

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 14 June on the following motion moved by Hon Dr Sally Talbot —

That the following address be presented to Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and its dependencies in the commonwealth of Australia —

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign and thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral) [11.20 am]: I have a few more words to say on the Address-in-Reply to the Governor's speech. Last night I was discussing dog fences with the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Alannah MacTiernan, who commented on her discussions with Hon Barnaby Joyce, the federal Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, who suggested that cell fencing was the way to go in dog control. I referred to the proposal for a \$3.5 million spend on a fence in the Murchison region, which would be a large cell, comprising 52 pastoral leases and six Department of Environment Regulation leases. It is quite a big area; however, the proposal has been well thought out based on the terrain. I might add that this proposal is for 370 kilometres of fence, but overall 1 000 kilometres has already been erected. It is like shutting the gate after the horse has bolted, to say the least. It is small stock unit country and the industry will not survive unless dogs are controlled; in fact, they should be aiming for eradication in that cell. In the early stages, the area could have smaller cells that suit individual properties, which would help to mop up those dogs. It will take a number of years.

I also spoke about Rawlinna station out on the Nullarbor, which put in a dog fence in the late 1960s. It is a total perimeter fence with 150-millimetres of lap wire on the bottom, stopping dogs from digging under the fence to gain entry. As I said last night that property is very productive, running 60 000 sheep and 1 760 bales of wool. I imagine on the sheep and wool market today it would be a very profitable operation. Building that fence today is a lot easier in the sense that the rolls of wire netting have the lap wire attached and it drops down as it is rolled out and hinged on the fence. Running that fence today is a lot cheaper than it was back in the 1960s, in the sense of the work that it entails.

The proposal in the Mt Magnet–Murchison area is that local labour will put up the fence and it will be administered by local government. I believe that provides some skin in the game for pastoralists, who are helping to build that fence and giving their time. We must remember that pastoral leases are still part of the state; they are only a lease and therefore one could say that the people running them are very much guardians of the rangelands with an important role to play. In the past there has been apprehension about people smuggling snakes and lizards into Germany, which is worth a fair bit of money. They have been caught by the pastoralists on those leases. The Kalgoorlie region is in the same boat with massive dog problems. Sheep production in that small stock unit country has been done away with. It is important for the state that it is brought back to some form of productivity, providing a return to government. Even if these properties were making a loss, the product they produce is mainly export wool and meat, which is important income for WA's coffers.

It was brought to my attention that in the past properties in the rangelands were based on wool production. There is meat sheep as well today but, in wool production, at about five or six years' old, ewes were sent into the agriculture area where they were on softer feed and were able to produce another lamb or two, and then they went on to the abattoir as manufacturing mutton. That stage is now missing, and it was a very profitable stage for agriculture in Western Australia.

I touched on royalties for regions last night and I gave the Shire of Meekatharra as an example that I believe has made good use of this funding. The shire put these funds into sealing a road from Meekatharra to Gascoyne Junction, which is already sealed from there on to Carnarvon. The shire thought that was the most productive thing it could do with the funds, and I think something like 37 kilometres of road has been sealed. That was done by local labour, local plant and the local shire. It provides jobs in that region, which are fairly sparse and, of course, families, school et cetera will follow.

I also want to talk about cattle numbers across the north. In answer to a question I asked a couple of weeks ago, I was told there are some 2.2 million cattle in Western Australia. We need to continue to build that herd, and we can use other resources today such as pivot irrigation to get better quality beef et cetera. We want sustainable markets such as Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand, and the opportunity to export to Egypt. Those markets are our

oyster. We must keep up the supply. It is no good finding new markets if we cannot meet supply. We need the Northern Territory and northern Queensland as our supply base to keep that trade going.

Recently between Broome and Derby an abattoir was built with much enthusiasm from Jack Burton, who is a long-time pastoralist in the rangelands, and in the Murchison before that with small stock units. His dream of having an abattoir in the north again has come to fruition. It is on about 120-kilometres a day at present and he wants to increase that up to 200 a day. The cattle that go through this abattoir are mainly termed manufacturing meat, although it is not quite that broad; it is hamburger meat et cetera and I believe it is sent up to companies in Singapore. That facility is built to eventually increase to a kill of some 300 head.

There are also other opportunities. Recently at Lake Gregory there has been an oversupply of wild horses. Up until now that is a product that has been destroyed by helicopter muster and firearms and just left there. That control is necessary, but this abattoir will also take horses in future. Once again, that will be an export dollar coming back into the state.

Another thing that always concerns me is that with this increase in production we need to make sure that we have an increase in our infrastructure to meet that demand. Broome badly needs an extension of the port so that it is easier for trucks to turn around and it can accommodate container vessels. I pick on Broome as being a port that is fairly central in that sense. If we look at all the other ports, they are pretty much taken up with iron ore or oil and gas. This port could become a multiuser port. If anyone is concerned about the Thunderbird mineral sands project, I direct them to an excellent Department of Mines and Petroleum article, if any members wish to read it to find out exactly what it will entail and whether it will put pressure on these ports.

I look forward to the state of Western Australia prospering with the diversification of mining, tourism and agriculture, and the roles they can play in the economy of the future.

HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural) [11.31 am]: Thank you, Mr Acting President (Hon Dr Steve Thomas) for the opportunity to speak to the Address-in-Reply to the Governor's speech given in this place earlier this year. In doing so, I congratulate you on your election to this chamber and on your elevation to the lofty office of Acting President.

As a member who joined this place late in the life of the thirty-eighth Parliament, I benefited from the counsel of Hon Barry House. I am sure that new members in this Parliament will do likewise with the recently elected Madam President, Hon Kate Doust. I would like to welcome her appointment and let her know that I backed her all the way, even though some of her colleagues may not have always been supportive of her elevation to the office of President of this house! I truly believe that she will do a sterling job as President of the Legislative Council. I also welcome the comments she made shortly after her election about taking actions to modernise Parliament; particularly, the introduction of technology will be a very good thing for this place and its members.

I must offer an apology to the house for being away on urgent parliamentary business for much of the last sitting week before the membership of the house changed in late May. As a result, I was unable to observe many of the valedictory speeches presented in this place at that time. Since then I have had the opportunity, with the assistance of *Hansard*, to review them, and I would like to offer my respects to those former members of this place who are now forging paths and lives outside these four walls; I am sure they will be much more normal than those within these four walls!

I thank the Governor for her address to this place on 11 May. In doing so, I would also like to congratulate the Australian Labor Party for its success in the last election. Although we have changed seats and are sitting on different sides of the house and our focus has changed, there is no time for any rest. As members of the crossbenches, we have an important role in this house in holding the government to account.

I came to this place as a newly elected member in April 2013. I was then 31 and at that time the youngest MP serving in either house of the Parliament. I remember saying in my first speech that for a Parliament to be truly representative, it needs to be much more reflective of those who live outside this place—those people who often do not have significant influence on our parliamentary democracy and who rely upon us to represent them. I said we needed people from all walks of life with wideranging experience, culture and skills.

This election has delivered a much-needed injection of life into this place. Rather than a demographic that was trending towards my grandparents, we now have a bunch of new members, a number of them younger than me! I am more than happy to pass on that baton and to say to those members: never believe for one minute that you are worth less than any other member in this place, with the obvious exception of Madam President! You will face ageism, and you will face those who tell you that you are too young and inexperienced to know and that you should follow their wisdom. I was even called a twerp during a parliamentary debate by a thankfully former member of this place, and that was not even deemed unparliamentary! That member went on to say that when she was a young person she would speak out inappropriately at times without the benefit of knowledge, wisdom and life experience, and that her mother would call her a twerp; therefore, the expression was fit to characterise me! I am sure some of you still agree with her!

Hon Dr Sally Talbot: Was it somebody on your side?

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: She may have been!

I say to that, never back away from your beliefs and, above all, remember that you are equal in this place, having earned your right to be here just as much as every other member.

Good luck accustoming yourself to the standing orders; you will soon learn that there are as many unwritten rules, if not more, as there are written ones. I am still trying to work that out after four years here, and that is why I have taken the opportunity to become a Deputy Chair of Committees and Acting President—a position that I have wholly failed this week, as a result of having to be away on urgent parliamentary business due to some sickness in my family.

Welcome to the Legislative Council, and I look forward to working with all members, but particularly the new members, over the life of this fortieth Parliament.

I would like to reflect now on my electorate for a short time. This is the third occasion that I have been elected a member of this place and I wish to place on record my thanks to the good people of the Agricultural Region. At this election, the voters of the Agricultural Region overwhelmingly supported the National Party over any other party. The Nationals recorded 27 060 votes—almost 6 000 more than the Labor Party, 10 614 more than the Liberal Party and 16 777 more than Pauline Hanson's One Nation. In comparison to 2013, the Nationals vote increased by 1 771 votes in an election in which the government parties saw significant swings against them in most seats.

I would like to recognise my fellow Ag Region running mates. Obviously one of them, Hon Colin de Grussa, MLC, is seated behind me. I would also like to recognise those of my running mates who were unfortunately unsuccessful: Leigh Ballard, Steve Blyth, Fred Block and David Kennedy. They were a solid team of hard workers, committed to the cause, and I want to personally recognise their efforts and the sacrifices they made throughout the election campaign.

I would like to also pay tribute to my colleagues in the other place. We do not like to thank them too much because their heads are already big enough and they already think that they are better than us! But I want to particularly acknowledge Peter Rundle, who successfully contested the seat of Roe following the retirement of the very popular local MP, Tuck Waldron. Not only was there a retirement in that seat, but also a merger of the seats of Wagin and Eyre to form the new seat of Roe, of which I am sure members are aware. Peter faced a strong challenger in Dr Graham Jacobs, the then member for Eyre, whose seat was abolished after the 2015 redistribution of electoral boundaries. I managed to spend some time with Peter during the campaign, despite that seat being the most distant from my home in Gingin. Pete was a committed and determined campaigner who lost neither focus nor his nerve. As the election approached, all sorts of things happened, as they do during election campaigns. We saw opponents handing out how-to-vote cards for other parties. The National Party was accused of preferencing the Greens and of collusion with a grand mufti concerning the Pauline Hanson's One Nation–Liberal preference deal. In my mind that had a negative impact on both parties involved. Late in the campaign, at five minutes to midnight, there was the revelation that the Liberal Party intended to make significant cuts to royalties for regions; a matter that I will talk about a little later in my address here today.

I would like to acknowledge the retirement of “Tuck” Waldron, who will be the last member for Wagin. Tuck was a good local member, who worked very hard for his patch and I want to share a few little anecdotes of my time with Tuck from before and after I was elected to this place. One of the great skills that Tuck taught me was how to use a fax machine. I think it is fair to say that Tuck was one of our technologically challenged members. Even when he was a minister, he maintained a paper diary, which he took into his office once a week to erase and update his entries. He liked to do things the old-fashioned way. Late one night, I needed to send a fax and, for some reason—I cannot remember the exact reason—I could not get the blooming thing to work. Tuck waltzed in and showed me how to do it. He never forgot it and would often remind me that, although he had never opened a computer in his life, he taught Marty Aldridge how to use a fax machine!

We often spent a lot of time on the road together, especially during field day season. It was hard not to see the deep admiration and respect in which he was held by his electorate. We could almost reach the conclusion that he knew each and every one of his voters by not only their first name but also their middle name, so strong was the bond. But after observing Tuck at the Newdegate field days, it was not long before I saw a pattern emerging. People would approach the stand and his opening words would be, “G'day, me girl”, or “G'day, me boy.” After he had spent about 45 minutes in quite a deep conversation with a fellow, I asked Tuck who it was, and he said, “Stuffed if I know!” I think from that point I realised that a lot more people knew Tuck than he knew, but he certainly had a way with people, and that made him a very popular member. I do not have the numbers with me but I think when he was first elected, his primary vote was in the 30s and at his last election it was somewhere in the 70s. That is a testament to the work he did for and in his electorate. Probably my favourite Tuck story was when, as candidates, we were on the campaign trail doorknocking—in which he was a big believer. We went to

every house in every town. We did not get a lot of downtime; we generally ate as we travelled between towns. I remember stopping at a roadhouse where Tuck had ordered a burger with the lot. We hopped back into the car and out came the maroon bathroom towel. He kept it in the door of his car and it would emerge. He would wrap himself in it, a bit like you would wear a big napkin, and proceed to consume the burger with the lot as he drove on his way to the next town. God help us if he were ever our spokesperson for road safety or something like that. We would arrive at the destination and off would come the bath towel; it would be flicked outside and all its contents would be removed. He was really instructive in how to use the “Tuck towel”, as we called it, but I have not seen anyone else quite pick up that tip yet. Anyway, he never got any of that burger with the lot on his shirt! I would like to wish Tuck and Noelene all the best in their retirement, and safe travels in their caravan. Tuck has joined Facebook—I think it is more Noelene than Tuck—so we are getting some regular updates and from what I saw recently, I think they are heading to Lake Eyre.

To my good friend Mia Davies, the member for Central Wheatbelt, I would like to congratulate her again on her re-election. Achieving a 72 per cent two-party preferred vote does not happen by chance; it happens by sheer hard work and Mia constantly puts in the hard yards. To Shane Love, the member for Moore, and my local member, it has been a pleasure working with you over the last four years. Your hard work and determination is also reflected in the strong vote in your seat. To Paul Brown, a former member of this place and colleague of ours in the Parliamentary National Party, you gave it your all, despite the odds being stacked against you. You never gave up and I have never seen anyone work as hard or as tenaciously as you did. I wish you and your family well for the future and look forward to your ongoing counsel and friendship when I am in the midwest part of my electorate.

I would now like to focus on some of the issues that arose during the campaign. There are probably none bigger than how each party planned to deliver royalties for regions. People would commonly raise it with us as we were doorknocking or traipsing around. We were often accused of talking about it too much but the reality is that not until we meet with communities and knock on people’s doors do we realise how important people view this program, which has been delivering so much for the last eight and a half years. On 2 March 2017, the then Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Premier of Western Australia submitted the Liberal Party’s election commitment costings to Treasury. On 8 March 2017, the under Treasurer responded and I quote —

Royalties for Regions (RfR) Realignment

The commitment to fund from the RfR program \$350 million in 2018–19 and \$450 million in 2019–20 in rural service provision currently funded from the Consolidated Account has been assumed to be fully absorbed within the existing RfR program, thereby delivering a full \$800 million net operating balance and net debt benefit over these two years.

When the costings came out, I could hardly believe what I was reading. We had spent quite a number of years telling voters to be careful of how other parties committed to royalties for regions. Everyone says that they are committed to royalties for regions but they will do it better. That was the catchcry of the election, but this was something I did not think I would see in such a short time frame after the program’s implementation some eight and half years ago. I immediately called one of our quite senior and experienced chiefs of staff to one of our ministers at the time and relayed to him what I thought I had read and understood from Treasury’s document. His response was, “It couldn’t be true; it must mean something else; we’ll have to have a look at it and find out about it.” But from what I had read, it was pretty clear-cut. There would be an \$800 million reduction over two years, which would have commenced from 1 July this year, to align with the Liberal Party policy to fund ordinary government services, including water, buses and remote area communities, from royalties for regions. Despite this release coming three days prior to the election, I think it gave us the boost we needed as we headed into that Saturday poll. Everyone was getting tired; they were ready for a rest and wanted to see their family. That commitment certainly reinvigorated me to go hard for the last few days up to the finish line. Not long after the release, we saw a lot of commentary; the media ran pretty hard on it. We saw a lot of our opposition candidates singing from the same hymn sheet that, “It wasn’t a cut; it was actually a boost; we’re directing it more to local governments. Local governments will be the beneficiary of this decision.” Then we saw it emanating on social media. At this point, I could not help but engage with the Liberal candidates in Roe, Central Wheatbelt and Moore, who, in my view, had been absolutely convinced by the talking points they had been provided. I put one simple question to them: how do you achieve an \$800 million benefit to the operating balance and net debt over two years by spending more money, not less? They did not answer that question. After the election I felt compelled to ensure that I was not incorrect on this point. For the second time in my life I issued a freedom of information request to Treasury. This confirmed for me what I already knew: the 61-page document contained an email dated 8 March, the day on which the Under Treasurer released his response to the Liberal Party’s electoral costings. I quote from that email —

In order to clarify the underlying assumptions of the Liberal Party's policy on costing and funding of election commitments for the 2017 State Election submitted to WA Treasury, I wish to state the following:

The Liberal Party's policy is that it will allocate \$350million in 2018–19 and \$450million in 2019–20 from the Royalties for Regions fund to the Consolidated Account for the purpose of paying operating costs for services in the regions currently paid by the consolidated account.

This election commitment overrides the decision by the previous Government to allocate part of the unallocated funds in those years contained within Royalties for Regions fund to capital projects. It is the intention of an incoming Liberal Government to allocate the full \$350million in 2018/19 and the full \$450million in 2019/20 to recurrent programs.

Please call to discuss.

I cannot tell who sent that email in response to Treasury's question because that information has been removed as part of the release of those FOI documents. I seek leave to table those documents, being the correspondence from the then Leader of the State Parliamentary Liberal Party to Treasury and Treasury's response dated 8 March 2017.

Leave granted. [See paper 277.]

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: I want to move on now to the Labor Party, which also had some questionable tactics during the election campaign. I am most disappointed that my friend and colleague Hon Darren West is away on urgent parliamentary business, because we engaged in some interjections during his Address-in-Reply and he challenged me to have a look at some of the statistics from the electoral campaign. I came fully prepared to engage with Hon Darren West, but we will leave that for another day perhaps!

In the seat of Moore, where I probably spent most of my time during the election campaign, things turned particularly nasty at times and we had a Labor Party candidate who seemed to have significant influence over some of the local community Facebook noticeboards. She would block political rivals and would use these so-called community noticeboards to espouse her messages while blocking others from participating or even viewing the noticeboards. That is a rather questionable tactic and one that I still think the community is not fully aware of. There may be some reason that there are so many community noticeboards in this particular community; it may be because of the type of censorship that was applied by this particular person through this campaign and before this campaign. There were a number of candidate forums this time around and this particular candidate, the Labor candidate, would say or do anything with almost next to no scrutiny applied to her. She went to a forum and said that her position was to have a statewide ban on fracking and that there should be drug testing of welfare recipients—two policies that are not in line with those of her party. Despite this, she failed to even convince voters in her local community of the merits of voting Labor, with the Nationals winning the booth, I think, for probably the first time in living memory.

On polling day it was also interesting to observe the Labor volunteers doing a very good job of distributing the signage of the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia. It will be interesting to see the election returns when they finally come out to see what is disclosed about the chamber's interactions with the Labor Party and particularly the donation of goods such as corflute signage and other materials. At one of the booths I was setting up early in the morning, it was interesting to see an exchange between the Labor candidate and her volunteers. When the CME mining tax signs were pulled out of the candidate's car, the volunteers responded by saying, "If you put those up, I'm out of here." It is interesting that the volunteers on this booth were clearly supportive of the policy of making sure that the special lease rental applied to BHP and Rio Tinto in Western Australia is modern and reflective of community expectation and that those companies pay their fair share. In this instance I did not see many of these signs put up on polling day and I wonder whether it was because what occurred at this booth was potentially occurring at other booths, with some real true, I guess, Labor-valued people saying that they thought there was some merit in the proposal.

I would like to spend a moment discussing the administration of the election. In my first speech to this place I congratulated the Electoral Commission and the commissioner at that time on the conduct of the 2013 election. As a former state director of a political party, I have been quite involved in the operation of elections at various levels and I think that has spurred my interest in all matters relating to elections. I must recognise that it is no easy feat. The logistical exercise associated with running an election is immense, and we have only to look at some recent history federally when the Australian Electoral Commission had clearly not performed at a level that we expect it to. I think there are always ways we can improve what we do and how we do it. It has become my view though that there is inadequate oversight over the Electoral Commissioner and the Electoral Commission by this place. Similar to the other jurisdictions, I believe there should at least be a select committee, if not a standing committee, established to inquire into electoral matters, including the conduct of elections.

Members who served with me in the last Parliament know that I introduced a private member's bill to amend the Electoral Act that passed this place. During the second reading debate on that bill I believe that there was unanimous suggestion, if not support, for the establishment of such oversight of the Electoral Commission and consideration of electoral matters in Western Australia. I hope that is something we can continue to talk about in the life of this Parliament. In my view, the Electoral Act itself requires a review in many respects. It is quite an old act dating back to the 1900s and it has had a lot of piecemeal reforms made to it over many years. I am not quite sure when the last major review of the Electoral Act was undertaken. I was led to believe that there was an internal review of the Electoral Act when Hon Norman Moore was Minister for Electoral Affairs in Western Australia, but I am not quite sure how extensive that was or what resulted from it. In my view, it has outdated offence provisions, and I do not think this is something the Electoral Commission would disagree with. There is a range of things that I think it struggles with as a result of some of the outdated provisions in the Electoral Act. I am sure that members will be aware of the challenges that arise from the authorisation provisions of the Electoral Act relating to election advertising materials. Almost every day of the election campaign we see breaches of the Electoral Act in relation to the authorisation of election materials and the Electoral Commission does nothing about it. I do not think the commission has even prosecuted anybody for it, so it begs the question of why we even continue with the requirement to authorise election materials. I understand the reasons it would be done, but in my view it has reached the point of the Electoral Commission not even following up complaints about breaches with respect to the authorisation of election materials fully. That was certainly an issue I observed during the election campaign.

One of the other really quite odd offence provisions in the Electoral Act 1907 is that the holding of a committee meeting of a candidate on a licensed premise during an election period is prohibited under the act. I am not sure how many members are aware of that and how many held campaign committees meetings on premises licensed to serve alcohol during the election period, but they would have committed an offence under the Electoral Act as it stands today.

Hon Colin Holt interjected.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Correct.

Hon Peter Collier: I'm not!

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Anyone owning up?

Hon Colin Holt: Not by interjection!

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: When candidates seek advice from the Electoral Commission on a range of these things, firstly, it will not give advice. The Electoral Commission says it is up to candidates to read the act and seek their own legal advice, but at end of the day candidates are on their own. I think some of that might come down to resourcing. I had some conversations with the Electoral Commission during the campaign, and it said to me that it was not able to deal with providing advice to candidates or parties that may or may not find themselves in breach of the Electoral Act. I think that is quite concerning, because it is the body principally responsible for the act. I would think it would be the body that would bring prosecutions for offences under that act. I compared the Australian Electoral Commission, which may well be resourced differently, and found it has much more briefing and explanatory materials available to help guide candidates and parties through their legal requirements with respect to the commonwealth Electoral Act.

Another unusual provision relates to some of the bribery offences. I will not go into great detail about those, but, essentially, a candidate is committing an offence under the act if they give moneys that they would not ordinarily. Let us say a candidate donates to a local cricket club for its Country Week event—it might be \$100; if they have not ordinarily given that cricket club \$100 on a regular basis in the previous years as a member of Parliament and it is a first-time donation, they are committing an offence under the Electoral Act bribery provisions. There are some famous cases, and I think one is referred to as the “sausage sizzle case”, when a candidate, if not an MP, was prosecuted—I think the commonwealth Electoral Act has similar bribery offence provisions—for offering a free sausage sizzle to people who attended an event. That was alleged to be bribery under the commonwealth Electoral Act.

At best the financial disclosure rules are weak, if not dysfunctional. There needs to be a complete overhaul of financial disclosure rules within the Electoral Act in Western Australia. I think one of the other areas in which I took particular interest in the last Parliament was some amendments that were brought in by the government to introduce a technology-assisted voting system—iVote. I brought some amendments to this place—I think one was passed and one was not—on the integrity of the iVote system that was used to assist voters by way of technology at this election. Since the election I have read with interest that some experts—I do not have the article with me—in cybersecurity are raising some question about the security and integrity of the iVote system used. I think that is something we should explore further, and certainly something I took an interest in when we were dealing with the legislation in the last Parliament.

I think there was another real challenge. I would be interested to know the experiences of other members, but this was the first election when we had a three-week early voting period. My view was that that was a complete disaster. I think the Electoral Commission was incapable of delivering three weeks of early voting. That may be a regional perspective because there are some significant logistical challenges in getting materials, particularly enough ballot papers, to polling places. I think the number of people who were going to vote early was underestimated, because, remember, this was the first election in which we could vote without having to justify why we were voting early or come up with some excuse as to why we were voting early. I think we saw high numbers in relation to early voting. I have a whole range of issues that I think need to be explored on early voting. I think three weeks is simply too long in the circumstances we experienced at this election without some significant change. Considering the window between the close of nominations and the opening of the vote, I just do not know how a statewide logistical exercise of printing all those ballot papers, checking them, couriering them and having them there within about a week can be turned around. It showed in the examples I have within my electorate. I am sure the Mining and Pastoral Region could have been even more problematic, simply because the delivery times of getting these materials to the places where they were needed is even more challenging than in the Agricultural Region.

I have had reports on early voting about not having the ballot papers, incorrect ballot papers and providing the wrong ballot papers. We even had occasions when the Electoral Commission published that an early voting centre was open, but when the ballot papers ran out it was closed. I understand provisions are meant to be in place so that ballot papers can be hand-printed. Some public buildings, like libraries, were used as early voting centres. I think they are incompatible with being an early voting centre, particularly in a country context where there are some unusual opening hours or they close for lunch because there is only one librarian and things like that. I think there really does need to be greater consideration of early voting at the next election, whenever that may be.

To conclude on this point, I think the time has come for a quite wide-ranging review into the Electoral Act and Electoral Commission. I think it should be done in two parts. I think the first should be a review of the conduct of the election and the performance of the Electoral Commission. I think that should be standard practice after every election. It surprises me. Although we have some committees in both houses that could have, within their remit, the opportunity to take a closer look at these things, I think we should have a look at what occurs in perhaps New South Wales, federally or in other jurisdictions where they have standing committees with responsibility for electoral matters. I would have thought that the first thing after an election would be to conduct an inquiry of that election, and the performance of the Electoral Commission.

I think that the second part of an inquiry into these matters should review a whole range of other things, including the appropriateness of the legislative framework and options for reform. As the National Party's spokesperson on electoral matters, I would like to pursue that in this place in the coming months, particularly knowing there is some commonality already between the parties—noting the new members and parties in this place—from conversation we had in the last Parliament on electoral affairs.

I would like to thank some of the people who assisted me during the campaign. First, I would like to acknowledge a group of people within my party who played a big role in my re-election and who are why I remain determined to make a difference in this place. The Young Nationals is simply an amazing group of young people. I am sure the same could be said of the youth wings of all our political parties. This group of dynamic, politically motivated young men and women literally traversed this vast state of ours in their green and gold minibus. I can assure members that what is said and done on the green and gold minibus stays on the green and gold minibus! It was not terribly comfortable. But, gee, these young men and women did an amazing job of getting around regional Western Australia in the lead-up to the election campaign. They would often roll into town en masse and give our candidates and campaigns the boost we needed when we were starting to run out of energy, and they never disappointed. They worked very, very hard. I may be biased because at the moment I have the great privilege of being the patron of the Young Nationals in Western Australia—a role I think will transition at our conference in August—but I was overwhelmingly the beneficiary of the Young Nationals as a young person, and I am sure many others in this place could say the same about their youth wings. I absolutely love giving back to our young Nats, because they have given me so much. This afternoon I would like to recognise some of the mainstays who devoted themselves to our campaign. To Jason Turner from Geraldton, thank you for your unwavering support and the many kilometres that you trekked on the doorknocking trail. To Tori Kirk from Wagin, thank you for your efforts, your infectious smile and your wonderful ability to engage with people. Thank you also for the work you have been doing in recent months in my parliamentary electorate office. I wish you all the best in your future endeavours, wherever they may take you. To Siobhan Blake from Denmark, thank you for being our constant. It is hard to believe you are just a school leaver. You have a maturity beyond your years and I think there are some great things ahead for you. To Jess Hayes from Badgingarra, thank you for your contribution as both a member of our staff and as a young National. It has been a pleasure to work alongside you, and your efforts throughout the campaign are valued. To Tori Castledine, Heather York, Sebastian Schiano, Luke Pilkington, James Wishart, Jayde Hope-Blyth and Greg Kerry, who all made significant contributions on local campaigns where they live,

thank you for your efforts. Finally, to the leader of the pack and one of my closest friends, Lachlan Hunter, I value your counsel, commitment, energy and, above all, our enduring friendship. Members, remember the name Lachlan Hunter, as you will likely hear him as a regular caller to Geoff Hutchison's program—not to be confused with John from Collie. More importantly, I hope that one day he will take a seat in this great place. I hope it is not in the other place, as his skills and abilities would be put to waste among the commoners! I would like to recognise the state director, Nathan Quigley; campaign director, Hon Jacqui Boydell; and the members of the campaign committee and state executive. These are jobs that nobody ever puts their hand up for. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to our party.

I want to pay tribute to my staff who have served with me throughout my term. There have been a few! It shocked me a little when I actually went back and reflected on the number of staff I have had.

Hon Stephen Dawson: What do you do to them?

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: I do want to qualify that remark! I was also the secretary of the Parliamentary National Party, which came with additional staff, and there were other roles that I managed as well. Hopefully it is not a reflection on me, Hon Stephen Dawson. To Vanessa Shehan, Amy McAllister, Judi Janes, Andrew Corke, Josh Nyman, Jess Hayes, Tori Kirk, Brendan Storer, Allyson Cantrall, Jason Turner, Cale Hill, Isabelle Gillespie and Lachlan Hunter, thank you very much. It is not easy working for a member of Parliament—I know, because I have done it—and I am sure it is not easy working for me at times. Your contribution is important to the strength of our parliamentary democracy, and more so in a regional context where access to that parliamentary democracy is so much more challenged. To Isabelle Gillespie, who was my research officer in the lead-up to the election, thank you for placing your life on hold and moving to Western Australia at a critical time for me. It was an absolute pleasure working with you and you taught us all a lot. Above all, I hope your time in Western Australia and the friendships you have developed with me and the WA Nationals will endure for a long time.

Now to my current staff. Jo Mobbs, as our time together nears an end as I am finally able to relocate my parliamentary electorate office, thank you for your commitment to me and my family. I am not one that hands out gratitude probably anywhere near as much as I should; however, I am truly grateful for your loyalty and your dedication to me and my office. Last but not least, to my long-term staffer and friend, the ginger ninja, Joseph Lundy; we go back a long way, Joe, and I am so glad that you have stuck with the Nats and politics despite temptations to head in other directions. You have truly gifted talents in politics and policy, and our state will be a better place for people like you continuing to make a contribution. I hope one day you will get the bug to serve as a member of this place, as you will do us all proud—of that I am certain.

Before I conclude my remarks today I want to acknowledge, last but not least, the contribution of my family to the time I have spent in this place, and particularly, I guess, the difficult and often long times away on the road during an election campaign in an electorate that is some 280 000 square kilometres. Firstly, I would like to recognise the passing of my grandfather in November last year. Timothy John Aldridge, or “Big Pop” to his grandchildren, was a big influence on me, and none more so as I embarked on my parliamentary service. I miss him dearly, but know that he is finally at peace after a long illness.

I entered this place on 5 April 2013. I had no children; now I have three—so much for being away from home a lot!

Hon Simon O'Brien: Get a television!

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: I think we need more televisions. Casper, the eldest, is three; Piper is two; and our youngest, Dominic, turns one in July. My children are the most amazing gifts I have ever received and I treasure them every day. I despair that I do not get to spend enough time with them as I try to balance life as a regional MP with that of raising a young family. On that note, I want to recognise my partner of 12 years, Dale Spark. Dale is the best mother one could hope for and continues to amaze me at how well she manages our three children with the time that I spend away from home. The job can be unforgiving, but Dale keeps me grounded and reminds me of that which is important.

Congratulations to all members on their election or re-election to this place, and all the best for the fortieth Parliament. I look forward to serving with you over the next four years.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Hon Ken Baston.