

applied to our State's Legislatures. Reforms have been introduced in other Australian States and are seen to be working in the interests of a more just means of representation. Both major political parties can win under this system provided they get a majority of votes.

The proposal to reduce the number of members in this House to 22 does not mean less representation for electors. If we divide the number of votes cast at the last election by 22, the number of electors per Legislative Councillor would be 30 500. My constituents at present have one member per 35 000 electors so the quality of their representation would immediately improve by almost 17 per cent. I know my constituents would see the significance of this improved situation.

The underlying philosophy of equality before the law is relevant to this argument. Equality in making the law also applies. It will be possible for Western Australians to lay claim to this only when a system of one-vote-one-value is the basis of our electoral processes. Until that time Western Australians will not enjoy the benefits of a society based on equality and the value of its individual members.

It is my hope, Mr President, that this Thirty-first Parliament will be the last to have its membership based on bias, in favour of the privileged, and that future members will reflect this nation's commitment to democratic principles.

Government members: Hear, hear!

**THE HON. MARK NEVILL** (South-East) [9.50 p.m.]: I support the motion. I thank the electors of South-East Province for their support and for making possible the privilege I have to represent them in this Chamber.

Firstly, I shall deal with electoral reform. Australia is a democracy and if Western Australia is to be a true democracy, the electoral reform of this House must be effected without further delay to make democracy a fact and not a mere pretence.

The present gerrymander has persisted in this House for the best part of a century. At the recent State elections the Australian Labor Party polled 51.3 per cent of the formal Legislative Council vote; yet, despite winning the majority vote of the people, the ALP won only seven of the 17 Legislative Council seats.

The present electoral laws of the Legislative Council are not consistent with democracy. They would be illegal in the national Parliament; they would be illegal in every Australian State, with the exception of Queensland. To earn public credibility and to make this House a useful and positive force in guiding the future of our State,

this House—and its members—must have the courage and honesty to reform itself. A permanent, impartial electoral commission should achieve this.

The electoral reforms proposed by the present Government have the support of the majority of Western Australians and they will put behind us the last 90 years of political manipulation.

In the South-East Province, which I represent, 20 per cent of those eligible to vote in the recent State election were not on the roll. The ridiculous enrolment requirements and the refusal to allow co-operation between State and Federal Electoral Departments by the Liberal Government then in office, were a deliberate policy to minimise enrolments; whereas democracy in Government implies that the final authority rests with the people themselves and that the will of the majority shall prevail. This can be achieved only with full enrolment.

The Burke Government's proposal to reduce the number of Legislative Councillors from 34 to 22 will increase the ratio of representation from one member of Parliament to 14 657, to one member of Parliament to 16 883. Under fair distribution, this ratio is still very favourable when compared with Queensland which has a ratio of one to 29 500 people.

Further, the proposal to introduce a State-wide system of proportional representation counters the gross imbalances, such as where 7 000 voters in one area are granted representation equal to 85 000 voters in another area—as occurs in North-East Metropolitan Province.

The Government will move to provide a mechanism for the resolution of deadlock situations between upper and lower Houses of State Parliament. The present situation of "power without accountability", where this House can send the Legislative Assembly back to the people without facing an election itself, should end.

It is most urgent, particularly in these critical times, that the elected Government govern without obstruction and that the Opposition should be effective rather than capricious.

I turn secondly to the alignment of upper and lower House terms. Under the present ridiculous system, an upper House member such as myself who was elected on 19 February of this year, did not become a member until 22 May, some three months later. Simultaneously, members who had been rejected by the electorate still voted on a Bill during the last sitting of this House.

The Government's proposal to align the upper and lower House terms, makes good sense. Under the proposal, upper House members will take

their seats at the same time as Lower House members; that is, at midnight on the night they are elected.

Thirdly, I shall deal with the alignment of upper House electorates. The Esperance area is currently represented by myself as member for South-East Province until 1989. It is represented also by the member for South Province whose term expires in 1986. This causes great confusion. Members elected in 1980 should represent the new boundaries for their provinces and not the old boundaries as at present. Under the current legislation a constitutional amendment would be required to achieve this sensible proposition.

My fourth point relates to sunset legislation which I support strongly also. Under the Government's proposed legislation, departmental boards and committees will lapse after a period unless legislation is introduced and passed specifically to extend their terms, bearing in mind that there are over 400 of them and many had served their purpose long ago.

Fifthly, I turn to my electorate of South-East Province which covers the eastern goldfields and Esperance region of this State.

Healthy, profitable mining and agricultural industries are essential to the economy of my electorate.

Mining is the main industry in the eastern goldfields part of South-East Province. During the last 10 years I have been privileged to work with a very talented and dedicated team with Western Mining Corporation under Roy Woodall, A.O., who is a man of exceptional leadership and ability. He is now director of exploration with that company.

Those 10 years were spent in mineral exploration throughout the State, working on operating gold and nickel mines in the eastern goldfields. Included in this period was five years' underground experience at Kambalda.

The outlook for the mining industry is good. The gold price is healthy and most, if not all, of the indicators point to upward pressure on gold prices in the medium to long term.

The nickel industry at Kambalda is slowly emerging from the worst price slump since the Depression and is still intact, which is a tremendous reflection of the resilience and skill of the mining industry workforce in the goldfields. They have survived when many mines around the world have closed down or had large production cutbacks.

The efforts and productivity of the workforce in the nickel and goldmining industries have helped keep those industries insulated from closure. The unions have shown commendable restraint during the recession. This restraint should not be taken for granted; management has faced up to its social responsibilities during the recession without resorting to widespread retrenchments.

There are a number of practical ways in which we can provide the framework for the mining industry in this great region to develop and expand employment.

I want now to touch on areas where effort and/or reforms will assist the development of the eastern goldfields region and help improve the economy of this State.

I turn now to freehold mineral rights. Firstly, we should end all existing freehold mineral rights. All minerals should belong to the Crown. In the eastern goldfields some 84 000 hectares of prime exploration ground are held freehold with mineral rights by Hampton Gold Mining Areas and Hampton Trust Ltd. in 19 separate locations. These mineral and timber rights were granted to the Hampton Pastoral Company in 1881.

On the foundation of the colony, the Crown became the owner of all the land and, therefore, also became the owner of all the minerals. When the Crown commenced alienating land in the colony, the base metals were not reserved to the Crown as they should have been. This position continued until 1 January 1899, after which, by Statute, all minerals became reserved to the Crown.

Because of this anachronistic situation, mining companies such as WMC have to pay nickel royalties to Hampton Areas when I believe they should be paid to the Crown; that is, to all Australians.

All other Australian States have abolished private mineral rights and resumed those minerals to the Crown. Our Mining Act 1978-82, did not redress the situation in this State. These vast areas, immensely attractive to other mining companies and prospectors, are close to existing milling facilities.

Three years ago I recall Hampton Areas attempted to negotiate the sale of its rights to nickel royalties to a major insurance company. The sale fell through. However, I believe it is wrong that rights to mineral royalties can be sold off or transferred from the freehold.

The existence of freehold mineral rights is anachronistic and the legislation should be brought into line with other States, and the practice ended, to open up these areas to other mining companies and prospectors. Australian minerals



should be owned by all Australians. We cannot allow these anachronistic private mineral rights to continue to exist.

The Mining Act 1978-82 in its present form is unsatisfactory. The current inquiry will address itself to the areas of concern and hopefully will find a workable compromise between the various competing interests.

The principal aim of the Mining Act is to ensure ground is explored to discover and evaluate mineral resources. The amendments to the Mining Act must ensure that the ground held under tenement is worked. Strict expenditure conditions only can ensure exploration is undertaken. The genuine prospector with limited capital must be protected also under the Mining Act.

A further matter which should be addressed is the need for uniformity within the mining Acts of different States. Much of the exploration in this State is undertaken by groups and companies which work throughout Australia. Much of the confusion resulting from the difference between State Acts could be eliminated by consultation between the various State Ministers.

Another practical way we can assist and stimulate the mining industry in the eastern goldfields is to upgrade the exploration data base. The eastern goldfields is one of the most intensively explored mineral provinces in Australia. Much high quality geological and geophysical information has been generated in recent years, and I believe it is an opportune time to compile and publish the existing data in a more detailed form to avoid costly duplication of exploration. A good published data base will encourage more effective exploration.

The State Government should consider extending the national topographic mapping to the eastern goldfields at a 1:100 000 scale. We should consider providing compilations of reprocessed aeromagnetic data at 1:50 000 scale and commence compilation of more detailed geological maps of the region also at 1:100 000 scale.

If this information is available publicly in a compiled form, it will stimulate exploration and reduce much of the duplication in exploration which is ineffective and wasteful. The Western Australian School of Mines has the expertise and the staff to assist in these programmes, which could be undertaken as a joint venture with the Geological Survey of Western Australia.

The inland regional centre of Kalgoorlie-Boulder is linked to the east, south, and west by rail and sealed roads. The remaining link needs to be developed; that is, the building of an all-weather road north from Kalgoorlie to the

Pilbara. This imaginary concept has been long championed by local members of Parliament, business, local government, and the Mayor of Kalgoorlie, Mr Ray Finlayson. An all-weather road link will improve the viability of many mineral deposits *en route* and will strengthen the role of Kalgoorlie-Boulder as a regional centre, and enhance its tourism potential.

I now turn to the other major and contrasting region of South-East Province, the Esperance mallee region, which is dominated by agriculture.

The Australian Labor Party has always been the "light on the hill" for agricultural industries. Most if not all the durable reforms and initiatives in agriculture such as the Snowy Mountains scheme, the Australian Wheat Board, the Australian Wool Corporation, the Lamb Marketing Board, and many others, are initiatives of the Australian Labor Party. I cannot think of one durable rural initiative of the "do nothing" Menzies and Fraser Governments.

The Australian Labor Party is the only party committed to orderly marketing. Farmers, by a big majority, support orderly marketing, yet both the Liberal Party and Country Party policies on orderly marketing, and farmer thinking on this issue, are characterised by a philosophical chasm. Although our political opponents oppose orderly marketing, they have never disbanded these great ALP initiatives, nor would the farmers allow them to be disbanded.

Within Western Australia the Esperance mallee area has the highest level of farm debt. We must remember that WA has the highest average on-farm debt of any State in Australia; a debt which now totals a staggering \$1.12 billion and has grown at an annual rate of 16.4 per cent during the last six years. It can be seen from those figures that the Esperance mallee farmers in my electorate are one of the groups worst hit.

It is essential that farmland values reflect the potential rate of return from production. The high land values of a few years ago are responsible for part of the current debt. Three and in some cases four poor or non-existent seasons have also caused the debt situation to deteriorate, particularly in the mallee area.

Part of the answer, I believe, to the rural debt problem is the need for access to an adequate supply of long-term bank finance over 15 to 20 years at market rates of interest. By that I mean the bank rate for loans of less than \$100 000.

Long-term loans would enable farmers to survive the drought cycle. The long-term finance must be made available for both operating finance as well as for development costs. Most farmers

now in trouble are both efficient farmers and good managers who are being crippled by a combination of a succession of poor seasons and high interest rates on relatively short-term loans.

It is essential that these owner-operators are kept in our rural industries, and I believe long-term finance is the only answer. If foreign banks are allowed to operate in Australia, they should have a statutory requirement to provide long-term farm loans to cover equipment and operating expenses.

Rural adjustment scheme funds have been increased by 90 per cent this year, from \$18.4 to \$35 million, by the present Federal Government. These funds are welcome but go only part of the way to alleviating the rural debt problems. I note here that, in contrast, the previous Federal Government cut rural adjustment scheme funds by two-thirds in 1979.

I refer now to absentee owners. High rural land values in recent years have not reflected the ability of the land to service the cost of capital. Much of the buying has been from overseas or metropolitan bases and has resulted in prices being forced to unrealistic levels. Such speculative buying must be discouraged. We need to adopt policies to reduce foreign ownership of farms and discourage absentee owners.

The St. George's Terrace investors provided much needed capital to develop new land in the 1950s and 1960s, but I believe this capital does not in most cases serve a useful purpose where it purchases developed farms and increases the amount of land held by absentee owners. We have to encourage the sale of these properties to capable young farmers, who are being excluded in increasing numbers from the opportunity to establish a family farm.

On the subject of new land releases, I welcome the Government's review. New land needs thorough appraisal before release. The land releases are being made in increasingly marginal areas and we need to be very circumspect if we are not to pay the price later. If they fail we will have a repetition of the bankruptcies and walk-offs which occurred during the depression in the Grass Patch-Salmon Gums areas. Do not be fooled, this could happen again!

The releases should be made after a thorough study and when viability is established. Both the present detail of soil mapping and botanical studies are inadequate and zoological studies are non-existent. Our current studies are rudimentary compared with the Victorian Government studies of its mallee areas, studies which were completed 10 years ago. Their reports on similar types of

country provide a factual basis on which decisions can be made on the alternative use of public lands.

I want to make the point that Crown land is public land and there is no such thing as vacant or unused Crown land. It already has a use.

In Western Australia native vegetation is a declining resource of increasing value. Our decisions on alternative use of Crown land should be based on factual evidence from research.

Now that the System 2 environmental study, which covers the goldfields area, is almost complete, I will be strongly urging the Government to commence the System 3 study next. The System 3 area covers a 60 kilometre-wide strip along the south coast. With the System 3 study finalised we would have a complete regional study to guide our land use decisions.

The conditions under which new land blocks are allocated once Crown land has been recommended for agricultural use, need to be reviewed. There have been many undesirable consequences of the current conditions which urgently need to be eliminated.

The Government must seriously focus on the problems of rehabilitating some of the land already cleared as a significant portion of our productive farmlands have become sterilised and unproductive due to soil erosion and degradation, soil acidity, and soil salinity.

Known soil conservation techniques and soil conservation programmes will greatly increase the productivity of existing farmland. Accepted dry land farming methods at the end of this decade will be greatly different from what they are today.

In conclusion I wish to pay tribute to my predecessor, the Hon. Ron Leeson, MLC, a man with a great feel for and knowledge of the goldfields who loyally represented South-East Province and the Australian Labor Party in both Government and Opposition for 12 years.

I thank the staff of Parliament House for their kind help, and finally I wish to thank again the electors of South-East Province for the confidence they have shown in me and the Australian Labor Party.

[Applause].

Debate adjourned, on motion by the Hon. R. J. L. Williams.

#### ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE: SPECIAL

THE HON. D. K. DANS (South Metropolitan—Leader of the House) [10.11 p.m.]: I move—