projects in this state are looking at producing fertiliser at a local level. Potassium is one of those great products with important nutrients needed by agriculture in this state. A number of companies are looking to produce it; however, the government has seen fit to set a very high royalty on those producers, such that they may not be viable. That is extraordinary when we consider that that is one of the most important nutrients in agriculture and we should be doing all we can to make those sort of things accessible.

In the brief time that I have available, I want to talk about the *Foodbank hunger report 2022*. Foodbank is a wonderful organisation. I am sure that just about every member in the chamber has visited their local Foodbank and spoken with it at length about the work it does. It is an incredible resource for those people who struggle to get food on the table. The most recent *Foodbank hunger report* of 2022 refers to the issue of food security in the Australian context; in fact, it states that 21 per cent, or two million Australian households, have experienced food insecurity over the last 12 months, which is a huge number. Collectively, we need to ensure that we do something to address that issue. Food waste is one of the contributors but recovering that waste before it is disposed of is obviously incredibly important, and that is why organisations such as Foodbank are very important. Indeed, 23 per cent of Australian households now perceive that they struggle financially to access food. As inflation continues and cost pressure rise, more and more Australian households are struggling to put food on the table, which is extraordinary. Hon Sandra Carr said that it is not only those stereotypical households with employment issues that experience food insecurity; rather, it all sorts of households, including the nicest, wealthiest household in a street.

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary) [10.31 am]: I thank Hon Sandra Carr for bringing this motion to the house; it is very timely and relevant to my electorate of the Mining and Pastoral Region. Ten minutes goes by very quickly, so I will get straight into it.

Aboriginal communities are very vulnerable to food supply issues and price gouging. Members in this place would be aware that in the last federal government, there was a Senate inquiry into price gouging in Aboriginal community stores. Not much has come out of that inquiry because not too much has changed. People who have been out to an Aboriginal community can understand how easy it is for a greedy shop owner to gouge a community, particularly on pay day, and then change their mind the next week. For example, roo tails are a staple in some Aboriginal communities and often that is the most expensive meat in the freezer, not solely because of what it costs, but because shop owners are very well aware that Aboriginal people will buy roo tails. That type of operation is insulting and absolutely attacks the vulnerability of Aboriginal communities, which is not right.

I want to talk about something that is relevant to this motion, which also touches on a little of what Hon Colin de Grussa said but, as always from the Liberal–National government —

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: There is a long, long time before that comes, buddy—a long time before that comes, Stimp!

Hon Neil Thomson: You act like you're in opposition—do something about it.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: It is funny because I am standing here talking about a federal responsibility and Hon Neil Thomson is yelling at me to do something about it! You know what; Hon Neil Thomson should listen. I have told him many times that he should listen, not talk.

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Just like the member spoke to his colleagues about the GST fix? Do not talk to me about the former state Liberal–National government working with the federal government—what a disgrace. Let us get back to the motion instead of listening to gibberish.

Hon Colin de Grussa spoke about the East Coast Main Line going down. It is a bit disappointing that he did not mention a key integral supply chain option—shipping. Members opposite can say that I bring this up all the time and that it is my pet project, but let us look at the realities. At one stage about three or four years ago, Norseman was on fire and Eucla Road was closed so we could not get through to South Australia. There was a flood in the Kimberley so we could not get through the Northern Territory border. We all know that Outback Way is not ready.

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Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon KYLE MCGINN: The immaturity that comes from members on the other side of the house —

Hon Tjorn Sibma: You're leading with your chin on that one.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Okay; let us just cancel the Indigenous week of football, Hon Tjorn Sibma.

Let us be moderate. Let us talk about pre-selections on that side—would that not be interesting?

Kununurra and the Northern Territory were cut off. There was no ability for anything to come in or go out of the state. Shelves were empty, which put more pressure on Aboriginal communities. When we attempted to use shipping to bring food from the east coast, it was all foreign-flagged, which meant that there was no responsibility to the Western Australian people. So what happened? The federal government did not provide us with shipping space and we were unable to bring anything in by rail and road. We were really lucky that the ramifications that we experienced were not worse. It was months before shops were refilled with product. This government had the vision to say, "This is a big problem." It established—I am very proud to be its co-chair—the Western Australian shipping and supply chain task force, which is designed to ensure that there is another supply chain so that we do not find ourselves in another vulnerable situation. I am not talking about the 1970 state shipping model; rather, I am talking about Australian coastline waters in which flag-of-convenience ships do not operate.

The chirpy and smiley opposition member over there might frown when he understands that for 10 years, the former federal Liberal–National government destroyed shipping. Does Hon Neil Thomson know what his team's shipping legacy is? It is walking onto *MV Portland* at 1.00 am and dragging Australian seafarers down the gangway by the scruff of their collars and replacing them with \$2-an-hour exploited foreign workers—what a disgrace! Where did that get us in calling on that ship to assist us during a crisis? It got us absolutely nowhere. I do not know whether Hon Neil Thomson knows this, but we are an island nation. We have a history of seafaring in this country. The supply chain needs to be reinvigorated to ensure that there are more options. Hon Neil Thomson asked what the government is going to do. That is what we are doing. We are getting to work on it, whereas the former federal Liberal–National government destroyed it. The person here in the west who was its architect, Senator Michaelia Cash—geez, she was the Minister for Employment—had absolutely no respect for Australian workers. She had no hesitation in giving handouts to Alcoa but she did not ensure that Australian workers were on those vessels. *MV Portland* operated for 27 years without one industrial dispute, but the former federal Liberal–National government destroyed this Australian vessel. The supply chain we are talking about —

Hon Colin de Grussa: What about tugs?

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Okay; so Svitzer does a lockout and that is the workers' fault, is it? The former Liberal–National government only cared about destroying Australian workers. That is all it cared about, let us be honest. Let us talk about when happened when Qube had its dispute.

Hon Colin de Grussa interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Settle.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Thank you, President. Hon Colin de Grussa should get the facts before he starts spurring off. I remember when the Qube dispute was going on and farmers were dealing with issues. Where did those issues come from? They came from the employer; it created the issues. Let us be honest. If opposition members want to start talking about who is at fault, they should go back to 1998, when they conspired to kick workers out of their own workplaces. Let us be honest.

Some other good initiatives in my electorate need to be mentioned. Food for the Mob was a really good initiative that was done in Carnarvon through Lotterywest. That initiative fed many children during COVID, and over \$250 000 was put through that program.

Did the honourable member buy one?

Hon Donna Faragher interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: I am not standing here denying that. I am talking about a great initiative that came out of the Lotterywest program. I think there should be more of that.

Another really good organisation that operates well is Feed the Little Children in Broome. I hope the opposition agrees with me on that one. It would if it knew its own electorates.

Another one I want to touch on is Foodbank, as Hon Colin de Grussa mentioned. I am a member who works very closely with Foodbank, and we have to in our electorates. Foodbank is critical. One thing that I suggest members do is talk to Foodbank and find out whether there are little things we can do better. In Kalgoorlie, we found out there was no bus stop near Foodbank, so we managed to get Transperth to change the bus stop location so buses stop directly in front of Foodbank. That is a huge benefit because a lot of the people who access Foodbank do not have access to their own vehicles. That change has made quite a big difference over the years.

I want to give a shout-out to the women's hostels right across Western Australia. The women's hostels and short-stay and crisis accommodation manage to get food off the smell of an oily rag with their budgets. They find food from amongst the community. I want to send a big thankyou to all Western Australians, particularly in my electorate, who put their hands in their pockets, donate, assist and volunteer to these types of organisations to ensure that our most vulnerable, such as women in crisis, are looked after and have food security.

HON SHELLEY PAYNE (Agricultural) [10.41 am]: I thank Hon Sandra Carr for bringing us this important motion today.

As a number of members have said, we are a net exporter of food, which is really great. We export approximately 70 per cent of what we produce, but that does not make us immune to things like climate change. For example, in Esperance, we have had a couple of really good grain seasons, but I have been watching the farmers over the last couple of weeks, and I am not envious of them. The weather conditions have meant hail east of Esperance and rain, and farmers are still waiting to start their harvest. This is a shout-out to all the people who make our food.

I want to talk about what our government has done to put money into research for creating efficiencies in our production systems. I particularly note some of our partnerships with the Grains Research and Development Corporation, which have really been good for our grains and pulses industry. Minister MacTiernan has done a huge amount of work on her goal of value-adding to a lot of our agricultural production. For instance, the really great value-add investment grants are on the second round, which has had \$7 million. In the first round, we provided over \$17.6 million to food and beverage manufacturing and processing investment in Western Australia in the past three years. That in turn attracted private capital, so \$152 million of private capital went in and generated more than 900 full-time jobs. This is really great for building resilience, growth and diversification in the sector. We have been doing a lot of smaller things as well. The food and beverage voucher program has helped food and beverage businesses get the support they need to grow and plan their businesses. We have heard that Minister MacTiernan was at the oat conference last month. Oats are a great area that we have helped invest in significantly. Wagin, in my electorate, may be the site of an oat-processing facility. We can now all buy local oat milk, which is really great.

I am pleased that Hon Kyle McGinn brought up issues with Aboriginal communities, because this is one of my concerns, particularly about fresh fruit and vegetables getting out to the regions and health issues, such as diabetes, in our regional areas. Regional Western Australia is a huge area, and getting good, proper food out to everyone is really challenging. I would like to commend some of the groups that are working in that area. Recently, I was lucky to catch up and have lunch with Kate O'Hara, the CEO of Foodbank. Earlier, I had met with Julie Hayden from the Badgebup Aboriginal Corporation, who raised concerns about how the Foodbank boxes did not have appropriate food that Aboriginal people wanted to eat. I had a good chat with Kate about that, and there is now a variety of Foodbank boxes. If Aboriginal people do not like the cans of spaghetti, they put different things in the boxes.

I want to shout out to some of the community resource centres that are operating in the regions. They help Foodbank and deliver the boxes to the small communities that do not have Foodbank depots that people can go to or catch the bus to. I met Craig Cooper in Wyalkatchem, who started getting the Foodbank box deliveries. Obviously, this service has to be on a cost-recovery basis, so the boxes are charged out at \$5, but people can come in to their local community resource centre and get one of these boxes. It has been great for me to go around and spread the word to some of the other community resource centres. Zac in Wagin is really great and has taken on that initiative. When the Albany-based Foodbank does its routes, it now drops off and works with the community resource centre in Wagin. I thank all the community resource centres that are helping out with that.

I was lucky to go on a bus tour recently with Jan McKenzie, who runs the Restore Hope Foundation Esperance. That organisation has its own bus and goes out delivering to 29 needy families in Esperance. It is a really great collaboration with the Esperance community. Many Esperance businesses donate their food, such as BJ's Fruit and Veg, which provides fresh fruit and veg; the IGA, which provides bread; and a whole bunch of other food and veg places in Esperance. Zen Frost, who runs Domino's Pizza in Esperance, has been amazing with donations to his community. He gives out pizzas every week so that Jan can rotate those amongst the community; everybody gets some pizza once a month, or something like that. Some of the farmers come in; Gillian Inkster provides her eggs every week so they can have fresh eggs. I wanted to do a shout-out to Jan and Restore Hope for the work it does providing food to the needy people. One of its issues is that although it is quite easy to get government grants for things like buses and projects, but Restore Hope really struggles to get money for all the usual running costs, such

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as rent and electricity for the freezers and fridges it keeps its food in. I am thankful to people in the community who have been helping out with that.

Esperance Care Services is another organisation in Esperance that has been really great working with Foodbank. It has been the first port of call for the really needy and homeless people in our community. I thank Esperance Care Services.

In Narrogin, Sister Sahaya is a lovely lady whom Hon Darren West would know. We gave an election commitment to her and her Divine You organisation. It is really helping out by providing food and working with places like Coles in Narrogin to provide food to the needy people. I send a shout-out to Ilija Stajic, who passed away earlier this year. He provided his house for them to run this organisation from. I was very sad to hear of his passing.

I want to mention some of the vulnerabilities with our food chain that COVID showed us. In Esperance, it was months before we could buy flour again, because of COVID issues and the fact that we do not create our own flour here in Western Australia. Members mentioned the rail line and the flooding. In Esperance, we were waiting for weeks to be able to buy a block of butter. We have seen the rising cost of food that has resulted from flooding in the east. A lot of people in our community are really struggling to afford their food, especially with inflation, so I am thankful for all the organisations that are helping out.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [10.49 am]: It is with great pleasure that I give the response on behalf of the government to this excellent motion brought to the house by Hon Sandra Carr. I clearly remember the time I sat down with Hon Sandra Carr and said to her she might think about having a run at politics and I see how well that has turned out for the people of the Agricultural Region and state Parliament. It is a great motion today about a subject that we as a government, and I as a member for the Agricultural Region, are very passionate about. It is with some level of bitter-sweetness that I get to give the government response today because I am doing so on behalf of our fabulous minister, Hon Alannah MacTiernan—the best Minister for Agriculture and Food this state has ever seen and the person most committed to the subject of food security and fairness and equality for all in accessing food. She is a great legend of Western Australian politics and has achieved so much over her 26-year career. She will be a great loss to this Parliament after her recent announcement to retire. We all love and respect Alannah. It is a shame that not everybody in the agricultural sector does, but the vast majority of people have no doubt that she is a hardworking, dedicated achiever, and she gets things done, as she has done in this portfolio.

Food security is obviously a very important topic for governments. It is politically bad for a government if its people cannot access food. As has been pointed out, Western Australia is a net exporter of food. We produce plenty and we assist other countries with their food security issues and ensure there is enough food for not just our country, but the world. Having said that, it is an increasing challenge to feed such a large population, eight billion people, and our resources are being stretched. Hon Sandra Carr made the very good point that we do not own the climate and the environment does not invoice us; we have to pay back. Our industry is facing challenges dealing with climate change and those costs that we have never needed to pay back before will need to be paid in the future; therein lies a great challenge.

With regard to emissions, Minister MacTiernan is doing some wonderful work to reduce methane produced by ruminants and is looking at research. It comes back to research. The minister reinstated research in the department that was cut by the coalition and rebuilt the department that had been gutted by the coalition. This great minister has put money back into research where public investment should go. There is a direct correlation between publicly funded research into agriculture and an increase in productivity in agriculture. The state will need that increase in productivity in agriculture because it will have to offset its emissions and pay the cost.

I give a shout-out to Hon Shelley Payne who made some good points about the wonderful people in our community who ensure that everyone has equal access to good quality food. We have worked with numerous organisations and wonderful people across not only the Agricultural Region, but also the state to ensure that everybody can get access to food. I acknowledge the work of Divine You in Narrogin and the late Ilija Stajic, and also Carol Jones and her team at Share and Care Community Services in Northam that provide emergency relief across the wheatbelt. That is a challenge as it is such a vast area. I had the great pleasure of being the work experience kid, for want of a better term, at Share and Care for a couple of days last year and I will do it again next year to get in among the day-to-day lives of the people who work in that sector and to see the challenges their clients face. We live in a disparate society and people have different needs. For some in the Agricultural Region it is the basic need of food and shelter. The government is glad to support the organisations that help in that regard. I say to Hon Donna Faragher that Lotterywest could be channelled in many ways, but the government channels a lot of it back into human services and community services.

Hon Donna Faragher: And I have no problem with that.

Hon DARREN WEST: Of course she does not.

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Brian Walker

Hon Donna Faragher: What I say is that the government cannot claim —

Hon DARREN WEST: Well, we are the only state that runs its own lottery and we will keep it that way so we can decide where the profits need to go.

Hon Donna Faragher: It does not come from the government.

Hon DARREN WEST: It does; it is a government-run organisation.

Hon Donna Faragher: That is where you get cute.

Hon DARREN WEST: We will argue about that another day. I look forward to Hon Donna Faragher's motion about Lotterywest.

We all know that supply chains have been stretched in recent years. Hon Kyle McGinn made some very good points and said how good it would be if we could call on localised shipping in a crisis, and Hon Colin de Grussa raised the tugboat dispute. What a disgrace it is by the company, Svitzer, to hold the national interest of Australia to ransom over a pay dispute or something that could ordinarily be worked out by a third umpire, by other means. That situation should not have been allowed to happen. There is a great opportunity here for the federal government to step in and say that in the national interest this is not on. Our farmers and the importers and exporters will all be held hostage by that overseas Danish-owned company. That is disgraceful. I do not blame the workers at all for this; I blame the company fair and square. It is affecting my industry and it is affecting food security not just here, but around the world. It needs to call off that lockout and get back to work. It needs to do what it is there to do—keep our ports operating and our goods and services flowing around the world. I call on Svitzer to stop it.

Hon Sandra Carr also touched on imports such as fertiliser and fuel. Members must remember that the world is in an advanced inflation state and that is caused by war. It is not caused by wages growth or by many of the things that cause inflation; it is caused by war. The impact on energy and food prices around the world —

Hon Wilson Tucker interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: Energy prices and food prices are driving this inflation, member. We have stretched supply chains and we have stretched a range of things that are not normally stretched in such a way because of the economic circumstances in which we find ourselves. We recently commemorated Remembrance Day to remember those who fell in war 100 years ago. Here we are 100 years later still with war in Europe. We do not seem to learn that when there is a war, the rest of the world is affected, not only those who are immediately impacted. We all feel for the people of Ukraine and what is happening, but supply chains across the world are affected, and that affects the most vulnerable in every corner of the world. Fertiliser and fuel costs are high because of this unusual occurrence. We need those inputs to power our agricultural sector, but we need to look at new methods. If we can regenerate the soil naturally without the need to rely on imported fertilisers, why would we not do that? Why would we not do a little research into that? Why would we not encourage people who want to go down that path to do that? There seems to be a reluctance from some corners of the agricultural sector and the opposition to think outside the square. I again acknowledge our wonderful minister for having the capacity to do that.

We need to look at improving soil carbon. There could be two very good benefits from that: we could remove the carbon dioxide from the air and put it into the soil—remove it from the air to remove the parts per million that keeps increasing and causing climate change—and also increase the water holding capacity of our soil. Science tells us that more carbon in our soil increases its capacity to hold water.

As Hon Sandra Carr pointed out, the agricultural sector is the second biggest sector in Western Australia. It is a very big employer and a major industry. We take that industry very seriously. If we ran out of iron ore tomorrow, that would be a big problem. If we ran out of gas tomorrow, that would be a very big problem. If we ran out of food tomorrow, that would be catastrophic; humankind as we know it could not continue. It is a very big and very important sector that is increasing in value. I believe we will get over a \$10 billion agricultural sector this year. We have had a couple of good seasons and prices are high and demand is strong.

There are many facets to that sector and I will touch briefly on those in the time I have left. I give a shout-out to the horticultural sector, a \$3 billion industry by the time it reaches consumers. It imports about only 60 million tonnes of fresh produce for seasonal reasons; for example, people wanting oranges out of season. The competition for land to grow those crops has become significant. The cost of land is becoming a major inhibitor to our sector. The vulnerabilities in our supply chain, such as flooding, have been mentioned. Hon Kyle McGinn has a solution that we should look at seriously in the future. The war in Ukraine is having an effect internationally. There was a time when we could not get export hay out to our markets around the world because we could not get shipping containers, such were the shortages. The government is working closely with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to find ways to better adapt to climate change and put money back into research. For all the flak the minister copped over biosecurity, the government kept out of Australia the foot-and-mouth disease that was in

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Indonesia. I congratulate the Minister for Agriculture and Food and federal Minister Murray Watt on that important development. We had a success there. We take biosecurity very seriously. This is a great motion by Hon Sandra Carr and it was a pleasure to give the response on behalf of the government.

HON DR BRIAN WALKER (East Metropolitan) [10.59 am]: I thank Hon Sandra Carr for bringing this wonderful motion, with which I can heartily agree. I am sure that we are all well aware of the issues around food security. On one hand, we are a national producer and exporter of food, and that is wonderful, but on a personal level there is great concern. It was mentioned earlier that around 23 per cent of the population is experiencing food insecurity.

I had the great privilege earlier this year of being briefed by Kate O'Hara, the CEO of Foodbank. In fact, I visited Foodbank on Tuesday. What a wonderful organisation. I could mention many of its services, but one in particular is the school breakfast and lunch service. The sad fact is that the number of children attending school without food in their stomach is increasing. There are 119 000 individual meals being provided on a weekly basis for children who come to school without food in their belly. If they go to school empty of food, they cannot possibly work hard; they cannot concentrate or function well, and as a result the whole outcome of their life will be negatively impacted upon. The same is true for lunch. If there is food insecurity at home and parents are unable to put food on the table for them, they are going to suffer and that will lay the foundations for poor social functioning which can turn into crime and other activities that are not helpful to society. The very underpinning of society is dependent on giving our most vulnerable people an adequate amount of good quality food so that they can survive. That is what Foodbank is doing, to a great extent. I also thank the government for supporting the wonderful initiative of helping to supply schools with the food that children—and, on occasion, their parents—need.

I have only one negative comment to make here: we need more funding for this. There is never enough. With a \$6 billion surplus, I am hopeful that we can provide more funding to organisations like Foodbank and others that are doing such wonderful work in our society. There is hunger and fear in our community, quite apart from the shame of those who have never previously required assistance, but who now need to hold their hand out and say, "Please: we are in fear of not having enough food to feed ourselves and our children."

I think it is actually a societal catastrophe for such a wealthy country to be in a situation in which this can be happening. It is only going to get worse. Inflation is increasing, the cost of goods is increasing and the cost of petrol is increasing. We are also going to find that electricity costs will increase. We are facing a time when it is going to be very hard for people to keep their head above water. The cost of mortgages and many other things are impacting upon our ability to feed ourselves. As has already been pointed out, we can live without many things, but without water and food we are in dire need.

It is not an option to not do anything about food security; it is something that we must do. We owe it to the population. As was mentioned by Hon Sandra Carr, that also links to food production. Hon Darren West talked about thinking outside the box, and we absolutely must do that. I am thinking of my time in the wheatbelt and those expanses of wide-open acreage. That is fantastic for producing export trade, but does it do our soil any good? Are we using our land for the best possible outcomes? I fear not. Although I certainly would not support the idea of banning all broadacre farming, we ought to consider the option of permaculture and similar out-of-the-box thinking. That could transform not only the amount of food available but also the quality of our soil and, indeed, even microclimate change. Working on that and using our farmers and their wonderful skills for the development of new approaches to managing our agriculture is a fantastic idea.

Yesterday I dined with a colleague from China who is very much involved in innovative approaches to managing farming conditions in areas of the north of China that are barely arable. There have been wonderful successes in that area; can we import that knowledge and those machines into our country? Why do we not think about that? I am hopeful that we can work with organisations with an open mind, look at this with new eyes, and think outside the box to improve upon the already wonderfully scientific approach that our farmers take to farming.

As I walk through the streets of Perth and see the wonderful lawns that are laid out and the beautiful European plants we grow, all watered with our valuable water, I wonder why we are emulating Middle Ages French cultivation when we live in Australia. Why are we wasting space? We know, for example, that if one original quarter-acre suburban block is farmed properly using permaculture, it can feed a village. I think back to the efforts made in Britain during World War II when people had food rationing. What did they do? They grew their own vegetables and they kept chickens. They had local supplies; they were unable to import, because the Germans were busy torpedoing the ships that brought food in. The supply chain, then as now, was very important. We need to pay attention to that; I thank Hon Kyle McGinn for pointing it out. If we, as a nation, were to place more emphasis on growing our food locally, we would benefit.

There is so much more that I could say, but in the limited time I have available, I will make one medical point. Gut health is the basis for wellness. Lacking gut health with good food will destroy us.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.

Extract from *Hansard*

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 17 November 2022]

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