

CANNABIS — LEGALISATION

Motion

HON SOPHIA MOERMOND (South West) [10.29 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house notes that Western Australia has been waging an illegitimate war on cannabis that has cost the state billions of dollars, wrecked thousands of people's lives and contributed to burgeoning profits in what is a thriving criminal market, and —

- (a) recognises that over the past two years there has been growing acceptance by Australians that cannabis should be legalised;
- (b) calls on the McGowan Labor government to immediately move to legalise cannabis for adult recreational use; and
- (c) urges the Western Australian Minister for Health to work with her colleagues in the Australian Capital Territory to examine the success of the decriminalisation of cannabis in that jurisdiction, as well as examine the Barr Labor government's current plans to decriminalise all illegal drugs, thus treating drug use as a health issue, not a criminal one.

Today, the Legalise Cannabis WA Party brings another motion to the house that well and truly lives up to our party name. Although I know that there are some who would rather Hon Dr Brian Walker and I had not been elected to this place, the fact is that we are here. That in itself should be the first clue for those who dismiss cannabis legalisation as a mainstream issue. People voted for us based purely on the party name; no-one knew who we were, so they were voting for something they specifically wanted.

The time has come to change the rules around cannabis legalisation. To back that up, at the recent federal election 501 421 people gave their first preference votes to the Legalise Cannabis Party—yes, over half a million people. Although we would have liked that result to have been converted into a Senate seat, it was not to be, but the message has certainly been sent and heard. Poll after poll shows that the general public, in ever-increasing percentages, believe that the time has come for cannabis to become legal for adult recreational use in this country. That is not just coming from so-called stoners; it is coming from many people who do not even smoke cannabis, but who recognise that it is a ludicrous situation for cannabis to be an illegal drug when anyone can simply walk into a Dan Murphy's and legally buy a liquid drug called alcohol that is much more damaging. These polls show that more than one-third of Australians have tried cannabis, and, of those, just under half are semi to regular users.

It is not only voters sending that message; it is now Parliaments, too. In the Australian Capital Territory, the Barr Labor government has decriminalised small amounts of cannabis. In Canberra, a person can have 50 grams of dried cannabis and they can also grow two plants. Of course, this is not only available to those who wish to consume cannabis at home recreationally; it also helps those who use cannabis as a medicine—currently, a very expensive medicine. I receive quite a few emails from people who have treated their cancer symptoms with cannabis oil, concurrently with other treatments. I also get emails from an incredible number of parents who have children with epilepsy. They are finding it difficult to maintain their children's medication, based on cost, and that is a real shame.

Since the ACT enacted its new laws, guess what? The sky has not fallen in. There has not been an increase in drug use at all. Police are not having to deal with arrests for small amounts of cannabis; it has freed up police to focus on other things, while at the same time it has helped unclog the court system. In addition, Canberra is a university town, so many young people now no longer have to deal with convictions for such a minor offence that will follow them around for years.

In Victoria, the upper house Reason Party leader, Fiona Patten, introduced a bill to legalise drug use. This came after the powerful Legislative Council's Legal and Social Issues Committee, which Ms Patten chaired, produced a report on cannabis. After extensive hearings, it concluded that cannabis should be legalised. That report is now in the hands of the Andrews Labor government for consideration.

In New South Wales and South Australia, the Greens have introduced bills to legalise cannabis. Politically speaking, more and more people are picking up the cause of cannabis legalisation. Queensland is moving to change its driving laws so that drivers who use medicinal cannabis can drive with a small amount of tetrahydrocannabinol in their system. The presence of THC does not equate to driving dangerously or being impaired. Many people who use the cannabidiol plus THC combination of medicine take it to help them sleep at night. By the time they wake up in the morning, refreshed, THC may still be detectable but they are not at all impaired.

By the way, if anyone is looking for a great time, the annual Mardi Gras is being held in a few weeks, from 16 to 18 September, which is my birthday weekend, so I am quite excited about that. Many thousands of people, including me, will take part in drug law reform rallies, educational sessions, inspiring presentations and gatherings. Both

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Hon Dr Brian Walker and I will be conducting panels and making speeches around the journey of cannabis legalisation. It is not often we turn on the news and hear of a massive car accident caused by someone who smoked a joint. It seems that alcohol and meth are most likely to be implicated. Research shows why. Just over 20 per cent of serious road accidents are caused when alcohol is a factor. That figure is just over one per cent when cannabis is a factor. In this case, impairment testing would be very useful. In some areas, recent road accident data shows that up to a staggering 28 per cent of road accidents were caused by mobile phone use. I think that Facebook is more of the enemy here than cannabis ever would be.

I want to talk a little about the history of cannabis prohibition in Australia because it is really quite fascinating. Cannabis has been around for several thousand years. It was used medicinally and mentioned in Chinese medicine in 2727 BC. That was about 4 700 years ago. It was common for people in Asia and across the Mediterranean to grow cannabis in their gardens. It was used to make fibre for sails, ropes, cloth, paper and a variety of things, as well as being used to make tea for medicinal purposes. Historians believe that hemp cultivation was the main reason for the British colonisation of Australia. I was really surprised by that. I was equally surprised to learn that it was possible to sell “cigares de joy” over the counter well into the twentieth century in Australia. Australian cannabis prohibition started in the 1920s as part of a Geneva convention that related to dangerous drugs. It was initially designed to control the use of opium and cocaine. Cannabis was included at the request of Egypt. This, together with international pressure from the UK and the US, meant that all the states eventually banned cannabis from 1928 to 1959. Thus, prohibition is quite recent.

There are many myths around cannabis use and the cannabis plant. Scientists have shown that quite a few of those myths are false and often based on misguided morality, with a dash of racism and a range of real-life conspiracy theories, all leading to cannabis being banned. Claims to demonise cannabis included incredibly racist propaganda such as “a Mexican drug that leads men and women to the wildest sexual excesses” and “New drug that maddens victims”. A more recent example is the link to mental health issues. Correlation does not always mean causation, meaning in some cases the propensity for a mental health issue was already present or those people who experience mental health issues are looking for solutions to reduce their suffering. One of the other myths is that cannabis is addictive. People can develop a cannabis reliance disorder. It is not necessarily addictive like opium or heroin and people end up going through major detoxification when they stop taking it. Having said that, anyone who has an unhealthy relationship with any substance should be cared for. It should be seen as a health issue whereby doctors and other healthcare providers can help them.

One of the big myths is that cannabis is a gateway drug. It is really very simple—it is trauma. People who are traumatised will have dysfunctional relationships with not only gambling, alcohol, tobacco and cannabis, but also other substances like methamphetamine and opiates. That cannabis leads to crime is not really quite true, unless it is made illegal and is hard for people to get. Then it becomes a crime. People who use cannabis are unlikely to go out and raid a bottle shop with a gun trying to get money for their next ounce. This is much more related to methamphetamine-style behaviour.

One interesting myth that goes around is that cannabis is harmless. This is something that we need to see in context in relation to people with illnesses and with different constitutions. Not everything out there suits everyone, and that ranges from antidepressants all the way through to peanut butter. Care needs to be taken that cannabis is used appropriately for those people who are in need of mental health care or other health care.

Another myth that comes up is that a person can die from an overdose of cannabis. Nobody ever has. People fall asleep or they might sit on the couch and eat a lot of Twisties. The myth that cannabis kills brain cells is not really conclusive. Alcohol definitely does that, but cannabis does not specifically kill brain cells as such. There is also a stereotype assigned to users. We have the hippie/stoner versus high-functioning members of Parliament—oops—society.

Western Australia should be a leader in legalising cannabis. The benefits would be many. Besides having a more chilled-out population, we could grow an entire new industry, gaining many jobs and reducing our carbon footprint through sustainable industries. We would dramatically decrease the police spending and court costs on pursuing personal cannabis users while simultaneously destroying criminal enterprises that rely on the millions of dollars in easy income from cannabis sales that prop up their methamphetamine trade. There would be a new crop for local farmers and increased tax revenue for government. What is the downside? I am not seeing any, to be honest, and I am one of many Western Australians who either does inhale or has inhaled or does not care whether other people inhale. It is our life; it should be our choice. It is time we kickstarted an informed community discussion about reforming laws around cannabis.

HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral) [10.43 am]: I think it is baffling that we are debating whether cannabis—I was going to say weed; I am not sure whether that is a parliamentary term—should be legalised in the year 2022. It is baffling. Western Australia is on the wrong side of history on this issue. A person can get on a plane,

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get off that plane and suddenly be in a place where cannabis is decriminalised and there is a thriving recreational industry. This has not been happening for just the last few years. There are a number of jurisdictions around the world where weed has been decriminalised and there is a successful and thriving recreational industry.

History will look back and judge WA; it is not a matter of if, but a matter of when. I understand that the Labor caucus voted to decriminalise weed in 2017. That has since been overturned. The Premier is now refusing to budge on the issue. As the honourable member pointed out, the Legalise Cannabis Western Australia Party received three per cent of the vote at the last election. I am sure that some fantastic campaigning happened in the background, but this vote was predominantly based on the name of the party, which indicates that there is a lot of support for this issue in the community.

I lived in Seattle for four years and I can confirm that the sky did not fall in. It has a thriving recreational cannabis industry. As the honourable member pointed out, cannabis is a less harmful alternative to alcohol. After work in Seattle, if the sun is shining, people can go to the park and smoke a joint instead of drinking beers and engaging in antisocial behaviour. The by-product of that behaviour is that a person then eats a packet of Twisties and goes to bed. I used cannabidiol to help with my sleep and found it to be very effective. When I got on a plane and came back to Perth, it felt like I had stepped back into the Dark Ages because it was illegal to use the substance here. CBD is not a psychoactive substance, but we are not allowed to use it in WA, which is mind-boggling.

Yesterday, I discussed this motion with a few members who shared my viewpoint and supported it, whether it was official support or not. One member raised the point that if cannabis were to be decriminalised in WA, we could potentially have eight-year-olds running around using smoking implements. My response to that is that if the government moved to regulate this industry and support it, nothing would destigmatise the industry more or make it less cool than the government supporting it. A lot of evidence shows that where the recreational industry is thriving, usage goes down. The thriving industry in Seattle was a bit of a drawcard. For the first couple of weeks after I flew into Seattle, I saw how people could go to the local marijuana store. It was all quite interesting and new, but certainly that shine and initial appeal wore off quite quickly. A body of evidence over the last decade shows that usage actually decreases in jurisdictions where the recreational industry is supported.

We are trying to attract people back to WA. One way to do that is to get onto the front foot on this topic. WA has an opportunity here. We are certainly behind on a lot of the issues. This is one issue on which we can take a more proactive stance and embrace the industry that is going to come—it is not a case of if but when—and use that as a drawcard to get people back into the state. I support this motion and the comments made by Hon Sophia Moermond.

HON DR BRIAN WALKER (East Metropolitan) [10.48 am]: Of course I am going to support this motion. I am going to speak to the motion. Members might note that we have had very similar motions in the past. I make absolutely no apologies for bringing on this topic again and again, because it matters. Why does it matter? Because it is a matter of life and death. This is not a trivial subject. In my frontline position as a doctor, I see people suffering because we have a difficulty with accepting the concept that cannabis is a safe, healthy and healing herb, which can be misused. By the way, my honourable colleague made the point: is there any evidence for cannabis causing brain cell death? On the contrary, we know that cannabis can actually encourage new brain cell growth and neural connections, suggesting that it is useful for helping people who have had a brain injury through, for example, concussive damage from playing AFL. That really was not what I wanted to say. I just wanted to clear up that particular scientific point.

We are, however, waging a war. All wars are expensive and all wars have casualties. We are waging a war against all drugs, but let us take cannabis in particular. There is collateral damage. I am not talking about buildings being destroyed, like we are seeing in Ukraine just now. It is not buildings but people who are being destroyed. We are seeing children orphaned because of the cannabis war. We are seeing women widowed because of the cannabis war. The police are also suffering because they are fighting a war against a healthy, healing herb that has resulted in their status in society being reduced. They know and we know they are fighting against a healthy, healing herb that is much safer than freely available alcohol. How does that reflect on the police force? It is dealing with trivial stuff, causing major damage, and respect for police is then diminished. We cannot allow this to continue. We depend on our police. We need them to be in the best health. Their morale has to be of a standard. At the moment, if police are fighting against cannabis use, however unwillingly, their own morale is going down. The moral values they represent are being destroyed. Alcohol really is the enemy. We ought to accept that and deal with it. Cannabis is safer than alcohol.

In war there are victors. The victors write the history books, do they not? The victor in this war against cannabis is not society or government; it is the criminals. The criminals are the ones who benefit from the war against cannabis. The continuing war against cannabis benefits criminals but the losers are us, the people. We, the people, are suffering with a war, which we are actually losing by the way.

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Let us look again at the concept of war. Is war ever just? Have we ever seen a just war? It depends on which side you are on—the winning side or the losing side. The losers are always the unjust ones. It is a moral and philosophical question. The winners usually think they fought a justified war. If we look at recent events, say, World War II—which was not that recent—we can see that for the people living in Germany, there are questions about Dresden being obliterated by carpet bombing. That helped end the war by destroying the morale of German society. Yes, it made the war easier to win and lives were saved. I think we can all agree that what happened in Dresden was certainly unjust, but it happened in the course of a war. We can maybe justify such actions if the reason for the war was just. The motion says that this is “an illegitimate war”.

Why was cannabis banned in the first place? The reason is not medical at all; it is social and political. The main reason that this war on drugs came into force was the need to find an alternative to alcohol that could be used to attack, if you like, the Hispanics and blacks in the southern states of America. Later in the Nixon era, when the Vietnam War was ongoing, hippies were smoking cannabis. That led to them being called un-American, anti-war, unpatriotic and evil people. Therefore, the authorities continued to cause damage by fighting against those who supported cannabis. The same thing is also true, by the way, of heroin users. It is a terrible drug, of course, but is that any excuse for invading their privacy, beating them up, killing them or shooting them on the streets?

This war on drugs is a political and social action on the part of governments that did not have the benefit of the people they represent in their eyes, only their own benefit. One could put across the argument that it was a fascist decision of an authoritarian regime that sought to retain control. That is a major claim. I put it to members that oppression and racism are the outcomes of what happened. Are we happy to fight for that war? Why are we still fighting an unjust and illegitimate war? Are we fighting a just war or are we just fighting a war? We are just fighting a war that we are losing. We are losing an illegitimate war that is causing collateral damage and bringing no benefits to the people we came here to represent.

There are, however, brighter lights on the horizon. We have the example of the ACT, which is Labor-led government. I wonder whether McGowan is going to follow that wonderful example. I note the current Liberal attitudes of law and order and the by-election coming up in the North West Central electorate, where the Liberal Party put us behind the parties espousing Nazi doctrines. I am wondering whether there is a pattern. I am not suggesting that the Liberal Party will support such things, but it certainly is not supporting enlightened political views regarding cannabis, but I wish it would, because that would save lives. Labor, on the other hand, may not be running a candidate in the North West Central by-election. We could say the Labor Party is abandoning the regions, although I suspect it is probably not. But we could maybe suggest that it is abandoning the farmers because I spoke to one farmer who reckons he could get \$25 million from growing one hectare of cannabis from the whole spectrum of the hemp plant. That is not a trifling sum. That would benefit farmers. I encourage members on the Labor side to view this as an aid to our hardworking, science-based farmers in areas where they need all the support they can get.

I mentioned that the Labor Party may be abandoning those farmers, which I know it is not, but the Labor Party is not considering the law of unintended consequences by persisting in this unjust, illegitimate war. The unintended consequence is the collateral damage. One of those collateral damages is not supporting our agricultural regions and, as a result, not supporting sensible approaches to managing climate change, the regeneration of our waterways and enhancing Western Australian business, which is being deprived of billions of dollars because of our inability to let go of that desire to pursue an unjust and illegitimate war that is causing collateral damage. It is a war that is damaging the honour of our police force and the safety of society, and it is a war that puts power back into criminal hands. I put it to members that by supporting this motion we will be taking active steps to support Western Australian society and Western Australia’s medical, social and financial health.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [10.56 am]: It gives me great pleasure to give the government’s response to this motion today. I acknowledge the member for bringing it on and I also acknowledge the passion and advocacy from the members of the Legalise Cannabis WA Party on what is a very important issue for them and their supporters. However, there is an element of déjà vu about this. We talked about this in May and in 2017. If the members of the Legalise Cannabis WA Party keep bringing this issue back to the chamber, they will hear the government’s position that they have heard before. The government will not be supporting the motion before us today.

This is not a priority for the McGowan government. The Premier has been very clear about this. A lot of very important things are going on in Western Australia, and for us, as a government, the legalisation of cannabis is not anywhere near the top of the list. We have a health system that is under pressure and our focus is to manage the health system and get people into it. We are also delivering a lot of important infrastructure projects in the regions. We have turned around the state’s economy, we supported the resources sector and we kept Western Australians safe throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. They have been, and will remain, our priorities. The legalisation of cannabis is not one of those priorities. We acknowledge that the Legalise Cannabis WA Party members in this house have been democratically elected as members for the South West Region and the East Metropolitan Region and that

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they have a mandate to bring these types of motions forward, but that does not mean that the government will change its position on this issue.

We have done a few things in this space. The government has supported Hon Dr Brian Walker's idea to have a Select Committee into Cannabis and Hemp. I understand that the committee is doing its work. Also, in 2019, the Select Committee on Alternative Approaches to Reducing Illicit Drug Use released its report. Recommendation 21 of that report was —

A health-based response to the use and possession of drugs makes provision for the cultivation of cannabis for personal use.

This government supports a health-based approach to the treatment of people with drug and alcohol problems. That is a very important distinction to make. It supports a health-based rather than a criminal-based approach, but our government's position has been made clear in response to that report: it does not support the recommendation to make provision for the cultivation of cannabis for personal use. The simple fact is that the evidence of the risks associated with the decriminalisation of cannabis for personal use—outside the use of medicinal cannabis, which this government supports and has enabled—currently outweighs the possible benefits in the view of the government. There is a large body of evidence of significant physical and mental health harms that can be attributed to cannabis. I know that we may disagree on that, but there is a large body of evidence. Regular cannabis use can lead to dependency and can increase the risk of mental health problems, including psychosis. Due to its nature, it can also lead to respiratory problems. The long-term effects from regular cannabis use is associated with anxiety, depression, dependence, paranoia and psychosis in people who have a vulnerability to mental health problems. I am not suggesting that everybody has that vulnerability, but some people do. The use of cannabis is associated with adverse health effects on the developing brains of young adults and enduring mental health risks in the adolescent population. Frequent cannabis use is also associated with changes in the areas of the brain involved in attention, memory, decision-making and motivation. Higher doses of cannabis can cause restlessness, confusion, anxiety, hallucinations, paranoia, panic attacks and detachment from reality. It can be a very harmful drug.

The government remains committed to ensuring access to medicinal cannabis for people with medicinal needs. As part of the government, we are quite proud to have enabled that to happen. I think that medicinal cannabis has an important role. We enabled GPs to prescribe medicinal cannabis to patients. I note that Hon Dr Brian Walker is a GP. That is a product he can now prescribe that was not available under the government before ours. We support that. The government has announced initiatives in that area, including \$2 million for a medicinal cannabis operation in Collie and making it easier for people to access medicinal cannabis from a GP.

While I am on the subject, the member referred to the North West Central by-election. I make the very good point that we have four outstanding members of the government who represent the area of North West Central—Hon Stephen Dawson, Hon Kyle McGinn and Hon Peter Foster, who spends quite a lot of time in that electorate; and, of course, Hon Rosie Sahanna—so our government's representation in the north west is thorough. The North West Central has been a great beneficiary of the McGowan government.

Other jurisdictions that have decriminalised drugs such as cannabis have had mixed experiences. In Portugal, decriminalisation is seen as a success, while in Oregon, just down the road from where Hon Wilson Tucker lived, it is seen to have been a failure. In a Senate committee earlier this year, Australian Federal Police Commissioner Reece Kershaw made the following statements on the Australian Capital Territory's proposed decriminalisation laws. He said —

“It will become a more dangerous society, it wouldn't be as safe as what we are enjoying today—so, for me, it would lead to chaos,” ...

“I don't think there's ever a safe level when it comes to those particular drugs. They are destructive.

“We're always open to different strategies, but so far the evidence is not stacking up that decriminalisation necessarily leads to less crime.”

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt: When did he say that?

Hon DARREN WEST: It was earlier this year to a Senate committee, from the information I have here, member.

I refer to the notion of a war. I think we have a very different definition of war. I am not sure it is the case that the government is embarking on a war against legalising cannabis. I think that might be quite inflammatory language and I do not see that as an appropriate way to describe what I think is a very sensible way of managing cannabis. We are open to the idea of medicinal cannabis and we have legalised that.

Clearly, as in the other times that we have debated this before the house, the government will not be supporting this motion.

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HON DR BRAD PETTITT (South Metropolitan) [11.04 am]: I stand in support of the motion. I would like to thank Hon Sophia Moermond for bringing it forward. Members would not be surprised to know that the Greens have long had a policy of supporting the decriminalisation of medicinal and recreational cannabis use because of some of the benefits that would flow from that. To give members some examples, the South Australian Greens introduced a bill to legalise recreational use in 2021 and, similarly, the Greens in New South Wales introduced a bill to legalise cannabis products produced and distributed under a licensing scheme through a cannabis authority. Hon Darren West made some comments about the Australian Capital Territory—that is perhaps the most interesting example, because there the Labor Party and the Greens share government—which decriminalised small amounts of cannabis for personal use. It is interesting to reflect upon that. That happened in early 2020. An analysis of the impacts has been undertaken and is worth going through.

I asked Hon Darren West to provide the dates on which the negative comments were made because I do not think they reflect the evidence that is well documented and on the public record. I will provide a bit of background. In 2020, the ACT passed a law to allow 50 grams of cannabis per person and a small number of plants to be grown—two plants per person and four per household. What was the result of that? The following year, an analysis was done and it showed some interesting results. Cannabis offences dropped by 90 per cent and, interestingly, there was no uptick in the use of cannabis. People stopped being prosecuted. I note, of course, that people outside the ACT and those under 18 years of age who reside in the ACT still cannot legally possess cannabis. Cannabis became legal for adults in the ACT and the number of simple cannabis offences dropped 90 per cent from 56 to five, which is really interesting. In fact, Detective Acting Superintendent Callum Hughes said there have been “no significant issues” following the implementation of these laws. They have been rolled out quite smoothly.

The other interesting thing, of course, is that there was a lot of fear about increased hospital admissions and other impacts. That did not happen. In fact, there was no increase in the number of hospital visits on the back of this. At the time, Greg Hunt and others were concerned about the health harms and the like on the back of the decision to legalise cannabis. The evidence from the ACT—it has a very sensible policy position—is that there have been no increased hospital admissions, nor the realisation of some of the other concerns. As I said, the rate of cannabis use in the ACT has remained relatively static. As has been highlighted by previous speakers, I think there is broad consensus in the centre and left of politics that this is a sensible policy; it is not a radical policy. We are seeing it happen; indeed, as Hon Wilson Tucker said, it is happening in large parts of North America and we are seeing it roll out across Australia. All the evidence is that it is working quite smoothly and calmly. Although legalising cannabis might not be a priority of this government, there are benefits to rolling it out. As Hon Sophia Moermond’s motion indicates, things have changed in the last few years and there is growing acceptance of cannabis use. We have seen the success of the ACT rollout. It is time that the WA government looks at this issue again. It should recognise the benefits that might flow into the Western Australian economy and that cannabis use should be managed as a health issue, not a criminal one.

HON JAMES HAYWARD (South West) [11.09 am]: I stand today to say that I cannot support the motion before us. I cannot support paragraphs (a) and (b), but I show some support for paragraph (c), which states that we should work with our colleagues in the Australian Capital Territory to examine the success of the decriminalisation of cannabis. I do not think we have anything to fear from looking at how other jurisdictions deal with matters such as this: nothing to fear at all. It is important that we get the latest information and understand what is at the forefront of how these issues are managed in not only Australia, but also around the world. I would also like to acknowledge the work of the Legalise Cannabis WA Party in this space. Yes, there is some *deja vu*, and I am sure we will be hearing much more of it. The Legalise Cannabis WA Party members have been elected with a mandate, with something they believe in, and they have consistently turned up in this place and made a case for what they believe and what they have been elected to do. I congratulate them both for their work in that space. I also note that the government has created a select committee that is looking into cannabis and hemp. Again, that is an acknowledgement of the work and the contribution that this party has been able to bring to the Parliament of Western Australia and the people of Western Australia. I congratulate them on that. I know that they are doing good work in that space and I look forward to seeing the final report from that committee. The work that that committee is doing is important.

The reason that I cannot be supportive of decriminalising cannabis is that I am still of the belief it is a gateway drug to other drugs that cause serious harm within our community. I, and I am sure others in the community, will always be reticent until we are convinced otherwise. Having said that, there is no doubt in my mind, and in the mind of others, that there is a legitimate place for the use of cannabis in our society generally and in Western Australia as well. We need to be striving to see those changes made as urgently as possible. I think about the people who are self-medicating by accessing illicit cannabis, because legal cannabis is still difficult and expensive to get. Those are some of the issues I think the government should turn its mind to, and I understand that there is some work being done in those spaces.

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I note that there was a fellow in front of the Manjimup court in the last week who suffers from terrible back pain. He grows marijuana plants and told the court that it was so he could relieve that pain. I think all of us can understand the difficulty of having severe pain and the need to be able to find an affordable remedy. Unfortunately, people are turning to these illicit drugs because there are no other pathways; all the other pathways or alternatives are too difficult or expensive for them to access. The issue with this fellow is that he had 16 plants in his backyard, and it is a little bit difficult to understand how that could just be used for personal use—albeit, I think the court accepted that it was. He has paid a penalty and now has a criminal record—actually, he does not have a criminal record in this particular instance, but people do get criminal records and are subject to difficulties that they now face.

There are other people who have a prescription for medical cannabis who are taking it and driving to work. but that is illegal and they could fall foul of a saliva test that the WA police give them. The potential danger for them is that every day of the week they take the risk that they will get caught driving with traces of THC in their body if they are stopped—even though they may have a prescription for that medication that significantly helps their wellbeing. I think these are the issues that the government needs to be addressing. I am pleased to say that some of the work of the Select Committee into Cannabis and Hemp will no doubt come to the fore. I think those are the important things. Again, I thank and encourage the cannabis party for bringing this forward. It is important that we continue to debate these things.

HON SOPHIA MOERMOND (South West) [11.13 am] — in reply: I would like to thank Hon James Hayward, Hon Wilson Tucker, Hon Dr Brad Pettitt, Hon Darren West and Hon Dr Brian Walker for their contributions. I believe that Hon Darren West has presented the nicest, “We will not support your motion, ever”, response. I thank him for that.

It is interesting to note that some of the myths around cannabis use were repeated here, and that is a shame. We have scientific data that shows cannabis is not a gateway drug and that cannabis legalisation can actually improve the safeguarding of children and reduce crime. We would be happy to present that at any stage. That is all. I thank the others so much for contributing.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.