



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Hon Ken Baston MLC**  
(Member for Mining and Pastoral)

**Address-in-Reply Debate**

**Legislative Council**

**Wednesday, 25 May 2005**



# Legislative Council

Wednesday, 25 May 2005

---

## Inaugural Speech

**Hon Ken Baston MLC**

(Member for Mining and Pastoral)

---

### ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

#### *Motion*

**HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral)** [9.00 pm]: I take this opportunity to congratulate the newly elected President, Hon Nick Griffiths. I am sure your deliberations will be wise and fair, and I wish you well in the important role of managing the business of our Council. I also congratulate Hon George Cash on his re-election as Chairman of Committees. I congratulate all my fellow parliamentarians who have been recently elected to this chamber, and I look forward to working closely with them all over the next four years for the benefit of my electorate and the state of Western Australia. I also commend the members and staff of the house for the invaluable induction courses that new members have attended. I found them most beneficial and now feel better informed and more confident in carrying out my duties in this house.

As is customary in an inaugural speech, I will briefly give members a quick overview of my background. My parents lived on a north west sheep station on the coast north of Carnarvon. Although this lifestyle was idyllic for a young child, it was isolated, and my early schooling was done by correspondence, the mail service was once a fortnight and the telephone lines were simple earth returns; that is, copper wires propped up by sticks. Cyclone warnings were transmitted by telegram, if the line was still in operation; the cyclones normally came before the telegram. I went on to complete my education at boarding school in Perth, making the journey home only three times a year.

For the past 30 years, I have operated a pastoral lease 90 kilometres south of Carnarvon producing wool and meat for the export market. There are only 538 pastoral leases in Western Australia. Although I have had to contend with drought, floods and cyclones, I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to operate a business in the rangelands. I have been actively involved in many issues that affect the Gascoyne region. In particular, I have gained valuable knowledge through my involvement in local government, various agricultural committees and the Gascoyne recreational fishing advisory group. In short, I have lived and worked for the greater part of my life in the electorate. This has armed me with an invaluable insight into the economic and social needs of the region at large, and this, I trust, will guide me in my deliberations in this house.

Mr President, I feel very honoured and privileged to be a member of this house, and in particular to be representing the electors of the Mining and Pastoral Region of Western Australia. It is a region that creates much export wealth for the nation and is the powerhouse of Western Australia. The mining and pastoral electorate has the capacity to drive Western Australia's growth into the future. We must not forget that the mining and pastoral electorate represents 87 per cent of Western Australia's landmass. The total value of the economy of the Mining and Pastoral Region is some \$27.5 billion, of which approximately \$23.4 billion is generated through exports; this represents 21.5 per cent of national export income. I am committed to the people of my electorate, and will work to further promote investment and development in the region, and to enhance opportunities for stable population growth.

I will focus on three strategies. Firstly, I will concentrate on creating incentives for business to operate and for people to live in the region; secondly, I will look for ways to foster and enhance regional development; and thirdly, and probably most importantly, I will seek cooperation between the federal and state government to achieve positive outcomes. I will elaborate on each of the three key strategies I have just outlined because I consider these to be the ingredients necessary to drive future wealth creation and population growth in my electorate. The first key strategy is the creation of incentives for business to operate and people to live in the regions. To provide the house with some context, if a line were drawn from Shark Bay across to Brisbane, which is the bit the government was willing to give away in World War II, that area would contain approximately 6.5 per cent of Australia's population but would create some 40 per cent of Australia's export income. It is understandable that a feeling of neglect exists in rural communities. The individuals who make up the 6.5 per cent of people who live in remote and regional Australia typify the iconic Australian character, and they want a fair go.

My interest in this issue came by way of an invitation to be a delegate to the Northern Australia Forum in Katherine in the Northern Territory in October 2000. This experience confirmed my view that government investment incentives and policies need to be targeted directly at promoting growth in regional economies. There is no doubt in my mind that economic and population growth provides the key to long-term sustainability of regional Australia. Population growth and economic development will contribute to the overall health, cohesion and vitality of our regional communities. I consider this to be a key in turning around the difficulties faced by all people living in my electorate. One issue that the regional summit certainly firmed in my mind was that the key to these incentives is not handouts. People should be rewarded for their personal endeavours and the investment they make in the regions through progressive mechanisms such as tax incentives. Given incentives and encouragement, investment will occur. We need only look at the blue gum, olive, wine and film industries, which are proof of this. As members will come to learn, I am a great believer in the potential of tax incentives to drive investment in regional areas. Although this is predominantly a federal issue, I see a role for state politicians to work cooperatively with the federal government of the day. I will discuss this issue in detail later.

Another example of a progressive regime was the removal of the fringe benefits tax on company-supplied housing. Although this represented a way forward, we need to continue in this vein to create further incentives. Furthermore, the entire concept of state air travel needs to be reviewed. It now takes twice as long to fly to Carnarvon from Perth as it did 10 years ago. Other towns have lost their major air services altogether, not to mention the breakdown that has occurred in regional airline linkages. If the city bus and train services need financial assistance, airlines throughout the state, which are regional Western Australia's bus and train services, are equally deserving of government support.

It is my dream to see people grow up, work, raise a family, educate their children, retire and become grandparents within the electorate.

I will now turn to the second key strategy that I highlighted earlier; that is, the strategy of enhancing and fostering regional development to create wealth and population growth within the Mining and Pastoral

Region. As members should be aware, the industries within this region are many and varied, ranging from agriculture to the mining, oil, gas, tourism and fishing industries to mention just a few. I will comment specifically on each of these industries.

### **Agriculture**

Agriculture in all its forms plays a major part in the region. The Department of Agriculture needs to play a greater supportive role in encouraging improved production in the region through its advisory capabilities, rather than what appears at present to be its ever-increasing compliance role. Thanks to Hon Kim Chance, over the past four years I have had the pleasure of being a chairman of the Carnarvon Artesian Basin Advisory Group, which successfully undertook to rehabilitate the artesian basin stretching from south of Exmouth to Denham. When completed, that will save some 90 gigalitres of water. This \$7.5 million commonwealth-state project encouraged the closing of old bores and refurbishing with new state-of-the-art reticulated systems. This huge resource, and other potential water resources throughout the rangelands, presents the electorate with a massive opportunity to contribute to regional wealth creation and population growth.

Another critical issue is the capacity of the rangelands to diversify into a range of other land uses. Our current tenure system was put in place more than 100 years ago and now does not reflect the current needs and future use requirements. Our current land tenure regime also does not encourage the investment that is critical for future growth. As opposition spokesperson for lands, I can assure the house that I will take a keen interest in this matter.

### **Tourism**

There is no doubt that outback towns can play a far greater role in local tourism than they do at present. Their full potential has nowhere near been achieved. The recently launched 3 000 kilometre outback pathways project, initiated by the Gascoyne-Murchison strategy, of which I am a former board member, is an example of how outback tourism can be promoted. For our tourism industry to grow, I believe we need to make sure that there are quality air services to all destinations of our state, not just a few major centres. These services need to provide a good base for packaged, realistically priced airfares, which are now expected by international and local tourists alike. I put on record that I will work hard to achieve a review of the current policy and commit to provide alternatives, options and solutions.

### **The Fishing Industry**

A sustainable fishing industry is of utmost importance to coastal towns for the income generated directly by the commercial sector of the industry and indirectly to the tourism sector. However, fishing laws and regulations need to be simple and policeable. It is pointless to have sanctuary zones introduced by one government department if they cannot be managed by another department; for example, sanctuary zones are introduced by the Department of Conservation and Land Management and then handed over to the Department of Fisheries to be managed.

### **Mining**

There is much optimism for the future of the Western Australian resources sector. However, mining, too, has significant land tenure issues within the mining and pastoral electorate and is, more generally, a significant issue for our state. Planning delays and expense caused by excessive and often unnecessary bureaucracy are a major hindrance to development in the region. This is further emphasised by the confrontational nature of the legal process in many of the land title issues, rather than localised, conciliatory negotiations. This applies in particular to the mining industry. We must find a way forward to resolve this and I am particularly keen to work with my state colleagues, our federal counterparts and the industry to do so.

I will also make some general comments about fostering regional development. Having some five years experience on the Gascoyne-Murchison strategy, a commonwealth-state regional development program, I very quickly learnt that the key to making development projects happen is the capacity of the institutional structures to make it happen. Members can be assured that I will be vigilant and proactive as an advocate of the one-stop-shop approach to the government's service delivery, and I will work with those precious few government development agencies to undertake an integrated approach to project delivery.

The other general comment I will make is about the role of local governments in regional development. A pattern appears to be developing within state governments throughout Australia of establishing planning committees to override local government roles and functions. This is very centralistic and often can install in regional areas unwanted development of inappropriate facilities. My experience with local government gives me the view that this trend is eroding the democratic rights of local councils. This means that developers of large projects will be able to bypass local councils and submit their plans directly to the state government for swifter approval. This can arouse accusations of bias or political interference because the decision has gone outside the normal, accepted democratic process. However, I recognise that the minister has the final approval. Consequently, funding for local government infrastructure projects to support the massive revenue source for the government needs to be more in tune with regional requirements.

I now turn to the final and probably most important of the key strategies that I alluded to earlier; that is, to work cooperatively between the federal and state governments to create much-needed growth and population for my electorate. I have seen at first hand the benefits that a region can achieve when all levels of government work cooperatively together. In the past I have seen major electoral benefits vanish for the sake of trivial party politics. I assure members that it is my hope - I hope not in vain - that I can remain above the day-to-day cut and thrust of politics and resist the temptation to score cheap political points so that we can work together to capture the full benefits for my electorate.

The relationship with commonwealth politicians and senior government officials built up over many years is an asset that I wish to translate into real action for the people of the Mining and Pastoral Region. It is probably stating the obvious, but I believe it is worth restating that the commonwealth has an extraordinary array of options to fund regional opportunities. If I can be influential in returning our fair share to Western Australia, and more particularly to the Mining and Pastoral Region, I will take the cause to whomever and wherever is necessary.

In closing, I will sum up by reiterating and putting on the record that while I am a member of this house, I will commit myself to encouraging growth, wealth and population for and within my electorate. Before returning to my seat, I thank those who have helped me to be here today. Although there are too many people to name - I apologise now to those I may miss - I specifically thank my wife, Robin, and my sons Derek, Richie and Thomas, for their support and encouragement. I also thank the members of the Liberal Party for preselecting me, a party of which I am very proud to have been a member for 20 years. I thank the individuals who encouraged me to participate, in particular Peter Broad; Gordon Thomson; Terry Cahill; David Steadman; Ross Atkins; the former MLA for the former seat of Ningaloo, Rod Sweetman; my dear friend Senator Alan Eggleston; and one other very close friend and bush confidante, Peter Robson, who has been holding the fort while I have been away. It would be remiss of me if I did not acknowledge the members of this house for being very attentive and courteous during my first utterance in this house, and I trust they will retain the same civility and decorum the next time I rise to speak. Finally, I thank those who are the real reason I am here: the electors of the Mining and Pastoral Region and the real people with whom I commit myself to work for the next four years.

[Applause.]

---