



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Mr Terry Redman MLA**  
**(Member for Stirling)**

**Address-in-Reply Debate**

**Legislative Assembly, Wednesday 30 March 2005**



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#### ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

##### *Motion*

**MR D.T. REDMAN (Stirling)** [1.33 pm]: It is with a sense of excitement, awe and trepidation that I stand here today before people whom I have previously seen only on television or read about in newspapers. Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr P.W. Andrews), for giving me the opportunity to address the Legislative Assembly for the first time as the elected member for Stirling.

I especially extend my thanks to the people of Stirling for placing their trust in me by supporting me at the recent state election on 26 February. It is truly a great honour to be elected as a member of Parliament. I am acutely conscious of the responsibility that goes with representing the views of almost 14 500 voters. I also acknowledge all members of the house for being prepared to stand for their respective electorates and for shouldering the electoral responsibility that accompanies representing the views of their constituents. I feel confident that each member is passionate about his or her views and will act in good faith when debating matters of concern and interest to constituents. I look forward to the challenge of vigorously representing the views of the Stirling electorate to this most distinguished group.

Gratitude is due also to my immediate family: my wife, Marie, who is in the gallery today, as well as my son, Ben, and daughter, Alysha. A person simply does not take this path without full family support. They have been unwavering in their support and encouragement throughout my campaign. Thanks also go to the campaign committee; my parents, Don and Margot Redman; friends Jeanette and Phillip Trent, Ross Thornton, Debbie Rice, Terry Enright; and, of course, Monty House, the previous high-profile incumbent, for his advice and support. Thanks must also go to all the helpers who, in one way or another, assisted during the campaign and on election day. Particular thanks are due to the Parliamentary National Party and the Nationals Central Campaign Committee for their support. Finally, I would like to extend acknowledgement to the late Neal Heffernan for his encouragement prior to my preselection.

The Stirling electorate is of very special significance to me. I have strong family links to the area. My maternal grandparents were among some of the first farming settlers in the Cranbrook district in the 1950s. My grandfather, Frank Smith, who was very outspoken about conservation practices in the Stirling Range, passed away early last year from a farming accident at 92 years of age. My great-grandfather on my father's side settled in Denmark in 1909 after contracting miner's disease in Kalgoorlie. The rightness of the decision to move was made somewhat easier when, on his first night in hospital in Kalgoorlie, blokes on either side of him died of the disease! Interestingly, and of personal significance to me, he was president of the Kalgoorlie Miners' Union and, upon moving to Denmark, stood for state Parliament for the seat of Albany in 1924, thus foreshadowing my own political aspirations. I will read an extract from his address to the people of Albany -

*I come before you tonight as an independent candidate seeking your votes for the Albany seat. I would not have nominated had another farmer been in the field, but holding the view that the prosperity of Albany and its hinterland must come through the farming industry, I maintain this district should be represented in parliament by a farmer.*

As a former union president he probably did not mind losing to an ALP candidate but he nevertheless followed his principles in standing for the seat. It is interesting to note that of the 57 members in this house today there are only two farmers.

### **ABOUT THE STIRLING ELECTORATE**

Let me tell the house about the Stirling electorate, which covers five quite diverse local government areas, making it probably one of the most interesting and beautiful electorates in the state. Stirling extends from the inland, rich, fertile farming districts of Frankland, Cranbrook and Mt Barker where, along with traditional farming pursuits, vineyards, olive groves and plantation timbers now spot the landscape. Moving back to the coastal areas of Denmark, Walpole, Bornholm, Little Grove and Goode Beach, we see large urban centres surrounded by more intensive horticulture and aquaculture and other niche and cottage industries. The natural beauty of karri forests, the Stirling and Porongurup Ranges and, of course, the varied coastal landscapes adds to the majesty of the region.

Some of these areas are becoming more and more populated as large numbers of people are moving south looking for a change of lifestyle, seeking a cooler climate or simply retiring to the stunning south coast. There are many challenges inherent in such population increases, particularly that of properly catering for the growing demands on key public services as well as providing employment opportunities through industry growth and the burgeoning tourism industry. Although the electorate of Stirling has some clear challenges, many of which have been pointed out during the election campaign and, in most cases, are consistent with issues throughout regional Western Australia, there are also some specific challenges. Enormous opportunities exist for the development of the great southern. With a quality port facility at Albany and a rich hinterland, the area lends itself to a diversity of agricultural opportunities and value-adding industries. In some cases the opportunities have already been grasped by private industry. However, there are numerous barriers to further development. I challenge the current government to support the upgrade and development of key areas of infrastructure, which are vital to regional development in the great southern. This requires a steady decentralised focus beyond the dominant population of Perth and its environs. The government must recognise that not only will it bring enormous assistance to people in the south west but it will also go some way towards relieving the pressure on the metropolitan centre as it becomes increasingly attractive for people to head south. To further emphasise that point, at a National Party state conference last year I listened to a speaker make a point about dwindling populations in inland rural towns and how it was an issue for local economies in those towns. The gentleman sitting next to me nudged me and said, "Well, young man, you do not have to worry about that because the population of the great southern is steadily going up." That may be so, but what is less often pointed out is that the population of the great southern as a percentage of the rest of the state is on a downward trend, based on 2003 statistics. Unless more recent data shows otherwise, the sea change phenomenon along the south coast is not keeping up with the growth rates in the rest of the state. The make-up of the population has changed significantly and further justifies the need to focus attention on industry development to maintain balance in our population structure. The government needs to get dinkum about decentralised policy as a strategy to redress the trend, by focusing on regional investment as a catalyst to regional development and growth.

I will highlight some of the huge assets of the great southern region. One of my central goals for this term in office is to put the region on the map, to showcase its needs and its potential, and to strongly argue for the merits of government investment in this area. In the Frankland subregion, something like \$150 million of private funds has been invested in vineyards, wineries, olive groves and olive production facilities over the past five years. The area is now bursting at the seams, and is in dire need of infrastructure investment. For example, some of the bigger facilities need to use diesel pumps because there is insufficient capacity through Western Power feeder lines to use electric pumps. The local shire is also working hard to open up residential land for development, but there are a number of impediments to this at a planning level. Some of these planning impediments relate to the provision of basic infrastructure to provide power and water. It is certainly clear from the phenomenon of Margaret River wineries buying up land in the great southern that the region has great potential. I urge the government to embrace the vision of what is possible in the great southern by finding ways to overcome some of the barriers and by taking proactive steps towards putting infrastructure in place as a catalyst to further private investment in this region.

Some smaller communities in the region, such as Wellstead and Manypeaks, have suffered a decline in population in recent times, especially due to the impact of the plantation timber industry. I add as an aside that we need to be cautious in making assumptions about the impact of the plantation industry. I look forward to the outcomes of a federally funded socioeconomic study into the timber industry in the great southern, which should quantify those impacts. Some of these communities have recognised opportunities in offering homestead lots and releasing land in smaller town sites, where independent investment growth is having a positive impact. Unfortunately, however, these communities are coming up against infrastructure barriers at this level of government. Once again we need to be proactive and to plot pathways through these issues, while being careful not to put the issues of these small towns into a one-size-fits-all box.

The Mt Barker schools communities recently engaged in a local area education planning process and came up with what they call a one college, one community project, which would amalgamate the primary school and the high school into a single college from kindergarten to TAFE. The project has tremendous educational merits, and I commend the

government for committing to the project during the election campaign. The project will incorporate community services into the educational precinct and will offer a seamless and flexible progression for students in the region. It will also include a cultural centre, which will focus on the outcomes of consultation with and participation by the local Nyoongah community. Such cultural inclusion is critical to reconciliation in these smaller communities. This project is an excellent model for larger regional centres and is deserving of full government support. I look forward to the opportunity to be part of a briefing with the Minister for Education and Training on the planning and execution of this project.

Regional health care has been exceptional to date. Nevertheless, the burgeoning and ageing population presents some significant problems. What became clear to me as I was doorknocking during the election campaign was the level of service and support provided by our regional health care providers. What also became clear was the need to improve some key pieces of infrastructure. In particular, a significant upgrade of the Albany Regional Hospital and the building of a new multipurpose health facility in Denmark are required. Regional growth and changes in the demographic of these coastal locations have put enormous pressure on such facilities. However, it is also great to see companies such as Amaroo taking steps to cater for our ageing population by building independent living units in the region.

My home town of Denmark deserves a mention in my maiden speech. It has so many attributes that they are too numerous to mention today, but they reflect the unique, beautiful and diverse nature of the town. These include very strong cultural values encompassing the arts, alternative medicine and healing treatments. It is interesting to note that Denmark as a community is keen to develop a focus on education as an industry, and to showcase best practice in natural resource management and sustainable development. Denmark will host the annual natural resource management conference later this year.

Although the townsite of Walpole might seem like a forgotten paradise with a population of around 400, it has a summer influx of more than 230 000 visitors. The seasonality of the town, as with many other areas of the south west, creates its own pressures in terms of local employment and the opportunity for industry development. The local community is keen to develop a town entrance statement to reflect the natural value of the town and to promote to the visiting community the opportunities that the town has to offer.

To summarise the central point I have made so far, there is considerable interest in and potential for industry development in the great southern region. The region boasts a woodchip mill, with another possibly on the way. There are also plans on the drawing board for a strand lumber production facility, which would utilise German technology in the production of timber products from woodchips. There are also plans for a biomass energy plant, which would utilise the waste from the plantation industry to produce energy. In addition there is the Grange Resources magnetite project at Wellstead which, with the recent increase in iron ore prices, will almost certainly be a viable project.

Agriculture is and will remain for some time the most prominent industry sector in the region. However, diversification trends are seeing less traditional agricultural industries such as aquaculture and organic horticulture entering the marketplace, as well as value-adding industries such as cheese making, with the production of milk products playing a greater role in agricultural activities. Clearly, it is all happening in the great southern! These projects will bring other investment with them, as well as considerable employment and wealth to the local communities.

If we are to encourage more business investment in the region, we need to ensure that access to the Albany port facility is secure and viable. This means that the Albany port facility needs to be developed and upgraded and for ring road access to be provided to enable haulage traffic to bypass the town. I know that the member for Albany is supportive of the Albany foreshore development proposal. However, I encourage that through this process we do not compromise access to what is a fundamental resource for the region; that is, the port facility itself.

### **A BROADER PERSPECTIVE**

My address so far has aimed to raise the profile of the great southern region and to highlight my desire and commitment to vigorously champion its needs and the concerns and interests of my constituents that have been raised with me in recent months. I am also acutely aware that, in a sense, I am representing the desires and needs of all of regional WA, because many of the issues that I have raised so far today have a common thread; that is, these issues are faced by people who live in regional WA. Western Australia, more than many other states, has intense concentration of its population in a few cities, so there is an enormous imbalance in the kinds of government assistance and facilities that are provided, which city people take for granted.

Some strong principles need to be recognised. These are common principles that have been articulated through most of the addresses that have been made by regional politicians over the past 20 years. They are not new. What are these principles? Firstly, to promote a commitment to decentralised policy, giving regional communities the opportunity to capitalise on government investment. Secondly, to promote a commitment to provide basic services to all members of our community. We have a service obligation to all community members and we need to deliver on that obligation. When the power went out in Perth last year, people got the sack. When it went out in regional WA, no-one seemed to take a great deal of notice. The third principle is to promote a commitment to invest in regional infrastructure as the catalyst to encourage regional investment and development. I find it very interesting and frustrating that these principles

have been articulated for many years and yet remain major issues affecting the viability of regional WA, despite regional WA being a major contributor to the wealth of our state. On most socioeconomic indicators, regional WA lags well behind the city and will continue to do so unless we target long-term, sustainable strategies to bring about much-needed change. I will comment on a few of the more universal issues.

### **HEALTH**

Health care and, in particular, aged care are key issues in regional Western Australia. They are especially issues in inland areas that are experiencing population decline as well as in coastal locations that are under increasing population pressure. The general ageing of the population is placing increasing pressure on federal and state governments to plan effectively for the delivery of services and the maintenance of satisfactory welfare support for the needy. An accentuated version of this ageing demographic is being experienced on the coast. As I mentioned earlier, retirees are moving to the coast. Allowing for this additional demographic - that is, that more and more people are moving to the coast to make a lifestyle change - there will be a significant pressure point in our community. As a result, we need the government to make good decisions that provide adequate and planned support for those in need. One of the key issues in being effective as a government is to ensure that these decisions are made in the context of long-term planning and solid research. Both sides of government, in my opinion, have often been more focused on buying the short-term vote rather than adequately dealing with quality, long-term planning.

### **EDUCATION**

As an ex-teacher and school principal in WA's education system for 18 years, I feel very positive about our system and the quality of educational outcomes achieved across the state. This was no more evident than only last week when I had the good fortune to be a judge in a schoolyard blitz competition. Schools in the Albany district were given \$5 000 to do a makeover of their school entrance statements, and there was a prize for the district winner. Although we have been to only 10 schools so far, the level of engagement of the schools we visited and the communities they service was tremendous, and acted only to reinforce the very inventive ways in which schools engage students and the community to achieve desired outcomes.

Our education system does, however, have some pressure points, especially in the area of curriculum improvement and risk management. In the process of implementing and managing these mandatory programs, it is critical to remain pragmatic at the school and classroom levels. This means keeping the focus on our core business and not getting bogged down in an overburden of unnecessary paperwork and compliance. In saying this, I do not sell short the responsibility that rests with teachers and schools in respect of duty of care and the responsibilities attached to educating students.

Succession planning is clearly another issue within education and remains a challenge for government. Bringing greater numbers of younger graduates to the vocation, promoting country service incentives, encouraging males into primary schools and assisting those who want to make a vocational change are but a few of the challenges. Promoting flexible options at the end of a teacher's career is one option that I particularly feel should be investigated.

Funding arrangements are another area in which flexibility could be increased. Often when funds are delivered, they are ear-tagged to areas of approved expenditure or for specific projects, thereby limiting the kinds of choices that can be made. I am an advocate of moving further towards a single-line budget whereby school communities can make more of the decisions about where these funds can be spent. I also take issue with school principals being given the authority to manage the expenditure of many hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers' funds but lacking the authority to buy even a bunch of flowers for a staff member who has lost a loved one. Good leaders have a strong focus on the people in their organisations and should be supported by government policy.

Vocational education and training has been vigorously promoted over the past few years, and in my opinion has been one of the more successful programs to come out of our system. Bridging the school-to-work gap has been a challenge and will remain a challenge for schools and colleges. I believe that additional support needs to be given to country students who, for reasons of increased opportunity, need to attend colleges in the city and, additional to their course costs, must cover the added burden of accommodation and living costs away from a family home. Rural youth need much more in the way of additional government support since they are in many ways disadvantaged in relation to their urban counterparts.

### **REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Much of our regional infrastructure is in need of a funding injection. It is probably fair to say that both sides of politics have contributed to the problem. Of particular concern is our south west interconnected system of power delivery and our internal road systems. While water networks appear to not be a clear issue, inadequate levels of water storage are often a limiting factor in smaller regional locations and can be counterproductive to growth. Whoever is to blame for contributing to this issue is probably somewhat academic at this point, but what is clear now is that government must make some clear decisions about planning for the upgrade of regional infrastructure to bring standards up to an acceptable level.

I believe it is also important to take a very strategic approach to planning for upgrades and maintenance of our core infrastructure. When planning for the future we need to carefully prioritise our objectives in accordance with sound principles. These principles need, firstly, to reflect a reactive response to basic service obligation and, secondly, to reflect a proactive response to regional growth potential. By maintaining a proportion of funds directed to areas of regional growth, we are not putting a handbrake on growth, and therefore government can effectively promote opportunities for smaller regional communities that would otherwise be held back by the limitations of key service provision.

### **LAW AND ORDER**

I am in the atypical position of finding it a little hard to comment on law and order as I live in an area of the state that is relatively free of crime. On the other hand, issues like party violence, car stealing, house theft and general unsavoury behaviour in the wider community seem to be on the increase and are obviously difficult to control.

I would like to comment on some principles I hold in regard to community policing, and would like to draw a parallel with my own experience in managing students in a rural residential college. On the surface it looks like I am drawing a long bow, but I want members to consider the parallel. When managing students in a school environment it is critical to keep the battle front on the relatively minor issues by maintaining a level of vigilance and support to achieve positive outcomes on the smaller issues, such as tucking in shirts, using appropriate language and demonstrating respect for peers. When I use the words “battle front”, I do not want members to have the impression that I am talking about a battlefield, where confrontation is the name of the game. I am talking about early intervention with students on what many would say are trivial issues. However, by taking this stance, we did not then have the prevalence of the more serious issues of bullying, drugs and alcohol abuse. Although these issues emerged from time to time, students had the very clear impression that they would be dealt with expediently and appropriately while recognising that they were also, in fact, on the serious end of the scale. The minute we got lax on the front line, the standards dropped.

I believe it is valid to apply the same principle to our community, and, in doing so, I feel it is also important to keep the battle front on the more trivial issues. This means responding to all issues expediently and appropriately by having police on the ground, mobile and responsive. If we make the effort to intervene at this level, we have a greater chance of turning around first-time offenders and giving the clear impression that, as a community, we set standards of behaviour that will be maintained by all. I know that in a perfect world we would have plenty of funds to achieve these things; and clearly this is not a perfect world. The principle still stands, however, and I commend the current government for initiatives to get more police into and engaged with the community.

On a more personal note, as mentioned earlier in my address, my grandfather died early last year as a result of a farm accident. The whole unfortunate incident was managed by the local policeman, who met with grieving family members, managed investigations, including a WorkSafe investigation, and worked the family through all the necessary but traumatic processes that needed to follow. One of my greatest regrets is that I did not take the time to write a letter of commendation to the officer’s superiors, commending him for the manner in which and the professionalism with which he carried out his duties. I was very pleased to see that, despite my inaction, he went on to become Western Australia’s Policeman of the Year. Derek Grimes was a worthy candidate and is truly a credit to the Police Service.

### **THE ENVIRONMENT**

No government can afford to ignore the implementation of sound policy in managing our environment in a sustainable manner. It is never as simple as we think, however, when it comes to implementing such policy, as there are often sensitive issues that need to be managed and conflicting demands on the environment. I do believe, once again, that some principles need to be considered when putting any policy in place for the environment. Firstly, it is paramount that we manage the process of compensation when landholders, through no fault of their own, are forced to give up land-use rights for the benefit of the whole community. If we truly appreciate the environmental value of such landholdings, it is incumbent on the whole community to appropriately compensate landholders for such changes. Secondly, simply gazetting a piece of land as national park or reserve does not necessarily mean that it has any increased level of protection with regard to the environmental values it holds. Such classifications need to be accompanied by the necessary resources to ensure real values, and not simply the classification, are protected. Additionally, we need to foster any desire by local communities to play a role in management decision-making processes. This encourages ownership and has the potential to reinforce the desired outcomes while maintaining a level of local vigilance in the protection of environmental values. Thirdly, the level of fuel reduction burning in our national parks, reserves and wilderness areas is a great cause for concern. There is no dispute over the need to continue in-depth research into the impact of applying fire to our forests. There is also no dispute over the fact that high levels of fuel lead to greater risks of bushfires burning out of control and putting our community at risk. I would argue that the conservative position is to reduce fuel levels through reduction burning programs. It does, however, concern me that over recent years the level of fuel reduction burning has decreased. If this pattern is continued, we do face an increasing risk of a severe bushfire. I understand that this is a controversial issue, and I believe that there is also a need to educate the public on the procedures

that the Department of Conservation and Land Management employs to monitor and maintain high-value flora and fauna species in at-risk areas.

I commend the federal and state governments for taking a more strategic approach to natural resource management by consolidating funding portals through the six Natural Heritage Trust regions. My only fear is that this approach has taken something away from the smaller land conservation district committees, and hence may be a disincentive to much of the voluntary and in-kind work traditionally done by farming communities.

#### **IN SUMMARY**

My address has a strong focus on showcasing the great southern. Like many of the people in the region, I believe the great southern has a great deal to offer the state of Western Australia. In pursuing a vision for this part of the state, the people of Stirling have asked me to do three things. First, they have asked me to keep a strong environmental focus while being pragmatic about the development of environmental policy legislation. Second, they wish me to pursue and support opportunities for value adding and sustainable industry development in the region. Third, they want a greater focus on regional infrastructure, and support for key public services and industry development opportunities.

I have aspirations to be a government minister one day, but at the moment I am honoured to be the National Party spokesperson for the agriculture portfolio, a role I will carry out with integrity, energy and dedication. I have always been proactive in leadership, and I intend to keep the same philosophy as a member of Parliament. Thank you, Mr Speaker, for this opportunity to address the house today. I look forward to playing my part in the many and varied deliberations of this Parliament, and to being directly involved in the evolving future of this great state of Western Australia.

[Applause.]

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