

CLIMATE CHANGE ACTIVISM

Statement

HON DR BRAD PETTITT (South Metropolitan) [5.41 pm]: I want to talk about climate change and activism today. This comes on the back of what I think we can all agree has been a pretty extraordinary couple of months globally. We have seen everything from a record decline in Antarctic sea ice to fires and ocean and land temperatures breaking records. I am not sure about today in Perth; it almost broke 30 degrees. I was thinking it will probably be a hot summer ahead, but also that it may be one of the cooler summers of our future.

We reflect on the fact that climate change is happening much more rapidly than many of us hoped, but, in parallel, we are seeing in this country a rise in crackdowns on climate activists. This is happening across the country and it has not gone unnoticed. In fact, Human Rights Watch has singled out Australia for our anti-protest laws in its *World report 2023*. Although Western Australia's laws have not changed, we are seeing an increasingly heavy-handed approach towards climate activists from the Western Australia Police Force, with, it would be fair to say, some cheerleading from some of the traditional media. This should be of great concern to us.

A lot of this is focused around Woodside. I know the Premier has asked what the issue is about Woodside, but I specifically name Woodside because I think this is worth drawing out. Woodside is a standout company for a couple of reasons. It is a company that, to put it bluntly, is more interested in expansion of fossil fuels than in transitioning to clean energy, and that is a big problem for this state, because, ultimately, we cannot keep doing that. When we have a company that has explicitly said that it is seeking expansions well past 2050 and out to 2070, it is totally incompatible with the climate science.

That is why we are seeing climate activists respond. It is actually quite a rational response to something that, quite clearly, is endangering all our futures. What is not rational is the over-the-top response to climate activists' actions, and I will give a couple of examples. Just last week 19-year-old activist Matilda Lane-Rose was weirdly served with a violence restraining order for their part in protesting outside the home of Woodside CEO Meg O'Neill, in a move that their lawyers say will stop them speaking out about the company—a gag order. That is pretty important, along with the circumstances around keeping women and children safe from perpetrators of domestic violence. No-one can seriously say that anyone was planning to commit violent acts. I understand that there is a rational debate around the appropriateness of going to someone's house, and we could have a fair debate in light of what has occurred. But no-one is seriously saying that anyone was planning anything that would make taking out a violence restraining order an appropriate response. That is my first example.

Hon Martin Pritchard: How do we know how she felt?

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: These were peaceful activists behaving peacefully. When we start pretending in this place and in the media that somehow violence was going to be perpetrated when there was no evidence of that—in fact, we know there was not going to be—we go down a very slippery road in this state.

Hon Dan Caddy: How do you know?

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: I absolutely know.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: I think we all know that.

The PRESIDENT: Order, member! When I call for order, I expect you to stop.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: Sorry, President.

The PRESIDENT: Can we please not have cross-chamber conversations, and you continue to make your contribution.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: I want to give a second example. This one is even more serious. The night before this happened, an unmarked van pulled in front of a car being driven by 21-year-old Disrupt Burrup Hub activist Emil Davey as he drove through City Beach. A man, who turned out to be a plain-clothes police officer, got out of that car and walked towards him, pointing a gun. We do not know his intention; that is unclear. It is under investigation. There is a pattern emerging here that needs to be called out. That is why I am standing up today—because of the fear and intimidation of climate activists in this state, which I think is troubling.

I am very much for peaceful protests. At the heart of what I want to talk about is that we need to support peaceful protests. The best changes made across our society have happened as a result of peaceful protesters. In fact, the Labor movement is very much at the heart of workers' rights and civil rights. The end of slavery and gaining women's suffrage are the result of peaceful protests. These climate protesters are on the right side of history. The idea that we are going to try to intimidate largely peaceful young people into staying quiet is really troubling. Ultimately, we should be supporting these young people. They are brave. I would not do it. I admire them for having the courage.

Because of what is happening to our climate and their future, they are willing to stand up, not be silent and take strong peaceful action, which deserves credit and celebration.

I want to finish by repeating something that was said in federal Parliament this week, which inspired me to get up tonight. The federal Leader of the Australian Greens, Adam Bandt, said —

“We might not all want to climb a coal bridge or sit in the foyer of Woodside, but we need to back the right of people to do so, and celebrate and feel joy from their action,” ...

That is really important. This is a moment in history when we need to back those brave young people and what they are doing in terms of peaceful protests.

Hon Dan Caddy interjected.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: The comment from across the floor was about someone’s private home. There is a fair debate around that, but no-one was intimidated. The only intimidation that is happening is of these protesters. We need to be real about this.

Hon Klara Andric interjected.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: There is a fair bit of debate around that. The only intimidation of people that is happening is largely by the Western Australia Police Force and others of young peaceful activists.

I will give members another example, if we want to extend this debate. A young single woman living alone in a home had six police turn up at her door at dawn and raid it. In what world do we need this kind of response? This is just intimidation; this is not about finding information. This is about trying to intimidate these people into silence. That is what I am pushing back against tonight. We should not be doing that; we should be doing the opposite. We should say to these people, “We support what you’re doing. Thank you for standing up for our future.” In fact, all members need to be doing that too. We should all be standing up for our future, because the silence in this place on climate is, frankly, disturbing. Nobody stands up anymore and says, “We have a climate crisis that needs a proper response.” I stand up in frustration because we do not talk about it enough. It is a weird silence that is disproportionate to what is happening globally and what many of the world’s best political leaders are saying. I hope that this place and this government can do it, too, because it is time that we stepped up and took the lead from some very brave young people.