



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Ms Simone McGurk, MLA
(Member for Fremantle)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Wednesday, 17 April 2013

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle) [3.15 pm]: I begin by joining with other members in congratulating you, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr I.M. Britza), on your election to the role of Acting Speaker. I thank the Clerk and the staff of Parliament for their assistance since I became elected. They have been both professional and personable in assisting me as a new member of Parliament. I am very grateful.

TRADITIONAL OWNERS

I begin with the knowledge that the Fremantle electorate is situated in Wadjuk Aboriginal land. They were there in the past, they are still there today and they will be there in the future. I acknowledge that fact.

Fremantle's European history began when the ship *Challenger* docked in Fremantle in 1829. When we think of the history of Fremantle and its surrounds, we tend to think of the built environment. While there is increasing acknowledgement of the original inhabitants, ignorance of their experience of the land is still pervasive. Last year I attended a local series of talks held around a campfire surrounded by balga or grass trees, which took place in the street in which I live. These Noongar stories were designed to give an appreciation of local Aboriginal culture focusing on the Fremantle area where the river meets the sea. It was a special experience, and I thank Noel Nannup and Bruce at Replants for their ongoing efforts to ensure that our area stays at least a bit connected to its Indigenous origins. I look forward to working with local Aboriginal groups using practical measures to not only close the gap in life expectancy, but also assist Aboriginal positive engagement in Fremantle and with the local community.

CAMPAIGN VOLUNTEERS

I place on record my appreciation for the people in the Fremantle Labor community who worked so hard to get me elected. To Jean Hobson, Helen Mills, Zita Pal, Phil O'Donoghue, Ron Mizen, Josh Wilson, Emm Drake-Brockman, Tim Kucera and Priya Brown, thank you. Thanks also to members of the Fremantle and Hilton branches—true believers all; I take very seriously the trust you and our army of volunteers have placed in me. I am particularly indebted to my campaign director, Sue Ellery—who probably will not let me forget that I said that—for her experience, firm hand and time during this campaign. We have been friends for a long time. I appreciate her candour and moral compass. A big thank you also to my campaign manager, Dom Rose, who brought intelligence, a can-do attitude and his family to the campaign effort.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

I am very honoured to represent Fremantle, a place I have called home for nearly 20 years, including when I was a student some years ago. Despite not growing up in the area, I have spent time in Fremantle since my early 20s, when I quickly came to appreciate the variety, verve and coffee of Old Papa's Café and Gino's. People are attracted to Fremantle for many reasons, not the least of which is its physical beauty. Of course, this has changed hugely since settlement, but the grace and the strength of the body of water where the river meets the sea is always impressive. Fremantle harbour is no exception. Much of the Fremantle coast has been built on,

which is why my fellow South Beach lovers guard their territory so rigorously. These beaches, which extend south to Coogee, have a calm and a lack of pretence that hold a special place in the community's heart. Horses are still walked there and they swim not far from the statue that acknowledges C.Y. O'Connor's suicide on his horse in that water more than 100 years ago.

HISTORY

Not only does Fremantle have the magnificent Swan River and beautiful beaches, it is also steeped in history. The Round House at Arthur's Head, which was built as a jail, is the oldest intact building in the state, having been built in 1830. There were some buildings in the area but it was not until the convicts arrived 20 years after settlement that significant construction took place. Fremantle Prison was completed in the 1850s and continued to be used as a prison until 1991. In the 1860s the Fremantle Arts Centre was built as a lunatic asylum, with locally quarried limestone. This week actually marks the fortieth anniversary of that building's very successful incarnation as an arts centre. In 1897 there were a number of significant civic openings in Fremantle; Premier John Forrest laid the foundation stone of Fremantle Markets and Fremantle Hospital was first opened, as was Fremantle harbour. That year another building was opened but with less fanfare. William Knox, a merchant trader, built two modest semidetached workers' cottages in what was then Alexander Road. He had three daughters, one who married, but the other two did not marry and lived together in one of those houses for the next 80 years. I have copies of photographs of the two women on the front verandah and in the backyard of their house in the 1920s when the women were in their 20s. Since the mid-1990s, I have been lucky enough to call that same house home. I recommend that if our current home builders, such as Alcock and Satterley, can build structures of lasting quality anywhere near houses like my own, they will be doing very well. It is a tribute to not only good construction but also activism that so much of Fremantle's heritage buildings still stand today. I would like to acknowledge the Fremantle Society, which in the past worked tirelessly to ensure that these buildings remain. Some buildings, such as Victoria Hall, which hosted WA Labor's campaign rally during the election, were protected by construction union green bans. Currently in Fremantle, there is a very active debate in true Fremantle style about future development and getting the balance right between protecting precious heritage, increasing inner city density and developing Fremantle so that it is equipped for the twenty-first century.

MIGRATION

Fremantle is a place of arrival where people from around the world and all walks of life have chosen to call home. This is in fact one of our community's great strengths. European settlement, mostly Italian but also Spanish and Portuguese, enriched the community, and as a result a much wider group, including artists and people seeking alternatives to the mainstream, came to Fremantle and contributed to its ongoing vibrancy. We are still heavily indebted to the Italian and southern European communities for choosing Fremantle and its surrounding suburbs as their home. We are very grateful for not just their culinary contribution, although this is very much appreciated, but their ongoing maintenance of many homeland traditions, which has brought a richness and diversity that is now woven into our community's make-up. An example of this is the annual blessing of the fleet ceremony, which I attended last year. First introduced to Fremantle by Italian migrant fishermen in 1948, it is a celebration of the fishing community's traditions and religion, and also involves the wider community by way of a procession through Fremantle. Fremantle's blessing of the fleet is unique, as two statues are part of the procession representing the towns of Capo d'Orlando and Molfetta in Italy, from which the majority of our now local fishermen came. There are countless examples of southern European migrant resourcefulness and success throughout Fremantle. We have to look only at Sealanes, which started as a small family business in 1922 and is now the state's largest supplier to the food service business. While there are successes, there is no doubt that there are also challenges

facing many of the industries traditionally working from the Fremantle electorate. Over the last term of government, quotas in the rock lobster industry were introduced. While the operators of boats working from Fremantle understand that sustainable fishing is necessary, they would like to see fairness applied so that restrictions are shared equally along the WA coast. They do not feel that this is the case under the present system, so I plan to work with their various representative bodies to ensure that the local industry is viable for future fishing operations. Both Sealanes and the local rock lobster industry are now being led by the children of migrants. In both those cases, tertiary educated children want to maintain their family and cultural connections to their industries but understand the need to be positioned into the twenty-first century. With what I have seen so far, I have every reason to believe that they will succeed.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Fremantle is of course not the only suburb in the electorate of Fremantle. The southern end of the electorate includes Spearwood, which still contains market gardens and a strong migrant community; a rapidly changing Coogee; and Hamilton Hill, once referred to as “silly town” because who would be silly enough to live that far south? It includes part of Beeliar wetlands, and the young families now moving there do not consider themselves silly at all. The electorate also includes Beaconsfield, White Gum Valley, South Fremantle—known for the Bulldogs and the beach—Palmyra, and, at the northern end, East Fremantle. In short, Fremantle appears to have it all. Graced with natural beauty and steeped in history, it has a vibrant working port and an active and engaged community. But there are challenges. Fremantle is a heavily populated area situated on top of a working port, which now processes hundreds of thousands of containers each year, and that output will double before the port reaches capacity. Currently about 86 per cent of those containers are transported by road, which in last year’s figures equated to nearly half a million truck movements in and out of the Fremantle area. Given that diesel emissions are now classified by the World Health Organization as a grade 1 carcinogen and those trucks contribute to congestion on already congested roads, there is a lot of support in my electorate for increased use of rail to transport freight. I welcome the current government’s adoption of Labor’s target of 30 per cent of Fremantle’s freight being transported by rail and I look forward to holding the government to account to that target. Productivity of cargo movements must also be watched closely with the point being to minimise the number of empty trucks coming into or leaving the port. It is not just the volume of cargo coming in and going out of the port; it is what is being transported that is of concern to the Fremantle electorate. Just last week Rosslyn Hill Mining announced that approval had been given for it to recommence the transport of lead through Fremantle port. While there have been a number of safeguards put in place to protect workers and the community along the lead transport route, local public opinion remains highly concerned about the risks involved. WA Labor’s policy is that the lead should not be transported unless it is in ingot form. I commit to doing what I can to ensure that safeguards are adhered to and there is zero tolerance for safety guideline transgressions when it comes to transporting this and other dangerous materials in and out of the port.

Another strong sentiment in the electorate I represent is that of phasing out live animal exports. This is not a “nimby” sentiment and as long as the animals are transported from Kwinana away from sight the community would cease to care, although the regular sight of sheep jammed onto trucks is distressing enough. I believe that the live animal trade is unnecessarily cruel and costs Australian jobs in abattoirs and in meat processing. I acknowledge there is a significant proportion of our state’s agricultural industry reliant on the live animal trade, so it would be necessary that there should be phasing out in an adequate transition, as we have done in other industries we have exited.

Like any community, it is essential that Fremantle has services that meet its ends. As a major population centre, entertainment hub, and with a working port, it is crucial that there are

accessible health services in Fremantle. There is concern that Fiona Stanley Hospital, coming online in 2014, could actually mean a reduction in readily available health services, particularly for less mobile people in Fremantle. Worryingly, Fremantle Hospital's Alma Street clinic has given our community firsthand experience of the inadequacies of our current mental health system, which was confirmed late last year when the director general of Health, Kim Snowball, admitted the state's mental health system cannot keep pace with the level of demand. We can and must do better in this important area of health.

Along with health services, proper public education is the cornerstone of a healthy community. Ensuring there are suitable public high schools in the electorate was also a matter of much debate during the state election. The demographics of the electorate have changed rapidly and I want to work with both John Curtin College of the Arts and South Fremantle Senior High School to ensure they have the resources to carry out their work and they are responsive to the demands of the community they are in.

Far and away the biggest issue raised with me when I was campaigning was the current state of central Fremantle. There are retail vacancies and buildings in disrepair, but rents are still high. There was a very active debate taking place around striking the right balance between maintaining Fremantle's cherished heritage and ensuring the city is on the front foot for this century. Many of the issues being debated are in the remit of the Fremantle council. I share concern that forced council amalgamations would, amongst other detrimental outcomes, delay progress on council projects that are already overdue. In consolidating Fremantle as a regional metropolitan centre there are a number of state agencies that have crucial roles to play. The Fremantle Port Authority has responsibility for major redevelopment at Victoria Quay and south of the port authority building near Bathers Beach. Any developments in this area need to be sensitive to the heritage value of the sites, but they have huge potential, and they need to progress.

There are opportunities in the responsibility of the Public Transport Authority, too, in opening up Fremantle train station. Both the FPA and the PTA need to work closely with local stakeholders to maximise the outcomes for Fremantle and play their role in economic regeneration.

An example of state government neglect is in the heart of Fremantle in the warders' cottages next to Fremantle Markets. These heritage cottages are owned by the Department of Housing. But despite record public housing waiting lists, they have been vacant for nearly two years and are now derelict. These are beautiful heritage structures in the heart of Fremantle, and it is an indictment of the current government that this has been allowed to occur. A solution, which may involve the cottages being renovated and managed by Fremantle City Council, must be arrived at soon.

What a vibrant Fremantle had in the past was employment. Many of the local industries have either moved or are no longer employing in large numbers. I therefore support this government's decision to relocate a major department, such as housing, to central Fremantle, and for this to occur as soon as possible.

Members would be aware that the seat of Fremantle includes Rottnest Island, a very special place for many Western Australians. Here, too, there are many challenges facing the successful management of this precious resource. I am committed to ensuring that close attention is paid to what sort of development takes place on Rottnest, that holidays on the island remain accessible, and that the natural environment is protected.

PREVIOUS MEMBERS

I would like this afternoon to give credit to previous members of the seat of Fremantle. I would like to acknowledge my immediate predecessor, Adele Carles. In particular, I would like to give credit to Jim McGinty, who held the seat of Fremantle for 18 years and will be remembered for

his significant achievements in advancing one vote, one value electoral reform in this state, as well as driving significant law reform in the area of gay and lesbian equality. He was, of course, a former secretary of the union now known as United Voice.

Earlier this year, I was very pleased to meet with one of the other former Labor members of Parliament who represented the seat of Fremantle, and that was John Troy.

[Member's time extended.]

LOCAL CONTENT AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Ms S.F. McGURK: John was keen to impress on me that although planning issues have been much discussed as central to overcoming local government economic doldrums, in fact in the past it was employment that was the source of Fremantle's vibrancy. I agree that it is crucial that we recognise that central to the state government's responsibility is the need to ensure that there are real, stable and permanent jobs. That is why, as secretary of UnionsWA, I was pleased to work in cooperation with the union of which I was previously an official, the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, as well as the association representing engineers and planners, and the steel employees in this state, to lobby for local industry to gain an increased share of the engineering, design and manufacturing work associated with our big resource projects. As a result of that campaign, I think there was an increase in the amount of work that went to local manufacturers. However, the increased work was patchy and done in a piecemeal way. I believe that as policy makers we have a responsibility to be systematic, as well as transparent, in maximising outcomes from our large resource projects. Making sure that we have jobs after the boom, and using the exploitation of our natural resources to nurture feeder industries, is an issue that has continued to resonate strongly with the public, and it is an area that I am keen to continue to work on as a member of this house.

Another policy area in which I believe we can do a lot better is improving the rates of vocational training. Despite concerted efforts by both federal and state governments, over the last five years the number of apprentices in high-demand skill areas, such as engineering and construction, has actually declined, in a time of overall employment growth in these industries. In short, what we are doing to increase our apprentice numbers is just not working, and we have an obligation to redouble our efforts in this area.

I spent over five years as a member of the State Training Board advising the government on vocational training matters. I also spent many years representing workers in the manufacturing industries as a union official. It has become clear that those employers who in the past have taken responsibility for indenturing apprentices—the large public sector employers such as the Midland Workshops and the state engineering works and also the large fabrication workshops—are now either not operating or are not big employers. I believe we need to look at alternatives for who will take on the responsibility in the future for the important work of on-the-job training in these crucial and high demand skill areas.

TRADE UNIONS

As individuals, we are all the result of many influences. I would like to take this opportunity to give thanks to the trade union movement, which I have been gratefully enriched by. I especially acknowledge the individual delegates I have worked with over many years, as well as so many other officials, too numerous to name. John Sharp-Collett and Keith Peckham were in the leadership of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union when I went to work with the union as a young woman, and they mentored, supported and gave me many opportunities so that I was in the leadership position as assistant secretary when I left that union. I believe that if women are to make significant inroads into non-traditional industries, deliberate decisions must be made by leaders at an organisational and industry level to actively promote women. Of course, this

also applies to the many industries where women are underrepresented in numbers as well as in leadership positions.

I also met my friend Carolyn Smith at the time, when she was a boilermaker at the then State Energy Commission of Western Australia. She became a union delegate at that time and now, of course, is very capably leading the state's largest union, United Voice. I wish her all the best in her important work. I would also like to thank the staff who worked with me at UnionsWA. To all of you, and to my successor as secretary, Meredith Hammat, I would say good luck, but we all know that luck has nothing to do with it. I know that the ability of the small but quality staff at the peak trade union body will ensure that its affiliates speak with one voice and that they are innovative and firm in giving working Western Australians and their families an effective voice in Western Australia.

I will work hard during my time in this Parliament to progress issues that will improve the lives of ordinary people. This is a natural progression of my union work, which has been all about giving a voice and strength to people who might not otherwise be heard. I feel that in this place we have a special responsibility to do what we can to even the ledger and to promote policies that progress equity and justice where it is lacking.

Fremantle has a proud tradition of standing up to be counted. In 1919, waterside worker Tom Edwards was killed by police in a union riot, Fremantle's own Bloody Sunday. I would also like to pay tribute to Paddy Troy, a waterside union official who went on to form the miscellaneous workers' union and the WA Trades and Labour Council. Paddy, the father of John Troy, whom I mentioned earlier, was fiery, compassionate and devoted to improving the lives of the workers he represented. Above all, he believed in unity, and I hope his spirit of mindful militancy will help guide me in my present journey.

ENVIRONMENT

Fremantle's rebellious traditions today manifest in a deep concern for the environment, a preparedness to take action and break new ground to ensure that we are living sustainably. Labor's track record—if you will excuse the pun—fits very well here. Locally, we are committed to rail transport, and in particular the reopening of the Fremantle railway lane in 1983, but also in ending logging in old-growth forests and federally, pricing carbon. We want to continue to pursue good policies that are practical measures to protect the environment we live in.

PERSONAL

Can I also acknowledge other important influences that have brought me to this place today: Arthur Clarke, Ken Travers and Roger Cook have all given me friendship, politics and a few late nights. Finally, what bigger influence can we have in arriving into adulthood than our own family? My father, Patrick, is here today and I thank him for his love. If I carry a tenth of his love of life with me, I will be doing well. His wife, Lois, provided as good a feminist role model as any teenage girl could want. But it is to my mother, Bette, that I would like to pay special tribute to today. She brought up five children, often working two jobs and during times that must have been exhausting and difficult. We never did without and we have never been in any doubt as to her love and commitment to us. As they say in the classics, "Bet, this one's for you." I have been graced with a tribe of nieces and nephews, so much so that some of them have had their own children and I am now a great, or, as I like to say, excellent aunt. It would take too long to list them, but you know that you have been very special to me and it has been great to be part of your lives.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my husband, Mark. Calm, creative and intelligent, he has provided unwavering support in all my pursuits and I am very grateful for the love we share. I hope my time in Parliament is not too exhausting for him. His parents, Pam and

John, are here today and I would like to thank them also for their support. The bonus of my relationship with Mark has been his son, Sam. Also placid, smart and creative, he put his talent on display creating a video for my election campaign. He is 21 next month and I look forward to sharing in the next chapter of his life.

I believe in the responsibility we all have to extend inclusion and to afford opportunity and the power that will extend to our community if we achieve our aims.

That concludes my address to the house.

[Applause.]
