



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Chris Tallentire MLA
(Member for Gosnells)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 12 November 2008

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells) [12.28 pm]: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and congratulations on your election to that position.

As I stand here I am filled with a deep sense of the honour that has been given to me to represent the people of Gosnells in this Parliament. I am humbled to be an elected member in a Parliament that draws on the Westminster tradition, with its hundreds of years of crafting and refinement. I am also humbled and filled with a sense of connection and profound respect for the Nyoongah people. I consider them to be the traditional owners of this land. I also recognise the traditional owners of other lands across this state, and I recognise the thousands of years of custodianship they have held over this land.

THE ELECTORATE OF GOSNELLS

The electorate of Gosnells has a strong working class tradition. In my lifetime it has gone from being a semi-rural area to part of Perth's south-eastern suburban corridor. We are now seeing more infill housing as people come to appreciate the area's proximity to central transport infrastructure. Housing in the area is relatively affordable, and of a style that reflects the down-to-earth honesty of the people of my electorate. The area has an excellent selection of schools, strong sporting clubs, places of worship and other community facilities. My political predecessors have been significant contributors to the development of the area's community assets. It is appropriate that at this point I pay tribute to Tom Bateman, Bob Pearce, Yvonne Henderson and Sheila McHale—a fine lineage of Labor members who have represented this area.

Gosnells is fast becoming an example of multicultural Australia, with roughly 70 cultural groupings speaking 80 different languages. One of my tasks is to ensure that our welcome to newcomers and our attitude to our neighbours go beyond the notion of tolerance to a position of enthusiastic enjoyment and respect for the cultural diversity that is Australia. Positive actions are required to help bring a multicultural community together. I would like to commend the City of Gosnells for events like its annual multicultural food fair. Such initiatives are a great way of nurturing the community on its journey towards embracing people from other cultures and religious faiths. I believe that in the Gosnells electorate we are well on the way to ensuring that people from a diversity of backgrounds are all strong contributors to our community.

The natural environment often helps define the character of an area. In the Gosnells electorate views of the Darling Range are ever present, including the scars of two major quarries that act as a

constant reminder of the cost of development. Another natural feature of the electorate is the Canning River. In an area that has been heavily urbanised it provides an extended natural corridor, a place of tranquillity, and a place for people to connect with the ecology of this part of the world. Like much of our natural environment, the Canning River and its riparian zone are suffering from invasion by exotic plant species. The river also has problems with excess nutrient runoff and subsequent water quality loss. Thankfully, there are courageous, hardworking people in the electorate who seek to repair the damage that has been done to the river system. Not only are these people doing fine work for the environment, but also they are valuable contributors to the area's community spirit and social fabric. I would especially like to pay tribute to the work done by the South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

My immediate background is in the non-government environmental sector. I think it is a very positive sign for Western Australian democracy that the Labor Party—a political party that has its origins in the Labor movement—should have supported me. Along with health, education and policing, the environment is a priority issue for Western Australians.

IMMIGRATION

Let me say a little now about the journey that has led me to be a member of this Parliament. In my life I have gone through three major immigration experiences. The first time was with my parents and two brothers in 1969 when I as a five-year-old moved here from the north of England. The second time was in 1986 when as a 22-year-old I moved to France. The third time was in 1994 when I returned to Australia. Each of these migrant experiences was different, but there is no doubt that one of the most challenging aspects of setting up in a new country is countering the sense of isolation that can come as one establishes friendships and networks, and finds work. It is essential for successful immigration that people be fully supported so that they can become citizens who contribute to their new community.

Such was my experience in France in the 1980s when the French state had programs in place to foster my learning of the French language and to facilitate my integration and general wellbeing as a worker. As I started my working life in a new country I was made to feel accepted, welcome and respected for what I could bring to my work and local community. I contrast my experience in France with the previous three years of my life spent in the United Kingdom under a political regime that disputed the value of society, despised helping people to establish themselves and worshipped a cult of profit-driven individuals.

My time overseas was seldom glamorous; it was about hard work and discipline. As an employee of a fast-food outlet in a seedy part of Paris, I well recall measuring my expenses down to the last centime, just as George Orwell recorded doing in his book *Down and Out in Paris and London*. However, I found a society that had advanced dramatically from the world experienced by Orwell in the late 1920s. To me a civilised society is one that supports people who arrive in the country with nothing, not even the language, and then enables them to establish themselves. That was my experience in France.

When I returned to Australia in 1994, I was proud to be returning home to a progressive country. I had plans of dairy farming and creating a cheese factory in partnership with a French company. In preparation for this, I enrolled at Curtin University of Technology's Muresk Institute to study agriculture and business. It was then that I came to understand the environmental damage that had been wrought on this country. I began to rediscover Australia from the wheatbelt and learnt of the extent of land degradation and the need to invest billions of dollars in land care to repair land fast-growing saline. I also learnt of the massive biodiversity loss caused by a denial of the ecological

processes that underlie a healthy, productive landscape. I am sad to say the spread of salinity continues, as does, in some quarters, a denial of the need to work with nature, not against it.

In 1999, equipped with an honours degree from Curtin University, I was recruited as a public servant to the Western Australian Department of Environmental Protection to work on notices of intent to clear native vegetation. I was given an excellent education in biodiversity conservation and was inspired by my hard-working colleagues. Not only did I learn about environmental matters, but I also came to understand the ethos of public service. I then sought to take my environmental knowledge to the non-government sector and became Director of the Conservation Council of Western Australia. The job was as exciting as it was rewarding, and I am thrilled to have contributed to a number of campaigns and policy developments, but there is still much to be done, and I am excited by the prospect of using my background to assist people in this Parliament.

SUSTAINABILITY

I would now like to outline some of my priorities for my time in Parliament. One of my priorities will be to build on the work that has been done to establish sustainability principles at the core of all government decision-making, so that future decisions are made only when economic, social and environmental benefits will be delivered, and that this is done in a way that meets the needs of current and future generations. I would like to acknowledge the contribution that Dr Geoff Gallop made in this area when he was Premier of Western Australia.

The assessment of major projects provides a good example of an area where we should be applying sustainability principles. The community needs to be able to test the claims made by proponents of major projects, who promise so much but often deliver environmental and social losses and questionable economic dividends. The time has come to provide for a sustainability assessment system that provides for quality input through a process that assists private individuals and community groups to raise questions and get answers. Essential to the success of the process is that submissions must be responded to in a transparent and comprehensive manner. Projects should be allowed to proceed only if they are found to be viable after facing the rigors of the assessment process, where environmental, social and economic factors mutually reinforce each other.

There is great wisdom in the Western Australian community, and we should help this come forward and not be reliant on information presented by those with vested interests. Presently, analysis of the economic benefits of projects is largely left to project developers and some arms of government. There is no reason that the claimed jobs, royalties and statewide economic implications of a project should not face the scrutiny of the whole Western Australian community. There is much that can be said about the policy settings for sustainability, but I would like to highlight the need for sustainability indicators to be developed. The present indicators of our state's performance, such as gross state product, give a one-dimensional view. We need to have easily accessible indicators of ecological footprints, inclusive wealth and social wellbeing.

In a broader sustainability context, it strikes me that there are two things about Australia that make our country truly unique, truly exceptional: one is our Indigenous culture; the other is our natural heritage. More than anything else, these are the two elements that should be used to define our national character. They are also the two elements that should be made central to our sustainable future.

Since white settlement, this land has changed dramatically. True, there have been many material benefits, but we must also acknowledge that much damage has been done to the culture of this land's first people and to the ecology and landscape of lands of which they were custodians. Turning complex functioning ecosystems, which have taken hundreds of millions of years to evolve, into endless suburbia or into low-yielding areas of broadacre agriculture or into highly marginal grazing lands are decisions we have made. Had we had the knowledge and the

sustainability principles that we have today, we would have gone about the development of this state very differently. We must learn from the mistakes of the past.

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE GOSNELLS ELECTORATE

The practical application of sustainability principles in the Gosnells electorate has well and truly begun, but ongoing government support is needed. I have already mentioned the unpretentious style of housing in the area. In my time in Parliament, I am looking forward to working on programs that will encourage and assist with the improvement of our housing stock so that houses can be more energy and water efficient and so that maximum use can be made of warming winter sun, while the effects of baking summer sun can be reduced. There is something very wrong with the Western Australian building industry that continues to allow a proliferation of badly designed homes to be built that require the expensive running of heating and cooling systems. Good climate-sensitive design would make for cheaper-to-run, environmentally sound, more comfortable homes.

During the course of my campaign and since being elected, I have talked with parents of school-age children and their teachers and learnt of the challenges involved in bringing up young people today. I am a firm believer that education must be a partnership between parents, teachers and children. This is particularly the case with sustainability education. Our population and consumption levels are growing, making our society more and more complex. With this complexity comes the need for individuals to make more decisions as their range of choice increases. For young people this can mean more decisions about courses of study, sports to play, how recreational time is spent and, most difficult of all, a future career. A major part of education needs to be about equipping people to make decisions so they can decide what is truly best for them.

We live in a world that is driven by the marketing of products so that their sales can make a profit. I believe in providing people with information so they can make informed decisions. I also believe that we must have clever regulation in place to save the confusion that comes when the unscrupulous try to profit from selling such things as unhealthy fast food, cheap unsustainable housing and fuel-guzzling vehicles. I want to contribute to helping the people of Gosnells to be proud individuals who think for themselves, care about their families and communities and know that life's most enriching experiences come from relationships, not from McMansions or home theatres.

ENVIRONMENT

I turn to a more specific environmental outcome that this Parliament can deliver—legislation for biodiversity conservation. Our present Wildlife Conservation Act 1950 is out of date and fails to provide adequate protection for our remaining biodiversity. It was with great disappointment that I read the recently released 2008 global assessment of threatened and endangered species by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. According to the report, Australia is performing especially badly. A total of 788 Australian plants and animals are currently listed as threatened. This includes 44 threatened species of birds, 38 threatened species of reptiles and 48 threatened species of amphibians. The red list includes 349 Australian mammals, of which 57 species are listed as threatened, the ninth highest number globally. This equates to over 22 per cent of Australian mammals under threat, by far the highest figure amongst all the developed nations.

One of the most dramatic changes to any landscape in the world has occurred in Western Australia. The destruction or fragmentation of 18 million hectares of native vegetation for broadacre agriculture has come at a huge environmental cost in terms of salinity, erosion, soil acidification, other forms of land degradation and biodiversity loss. The "State of the Environment Report: Western Australia 2007" records that over 14 000 hectares of land is lost to salinity each year. That is equivalent to 19 football ovals a day. There is also evidence that, along with climate change, this

clearing has contributed to the decline in annual rainfall across the south west and the wheatbelt since the 1970s.

We have seen the wholesale destruction of ecosystems before they were even scientifically described. It is worth reminding ourselves that we are custodians of a natural heritage that is spectacular on a global scale. The Department of Environment and Conservation records that we have over 11 500 known taxa of vascular plants and that this represents about 50 per cent of all known Australian vascular plants. There are parts of our state, such as the Lesueur National Park and the surrounding area, or the Fitzgerald River National Park, where a 10 metre by 10 metre survey quadrat will include more plant species than in a similar survey conducted anywhere else on earth. Western Australia has eight of the 12 national biodiversity hot spots. These are so-called because they have a high number of species that are not found anywhere else in Australia or the world and because they are vulnerable to a range of degrading processes. The 2007 "State of the Environment Report" records that WA currently has 362 threatened plants, 199 threatened animals and 69 threatened ecological communities. To provide statutory protection for plants, animals and ecological communities, we need a biodiversity conservation act that brings into effect a series of regional biodiversity management plans across the whole state.

In addition to legislation, we need to ensure that people are learning to love the real Australia and are not duped into believing that lawns, palm trees and European farming systems are natural or well suited to this part of the world.

During the Gallop and Carpenter governments important changes were made to the Environmental Protection Act 1986 so that we now have environmental harm provisions. One further amendment that I would like to see is to the act's environmental impact assessment process. We need to address the present imbalance that exists between the enormous financial resources of an organisation that presents a project for assessment and the capacity of private individuals and community groups to gather and present their concerns.

HOSPITALITY SECTOR

I turn now to my commitment to the hospitality sector in Western Australia. I am proud to be a member of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union. I enjoyed being a respected and justly paid front office manager in hotels in Paris but was dismayed to find on returning to Australia in 1994 that doing the same work here was underpaid and undervalued. Since I left the hospitality industry, I see that the standards of the industry in Australia have continued to decline. Employers might complain that they cannot find suitable staff, but the truth is that the hospitality industry in Western Australia is suffering because most employers fail to adequately pay and nurture good staff and because the industry has failed to address an attitude that exists in the Australian culture that says it is subservient to provide service to others.

During my time in this Parliament I want to contribute to a dramatic turnaround in the quality of our hospitality sector. To do this, we must respect the industry's workers as true professionals and provide them with pay and conditions that professionals have the right to expect. I am very pleased to support the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union's "Better Jobs Better Hotels" campaign. This is exactly the sort of initiative that will enhance the reputation of the Western Australian hospitality sector.

This is vital work as it underpins the success of our tourism industry. According to a Western Australian Tourism Commission study by Access Economics, the economic contribution of tourism to the Western Australian economy in 2005-06 was \$4.9 billion. Not only can tourism be a fast-growing part of our economy, but also it can, if done properly, be a perfect example of a sustainable industry that protects Indigenous culture and our natural heritage. If done properly, we can be sure to have a tourism sector long after our gas fields have been exhausted and long after the dwindling of our mineral resources.

AN EXPRESSION OF THANKS

I am greatly honoured to be a member of this Parliament because of the opportunity it gives me to be involved in helping shape the future of Western Australia. A number of people have helped me get here. I would like to record my appreciation to all members of my campaign team. To name a few key people, I owe special thanks to Fiona Henderson, Sarah Seymour, Jack de Groot, Pierre Yang, John Sherry and Eve and Ray Omicini.

I also want to record my love for and gratitude to my parents, Peter and Wilda Tallentire, and especially to Irene Tallentire. They have helped make me what I am today.

I also want to thank the Conservation Council of Western Australia for its role in my life. It was my privilege to serve with four presidents—Professor David Harries, Professor Philip Jennings, Dr Sue Graham-Taylor and Dr Harry Cohen. Thank you all for the assistance and guidance that you have given me.

I respect the genuine commitment to this state displayed by all members of this Parliament. Ultimately, I am a progressive-minded person, not a conservative. I believe in having a generosity of spirit, not a blind faith in markets or greed. I believe that as the world gets more complex, we need more and smarter regulation, not less, and I believe that a wealthy country such as Australia should be leading the world with sustainability initiatives, including greenhouse gas emission reductions and renewable energy initiatives. We should not be waiting for everyone else to move first.

The people of the Gosnells electorate have placed their trust in me to be their elected representative. In an area that could be described as Labor heartland, people demand that their member of Parliament be hard working and active in the local community. I understand that expectation and see that the only way to counter the cynicism that exists towards politicians in general and the growing disenfranchisement many express when discussing our democratic process is to dedicate myself to my community. I will dedicate myself to the people of the Gosnells electorate and to the Western Australian and Australian communities of which we are a part.

[Applause.]
