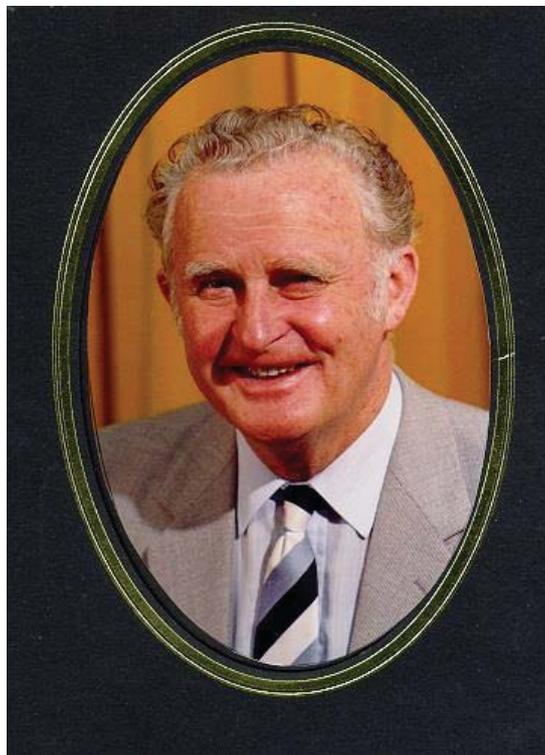




PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Hywel David Evans, MLA

(Member for Warren)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Tuesday, 6 August 1968

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY — FOURTH DAY

Motion

MR. H. D. EVANS (Warren) [8.38 p.m.]: I am conscious that I am exercising a very great privilege as I come before this Chamber to speak for the first time, and I would like to preface my remarks with several offers of congratulations and several expressions of personal appreciation.

At the outset I would like to add my congratulations to those you, Mr. Speaker, have already received on your election. I would also like to congratulate all those new members who, like myself, are at the commencement of their first parliamentary session.

My most striking impression stems from the friendliness and helpful attitude which I have found everywhere. My colleagues on both sides of the House have displayed a tolerance and willingness to help which was as unexpected as it was appreciated. Similarly, within the House, every member of the staff has displayed a spirit of warmth and co-operation, and I would like again to record my appreciation of these considerations.

The electorate I have the honour to represent is Warren. This distinction was held by Mr. Rowberry for the 10 years prior to March of this year. Mr. Rowberry now enjoys a well-earned retirement and, I would like to add, he takes with him the regard of the people he served for that decade.

Warren is a large electorate and embraces the three shire council areas of Manjimup, Denmark, and Nannup, and the area is something in excess of 4,000 square miles. Climatically, Warren is favoured. The highest average rainfalls of the State are recorded in this area, and the growing period is of far greater duration than in those places further north. As a natural consequence of favoured climatic conditions there is a considerable diversity of primary industries in this area. Over a third of the State's timber production comes from the electorate, potatoes, orcharding, dairying, the raising of cattle and of sheep, tourism, and even hop growing, contribute in varying degrees to the wealth of the district.

However, it is with some concern that I draw the attention of members to the adverse population trends which have been the pattern of Warren for some years now. During the five-year census period of 1961 to 1966 the population of Warren declined by 1,484. In the Manjimup district it fell from 10,195 to 9,167, a decline of 1,028. In the same period in the Nannup area, the fall was 366, and this is in excess of 20 per cent. In the Denmark Shire the figure was 90.

This population decline can be attributed to a multiplicity of causes. The failure of the tobacco industry, the closure of the State Building Supplies, mechanisation in the timber industry, and mechanisation and new developments in farming, have each made a significant contribution. The trend has continued—as the figures from the Bureau of Census and Statistics show—over the past year, but the figures are considerably less. It is also disturbing to note further figures from the Bureau of Census and Statistics. In the seven-year period prior to June, 1967, 26 fewer industries existed in the south-west region. At the same time there was an increase of 324 industries in the metropolitan area, and an increase of 75,500 in the metropolitan population.

If decentralisation is to become a meaningful word and if we are to have any policy of decentralisation at all, then the problems of the south-west must be analysed in detail and faced squarely.

It is also with some concern that I draw attention to the state of the primary industries of the lower south-west. The plight of the small farmer, with the exception of those with intensive forms of agriculture, is approaching desperation. I can best illustrate this, I feel, by reference to the decline in farm income, which is revealed most lucidly by the figures of the consultant employed by the Manjimup Farm Advisory Club. In the year ended 1967, the return on invested capital to the farmer represented 8.3 per cent. For the year ended 1966 the return on capital invested was 2.9 per cent—I repeat, 2.9 per cent. These farmers would be better off with their money invested at bank rate interest without working at all.

Accordingly I feel it should be pointed out that at this stage the small farms and the industries they represent require close Government attention. Almost every agricultural industry to which I have referred is in this plight. The broad type wools, which are typical of the area, are returning approximately half the amount they did 12 months ago. The producer is receiving about half the amount for fat lambs in comparison with what he received 12 months ago. Yet there has been no fall in the price of mutton and lamb, though I am convinced this is not the fault of the retail butcher.

Orchardists throughout the area are operating on a very slender margin. By reference to current prices of top quality export markets this can be demonstrated particularly well. For top quality Granny Smith apples on the English market, which is the backbone of the industry, the orchardist received a net \$2.50 per case for this year's crop. From that amount of \$2.50 he pays an amount of \$1.20 for packing costs. This means he has \$1.30 with which to maintain the orchard for the ensuing 12 months. This, of course, involves cultivation, pruning, spraying, irrigation, and all the other necessary costs involved.

I draw attention to an issue which is very current amongst fruit growers in Western Australia at the moment and which involves the proposed payment of a subsidy by the Commonwealth Government. The Commonwealth Government undertook to pay a bounty of 50c on apples and 53c on pears. It agreed to make a special payment on all apples that were exported to countries affected by the devaluation; that is, countries which employ sterling and allied currencies. The interesting point is that in Western Australia the shipper, not the grower, is regarded as the legal owner. Accordingly, the shipper will receive the bounty. I do not think that was the intention of the Commonwealth Government at all. If it did not intend to subsidise the growers in Western Australia, it certainly did not intend to subsidise the shippers.

Initially it was a measure to assist growers in Tasmania, who were very badly stricken, but for constitutional reasons the bounty became applicable to every State in Australia and, as a consequence, Western Australian orchardists became eligible. The reason this has come about is because of the forward selling method which Western Australia has adopted. A deputation of fruit growers is waiting on Mr. Anthony at this time in the hope of persuading him to reverse the decision and allow the orchardists, who are the producers and the original owners, to receive the bounty.

Publicity in recent months has drawn attention to the difficulties and uneasiness within the dairying industry. It is the dairying industry which most urgently needs action from Government sources. Both Mr. Anthony and Senator McKellar have on several occasions pointed out that the average industry income in the dairy industry is \$3,000, but over 55 per cent of all dairy farmers return a net annual income of less than \$2,000. Western Australia being a high-cost production State would be well and truly below the industry average. I asked a question last week of the Minister for Agriculture requesting that an inquiry be made into dairying. I regret he is not present in the Chamber tonight, because I would urge him to reconsider his decision and give this matter priority amongst the current business of his Cabinet.

Certainly a large number of factors lie outside the province of the State Government. They are matters which belong to Commonwealth, or even overseas, considerations. However, there are a number of controllable factors into which the State Government could very properly undertake an inquiry. I refer firstly to the cost structure and price returns in both the whole milk and butterfat sections of the industry. Closely allied to this would be an investigation into the possibility of making available additional funds for developmental purposes to make the marginal farms in the industry—marginal in the economic sense—economic units. In addition, the ramifications of the proposed rehabilitation scheme which Mr. Anthony recently put forward could well be considered against the perspective of the whole industry at this stage.

The second matter which could well bear close inquiry is the question of research. I know a great deal of research has been carried out in the dairying industry, but the point is, it has been inadequate. There is great scope for this and such matters as stock grazing trials—which would involve new concepts—such as those which are presently held in regard to fertilisers and grasses. There could also be research into parasite control and into new breeds of dairy beef; and there could be research into irrigation and the economics of irrigation with a view to breaking the season early, thus giving the greatest possible lactation period. These are matters which could well bear closer investigation.

Very closely connected with research, is the matter of an extension service. A great amount of experimental data is available and a great number of technological bulletins have been published which are easily accessible, but many of them need interpretation. The average practical farmer is not equal to delving into a highly professional type of paper that would be virtually useless to him.

The agricultural extension service certainly exists, but the officers of the Department of Agriculture have such great areas under their control and such a large number of farmers for whom they are responsible that they can hardly be expected to do justice to their responsibilities. An adequate number of extension officers who would be responsible for reasonable areas could bring about very rapid and far-reaching developments in management and technique within the dairying industry in a very short time.

The third avenue of investigation could well be the controls within the industry. It might be found desirable to amalgamate the W.A. Dairy Products Board and the Milk Board into a single authority, as is being considered in New South Wales at the moment. It may be thought desirable to review the controls which the Milk Board exercises at present. It may also be thought desirable to consider rezoning all whole-milk production areas.

However, if an inquiry is to be effective, now is the time for it to be conducted. There is considerable unrest and uneasiness in the whole-milk section of the dairying industry; there is great difficulty in the butterfat section, and the proposed dairy rehabilitation scheme is in the offing. This is obviously the propitious moment for an inquiry to be instituted.

Recently the editorial of a daily paper referred to the rural scene in Western Australia as being one of light and shade. In this regard Warren certainly has had more than its fair share of shadow. However, there is one industry, the prognostications for which are very favourable, and that is the tourist industry. This State is blest with four attractions which could well be considered world class. We have the developments which are taking place in the north-west. We have virtually thousands of miles of beaches. We have the caves of the Augusta-Margaret River area, and we have the forests of the south-west, and the wild-flowers. As almost the entirety of the karri forests lies within the Warren electorate, it is this aspect of tourist attraction with which I am most concerned—though the entire value to the State does not escape me.

With the completion of the Eyre Highway, tourist authorities expect there will be a great influx of tourists into Western Australia. The number of caravans crossing the Nullarbor is expected to increase dramatically. In January this year the Main Roads Department conducted vehicle counts at Cocklebiddy and Balladonia. On separate days the figures were 290 and 338 respectively. Certainly that would be peak period traffic, but the Main Roads Department estimates that at the present time between 60 and 80 vehicles would be using the highway daily. It further estimates that 10 per cent of all the vehicles would have a caravan in tow. It is impossible to predict with any accuracy the precise increase that the sealing of the Eyre Highway will bring in terms of caravans and visitors. However, it will be considerable. Preparation for this event must be commenced, even at this stage.

Firstly, a modern tourist reception centre would be essential. From a centre such as this, the information that is necessary to a successful tour could be made available to the tourist or traveller as he arrived.

A natural corollary to a sudden influx of travellers could be an agricultural inspection unit which could effectively exercise control. This aspect is one which has given rise to some concern of late. The precise location of a unit such as this would probably determine to a large extent the place on the Western Australian section of the highway where the entire project would be sited. A slightly more imaginative suggestion might even be an aboriginal cultural centre where the sale of native paintings, sculpture, weapons, and that type of thing could be undertaken in a building specially designed for the purpose. This idea is by no means new. In other countries, indigenous peoples such as Maoris, Hawaiians, and Red Indians, make big business out of it. Perhaps in a modest way the Department of Native Welfare could introduce some of our people to a business venture of this kind.

As I have said, primary planning must start apace now with the co-ordination of the various Government departments. As the first visitors return, they must take back with them a favourable impression. That would be the best form of advertising for the State that we could possibly get.

A prerequisite of all this, is, of course, the sealing of the road itself. I am aware that the present Government, in conjunction with the South Australian Government, has made approaches to the Commonwealth to seal the remaining section of the Eyre Highway. The Western Australian section—the portion of the Eyre Highway to the border—will be completed by September, 1969. There will remain slightly over 300 miles to Ceduna on the South Australian section of the border.

The State Government could well bear in mind, with its deliberations to the Federal Treasurer, that last year the petrol tax throughout Australia yielded \$230,000,000. Of this amount, \$160,000,000 was allocated to the States and an additional \$10,000,000, or thereabouts, was paid in special grants, such as for beef roads, for example, and \$60,000,000 to \$70,000,000 found its way into general revenue.

It would seem that the obvious source of finance is this petrol tax. Although there is no legal claim to it, there is certainly a moral justification for using some of the petrol tax funds for this purpose. In my opinion this is a venture that concerns the State. I am interested parochially, as I consider it would be to the advantage of the Warren electorate to have tourists directed from Albany through the Warren district, on to Busselton and Perth, and then to make the tour in the reverse order. I am interested too, in the value that would accrue to Western Australia. I can envisage quite a future for tourism that should not be neglected.

I have briefly dealt with the problems that concern the Warren area, but I certainly have not exhausted them. I am satisfied at this stage if I have made members aware that these problems exist.

There is one further acknowledgement I wish to make before resuming my seat, and that is to the people of Warren itself. I am extremely proud, and humble too, that they have seen fit to elect me as their parliamentary representative. Their confidence is deeply touching and I only hope I am worthy of the trust they have placed in me. Whatever else, I shall certainly do my utmost to justify the faith they have shown in me. Through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. W. A. Manning), I would like to express my thanks to all members for the patience they have shown in hearing me out.