

**LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION IN THE ASSEMBLY — PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS**

*Statement*

**HON SANDRA CARR (Agricultural)** [5.41 pm]: Given that Parliament resumed this week on Valentine’s Day, I feel it would be remiss of me not to share a little story about love. Valentine’s Day is a day when lovers traditionally exchange gifts and loving sentiments—at times in cute little notes coyly questioning “Will you be my Valentine?”. On the first sitting day this year, Valentine’s Day, the women of WA were given a delightful gift in the form of yet another reminder that some in the opposition seem to have a very difficult time valuing and accepting the appointment of women to leadership. On Valentine’s Day, in the other place, the newly appointed Leader of the Opposition—the aptly named Hon Shane Love—posed his own little Valentine’s Day question.

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** I don’t think he is honourable.

**Hon SANDRA CARR:** I might have elevated his status there! I am feeling a bit generous today. Maybe I was being ironic.

He waxed poetic, asking “Did the member for Bassendean demand that he be replaced by a female member as a condition of his resignation; and, was this the other reason the only working farmer on the ALP benches was held back from being the next Minister for Agriculture and Food?” Allow me to paraphrase his gentle Valentine’s Day prose. What the Leader of the Opposition was really asking is: did the new minister only get the job because she is a woman? He asked this with the head-scratching, knuckle-dragging subtext of “Are women holding men back?”

Never mind that Minister Jarvis has been an equal partner in a farming business for more than 25 years, and has an extensive and award-winning career in agribusiness. Never mind that she is best qualified to fulfil the role with extensive relevant industry experience. Yet, even that is beside the point, because if experience in the relevant industry is the Leader of the Opposition’s criteria for holding a portfolio, can I remind him that he holds the Shadow portfolios of Transport; Climate Action and other portfolios affecting mining and petroleum?

But like all “Love” stories, this one goes on giving because if we were ever in any doubt that the Leader of the Opposition was indeed questioning whether Minister Jarvis was appointed Minister for Agriculture and Food; Forestry; Small Business—all industries in which she has direct on-the-ground and extensive experience—the Leader of the Opposition confirmed this by dropping a secondary Valentine’s Day love bomb by asking a supplementary question. He said —

It is a simple question to the Premier. Did the member for Bassendean demand that he be replaced by a female member of Parliament, or not?

A “love bomb” is indeed an appropriate term for his line of questioning because his comment certainly bombed, as well it should in 2023. But do not just take my word for it; let us look at the responses, according to my notes, from members of the Western Australia agricultural community in support of Minister Jarvis on social media. A farmer, shire president and Grain Industry Association of Western Australia advocate said —

“This flabbergasts me. So many words buzzing through my head and yet, I’m speechless.”

Another farmer, board director and woman in agriculture said —

“My jaw just dropped to the floor. We’re all right behind you and supporting you.”

A WA regional manager of Nufarm and board member of the Rural, Regional, Remote Women’s Network of Western Australia said —

“RRR Network and I support you. Keep up the amazing work, you are an inspiration ...”

The CEO of the Committee for Perth said —

“Wow!!! Unbelievable in 2023. Keep up the great work ... just reading about your support of Ag Tech and the EvokeAg and others—brilliant for our state and economic diversification.”

A woman in the grain industry stated —

“Arghh so frustrating! It continually amazes me how many men miss the nuance that for hundreds of years, it is highly likely they were only appointed to the roles because they were male, not because they were the best person for the job.”

A planning engineer wrote —

“Such a shame that women working in historically male dominated fields still need to justify their skills, experience and capability or face the dreaded (incorrect) assumption of being a diversity hire.”

Shame indeed! But it was not only the voices of women in agriculture; there were male voices added to the support of Minister Jarvis, too. According to my notes, a CEO of the Apprenticeship and Traineeship Company said —

“Sad that this is even a discussion point in 2023.”

A managing director of a consulting and workforce group said of the member Shane Love —

“I think he may have kicked an ‘own goal’ there.”

A chair of a foundation said —

“I don’t know whether to be angry or just sad ... You —

He says of Minister Jarvis —

have probably the most impressive CV in agribusiness that I’ve seen for a Minister for Agriculture in living memory.”

But I am pleased to report that help is at hand for the lovelorn Leader of the Opposition. The group CEOs for Gender Equity Inc has delivered a very generous Valentine gift of its own by way of an offer to the Leader of the Opposition. The CEOs have publicly said that they are happy to share some insights with the Leader of the Opposition, Shane Love, on the moral, social and business cases for gender equity. I suggest the Leader of the Opposition take them up on that offer, because the arrogance and entitlement lurking beneath his line of questioning is gobsmacking. While he is at it, I suggest that the Leader of the Opposition make a formal apology to our two new ministers for the suggestion that they have been elevated to cabinet only because they are women. If he cannot do that, maybe he should give the people of WA the greatest gift of all and step aside and let the member for Vasse take the helm, because at least she knows what century it is.