

**BEELIAR WETLANDS — HON SIMON O'BRIEN'S COMMENTS**

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**HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House)** [5.41 pm]: I contemplated whether I would say anything about this, but I am going to because I have waited for 24 hours to see whether something would happen, but it did not. I will take a few minutes. Yesterday, during members' statements, Hon Simon O'Brien made some comments about Beeliar wetlands. He got reasonably agitated and wound up towards the end of his comments. He made the point—it was not an illegitimate point to make—that part of his thinking about why he takes a different point of view from the government on Roe 8 is his concern about reducing road trauma on our roads. Gesticulating towards the government, he made some comments about whether members knew what road trauma means. *Hansard* has recorded my interjection, which was —

More than you can ever imagine, thanks. Much more than you can ever imagine, my friend.

He went on to say —

It means that people are going to die; that is what it means. It means that people are going to die, and if you understand what that means, my friend, then you should not be allowing your government to visit this sort of cavalier policy on our electorate.

The uncorrected *Hansard* records me interjecting —

Think about what you are saying.

It records him going on to say —

I have thought long and hard about what I am saying, and I will be saying it again.

I wanted to make a few comments about that. I do not think that Hon Simon O'Brien understood what I was trying to get across to him. I do not think he did this deliberately, but he is certainly aware that road trauma in particular—I was not going to do this because I did not want to get upset—had a devastating effect on my family. To suggest that I or the government would make a policy decision—what a work is water; I have been here before. To suggest that somehow our policy was based on ignoring the serious impact that road trauma has on families is, I think, irresponsible and it was certainly insensitive.

As I said at the outset, I do not think that Hon Simon O'Brien made the connection between what I was saying, but I want to counsel members. Road trauma policy is terribly important. Hon Simon O'Brien is right to describe it as a very serious policy, and it matters. People have different points of view about what is effective and what is not, but when we take the path of trying to attribute personal blame for a difference of opinion on a serious policy matter, we risk ignoring the fact that everyone in here is human, everyone in here has a family and everyone in here brings to this house their own personal circumstances. Many members—probably more than half—have no idea about my family circumstances because they were not around during the years that it was a fairly significant issue for my family. In 1994, my mother was involved in a serious motor vehicle accident. As a result, she had an acquired brain injury, which fundamentally changed her physical and intellectual capacity. She lived for another 19 years. My family dealt with the costs of that accident—psychologically, financially and emotionally. Some members are aware of that but many are not. I do not say this because I am demanding an apology. I do not say this because I think that Hon Simon O'Brien deliberately did what he did. He was very agitated at the time. I do not think he deliberately did it, but I am trying to make the point that we should not forget the humanity of the Legislative Council. Members should go as hard as they want to on the policy issues, but when they seek to attribute personal blame for something as serious as people dying as a result of road trauma, I think that—if members will excuse the expression—they are taking the low road. That is what I think.

*Statement*

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan)** [5.46 pm]: Madam President, if I may, I will address the Leader of the House on a more personal level. Hon Sue Ellery deserves a response from me and so does the house. I do not think there is any desire to dwell on this matter, which will no doubt be at the core of a fairly strenuous battle in due course. I refer to a policy that the government has embarked upon and I understand that there may be a bill in the offing. No, I want to take Hon Sue Ellery's lead and respond at a rather more personal and human level. Firstly, in respect of the debate, I was rather agitated in some of my remarks yesterday. She has been kind enough to excuse some of the offence that she received on that basis. My point about the pros and cons of a road being built was based on a number of measurable indicators. I referred to price and I also referred to questions of road trauma, which indicates the degree of accidents, and, of course, with accidents there go measurable indicators related to injury, including fatal injury. These are things that must be weighed carefully when governments make decisions and when they form their policy. They need to understand that if they are going to turn a blind eye to any of those indicators, it might be at a cost in not only dollar or human terms, but also environmental impacts and so on, all of which have to be weighed. That is a debate for another day. I am well aware that Hon Sue Ellery was

a primary carer for her mother for many years, and that is a difficult role. I understand that very well myself. I was not aware of what caused the late Mrs Ellery's degree of disability, but now I am.

I can reassure my friend opposite that there was nothing in my comments that was meant to relate to any personal circumstances and nothing given with the intention of personally wounding or causing offence. I do not think she would expect that of me. I would hope that no-one in this place would expect that of me. I hope that she is reassured when I do assure her that I most certainly would not advance argument here intended to open such a sore factor in her personal circumstances.

I hope that that is a suitable explanation, because I think an explanation was owing. I do not mind giving any sort of explanation if any member here ever says, "Look, Simon, I feel personally affronted by the way you approached this." The member said that she is not looking for an apology. I feel inclined to give her an apology, whether or not it is looked for.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** You don't need to.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Thank you. The member is very generous. I appreciate that. Let me express my regret. It was not my intention to cause any personal level of affront when engaging in what were some very strong words that I was using in relation to a debate that is very controversial and will be for some time.

I will not advance beyond that to explain why I feel some of the emotion that I feel about this. It also relates to my own experiences with road trauma and victims of road trauma, which is directly related to the issue at hand. I hope that goes at least some way to explaining my intensity of feeling about this. I certainly have no compunction in front of all members in offering my regrets if I caused any personal disquiet to Hon Sue Ellery. I know that in public life she is quite capable, as are most of us, of dealing in robust terms. But certainly, nothing that crosses the line is ever intended by me when robust debate is flung by me across the house. I want all members to know that.