



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Shelley Nicole Payne, MLC
(Member for Agricultural Region)

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Tuesday, 25 May 2021

Reprinted from Hansard

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 13 May on the following motion moved by Hon Pierre Yang —

That the following address be presented to His Excellency the Honourable Kim Beazley, 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 SHELLEY PAYNE (Agricultural) [7.32 pm]: I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, and their elders past, present and emerging.

Thank you, President, and congratulations on your new appointment.

I would also like to congratulate all members here on their win, especially Labor members on our historic election win.

I would like to start by first giving a big thanks to the Western Australian Labor government and, in particular, our Premier, Mark McGowan, for keeping us safe through this coronavirus pandemic. I would also like to thank the Minister for Health, Roger Cook, for all his hard work. I am very thankful to be living in Western Australia now, enjoying our freedom and strong economy. We, as citizens, had to endure a lockdown in our homes but one might say that Premier Mark McGowan and Minister Roger Cook endured a more gruelling lockdown in front of the media nearly every day for a year.

We do not have the privilege of being in this place without some help and support. I would like to give a big thanks to Hon Darren West for all his support and the trust he put in me, and his help to get me here today. Hon Darren West has put in a massive effort across regional Western Australia since his election in 2013, as the lone Labor member for Agricultural Region, an area covering nearly 300 000 square kilometres. If I can quote from his first speech —

The Agricultural Region is rather large ... and I look forward to the enormous challenge ...

His hard work during his first term helped to achieve the election of two Labor members in the Agricultural Region for the first time, with Hon Laurie Graham being elected alongside him in 2017. Four more years of hard work and 2021 saw the lower house seat of Geraldton being won and the first woman to ever hold the seat, with the election of Lara Dalton. It also saw for the first time three Labor members elected in the Agricultural Region, with the election of Hon Darren West, myself and Hon Sandra Carr. As witnessed yesterday, with Hon Darren West being the first member to be sworn into this house, he even managed to get himself elected first in the Agricultural Region. Well done.

I would also like to acknowledge Laurie Graham's effort over the past four years. It is his seat that I have now taken. He put in a huge effort in Geraldton throughout the recent election campaign, helping to get Lara Dalton elected, and has provided me valuable guidance and advice. I would also like to thank him for his hard work throughout his term, supporting the

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Esperance community, where I live; the review into the Esperance port; tabling petitions on behalf of our community; and generally supporting our community when we were going through a difficult time.

Hon Darren West organised a farewell dinner for Laurie Graham in Northam. I know that Laurie, who is not here today, would have liked to thank Minister Ellery, Minister Dawson, Minister MacTiernan and Hon Pierre Yang for attending his farewell dinner. For those of us living in the regions, it means a lot when ministers make a big effort to support us. I would particularly like to thank Minister MacTiernan for her commitment and hard work in her role as Minister for Regional Development; Agriculture and Food. Minister MacTiernan is highly regarded across the Agricultural Region in areas that could probably not be called Labor heartland. Thank you for your many trips to Esperance, remembering the farmers there, and ensuring that they are included in programs such as the recent digital farm grants program.

I would like to thank everyone who worked on a campaign in the Agricultural Region. The lower house candidates had a tough job in very challenging electorates. I thank Brad Willis in Roe, Michelle Nelson in Central Wheatbelt and Barni Norton in Moore. Donna Plummer and Jodi Ingram put in a huge effort supporting these regional campaigns. I acknowledge the support from campaign central, headed up by Tim Picton, Ellie Whiteaker and David Cann, along with the team up in Geraldton working with Lara Dalton, Hon Sandra Carr and Laurie Graham, and all those helping out at our 102 polling booths across the Agricultural Region.

Finally, I thank my faithful Labor supporters in Esperance: Kevin and Colleen O'Dwyer, Wayne and Sue Batchelor, and Dale Piercey. I would like to make a special mention of Dale Piercey, who has been a great inspiration to me over the last five years. Dale is a longstanding Labor supporter. She was number two on the Agricultural Region ticket 20 years ago today, a time when number two was thought to be unwinnable. Twenty years later today, we have had three elected. Thank you, Dale, for bringing me into the Labor family.

I would like to thank my family for their support, especially my family who cannot travel to be here today. My parents were both born in London. They met at Imperial College when my dad was studying there and my mum worked there. After my dad finished his PhD at Cambridge University, he took on a postdoctoral fellowship in Canada for one year. My parents never left. When we asked as kids why they stayed, apparently it was much quicker to get a telephone installed than with British Telecom! My parents stayed in Canada and went on to have four children. My siblings and I grew up in the capital city of Ottawa in Canada. My dad travelled a lot, having been a geophysicist, working with the Canadian government, helping developing countries around the world with their airborne mapping for mineral exploration. He instilled a love of travel in us all. Our family has benefited greatly from being part of the commonwealth. In fact, my siblings and I used to compete with the number of passports that we could collect. Based on my experiences, I believe we are fortunate to have this bond with other countries strategically located around the globe to call on for support.

I studied engineering at university, with a minor in environmental engineering, as I had always been passionate about the environment. Being a traveller, I soon discovered exchange programs. I studied for a year in England, making new bonds with cousins and aunts, had a couple of summer work placements at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, and then later participated in another exchange program at the University of Queensland in Brisbane. It is a sore spot for my dad: for all the countries he had travelled to around the world, I beat him to Australia! But he has made up for it by travelling here with my mum more than 20 times in the past 20 years, even managing to secure work contracts with the Australian Geological Survey Organisation.

I then went to London to attend Imperial College, where my parents had met, to study my master's in business and the environment. Following this, I was accepted for a leadership development program, which involved a yearlong placement at the Thailand Development Research Institute in Bangkok, conducting policy research and writing research papers on a variety of environmental

issues, and here I qualified as an environmental auditor. Heading back to Canada at the age of 27, I recall thinking perhaps it was time to settle down, get a real job and maybe go to a few Sunday night family dinners. I remember thinking at the time that I just wanted to do something that made a difference.

When I arrived home, it was about the time my dad took retirement from a long career with the Canadian government and he was looking for something to keep himself busy. Also about that time there was a lot of community concern about our nuclear power stations and whether the surrounding communities were being exposed to radiation emanating from the nuclear reactors. Being a geophysicist and having worked with natural radiation through his career, this was something my dad thought that he could help with, so I convinced him to start his own company and solicit his skills to the nuclear power companies. My radiation knowledge was rather lacking so my job was making the logos, helping prepare the tender documents and generally trying to make us look a bit professional and like we knew what we were doing! We were quite successful. One of our first projects was monitoring the shoreline along the edge of a nuclear power plant with a handheld radiation detector. My dad set up his old purple and green backpack with a wooden garden stake sticking out the top to tape his GPS to. I suggested that perhaps instead of his 20-year-old backpack, we should maybe get a new one and perhaps we should paint the garden stake black so it did not look like a wooden garden stake. I also suggested that we stick a couple of magnetic stickers with our logo on the side of our rusted out Subaru Outback. Then they asked for a risk management plan, at which we looked at each other and wondered what exactly we should put in a risk management plan for surveying a nuclear plant. We put together a few words and formatted it nicely, bought a first-aid kit for the boot of the car and off we went. I never managed to get him to part with his old purple and green backpack, which, in his view, still functioned fine, but I think we did paint the garden stake.

After the survey, my job was to read the report my dad had written and spend a significant amount of time trying to understand it and then write it in layman's terms, as I figured the people we sent it to would then understand it. I also used that fancy equation editor in Microsoft Word to make the hugely complicated radiation decay equations look nice in the report. Things were going well and we had done a few interesting projects, and then with time between contracts, my dad announced that our family would be heading to Perth for Christmas to meet up with cousins from the UK who were studying at the University of Western Australia. At our age, then spanning between 25 and 30 years, my siblings and I still travelled as a family on holidays, provided they entailed three flights across the globe, usually to a ski resort. But this time, it was to Perth.

Perth was somewhere that seemed just so far away and somewhere I never thought I would get to. The east coast of Australia seemed manageable, but Perth was just that bit too far—the furthest airport in the world from my home town of Ottawa. You can fly either way around to get back or even straight over the top of the North Pole, I was shocked to discover one time while looking at the flight path on board. You can even circumnavigate the planet just to visit family, such as when the first of the five flights it takes you to get home is cancelled due to a snowstorm and the flight desk tells you, “Unfortunately, Mrs Payne, you will miss your connection through Los Angeles. Would you like us to route you through Hong Kong or London?” But it is not all that bad. I have had some great holiday stopovers in London and got to experience the Qantas direct flight from London to Perth twice, and I never even booked to go anywhere near London.

Being the travellers we were, my sister and I devised a plan during that Christmas in Perth to travel overland to Sydney and Tasmania and head home from there. Luckily, I was working with dad and we had no pressing projects, so I was able to go. We bought a \$7 book on free camping in Western Australia, picked up a \$2 000 car and off we went. A chance stop at a little place called Masons Bay, chosen from our \$7 book, led me to meet my husband, Marc, an abalone diver who was fishing for abalone from the shore using a four-wheel motorbike rigged up with

a shucking tray on the front and an air compressor and a dive hose on the back. I did not even know what an abalone was. This was the start of what would be my new life in Australia. My sister and I finished the trip to Tasmania and my sister headed home and I headed back to Esperance. Maybe it was that Esperance crayfish that Marc flew to Tasmania with that got me! My sister arrived home and my parents asked, “Where’s Shelley? What do you mean she’s still in Australia?” This started a multitude of across-the-planet journeys in both directions, mine with an ever-expanding number of kids in tow. We used to cringe at the dollars spent on travel, and carried on my dad’s tradition of remortgaging the house every year for a holiday. The thing with having overseas family is that your money gets spent on going back to the same place all the time, but now with this pandemic, we are thankful for the travel we did do.

I continued helping my dad for a while with his reports and tender documents. The 12-hour time difference actually worked out quite well, as he would work all day on something and pass it to me and then I would work on it all day too. Eventually, however, our lives started slowly drifting apart, with me having one child then another and getting more involved with my new life in Esperance. We managed to pretty well standardise everything so I could mostly do myself out of a job. However, I am very thankful to have had that fun time with him. I carried on raising my three kids, helping my husband run his fishing business and doing a bit of consulting here and there when I could fit it in, but I was generally preoccupied with what after-school activities my kids had that day, when my next overseas holiday would be and things like when my husband’s new shark cage would be finished so he would not get eaten when he went to work.

I arrived back from another holiday to visit family, in which my kids had completed a school year in Canada with their cousins; my parents were getting older and I had wanted to spend some time with them, and my kids had grown up not having a chance to regularly see their grandparents. No sooner had I arrived home when I had a knock on the door with a request to please help as the local shire wanted to knock down our heritage jetty. I was told, “You’re an engineer; you can help.” I recall thinking not much more than, “Well, that’s a stupid idea to demolish that jetty”, but not perceiving that I could actually do anything about it. Esperance’s state heritage-registered timber jetty was highly valued by the Esperance community. It was one of only three heritage timber jetties remaining in the state. Our country was built on jetties. Jetties came before roads. Even as recently as the 1960s, the Premier travelled to Esperance by sea and off-loaded his car onto a jetty.

I have to be honest; at the time a lot of my friends were coaching netball or basketball and I was not good at that sort of thing. I did not know much about netball and I had always felt a little bit guilty that I was not doing as much as them to help out around the community, so I thought, “Wow, this is something I can actually help with by doing the research.” So I proceeded to dive in with gusto, do my research and present it to the group. Yes, there are over 100 jetties in South Australia; yes, there are contractors that fix them; yes, Albany sawmills can give you all the timber you need et cetera et cetera, but they still said the shire was not listening. We decided to go in and talk to them. These meetings made me come to the realisation that there was a serious problem with our local government and its ability to listen, problem solve, engage with their community and work collaboratively towards solutions. My observation has been that many small regional local governments lack the capacity to adequately address some of their more technical issues and would benefit from being able to access more support from the state government to ensure that they achieve the best outcomes for their communities.

About this time, we had the state election in 2017. Esperance had moved into the Agricultural Region and we began to have Labor members come to our jetty meetings, which we all felt at the time was rather strange—after all, the last time a Labor office was open in Esperance was 1989. They provided support and made suggestions and encouraged us to run for council. This was how we could effect change—from the inside. I was horrified. Did it mean putting my face out in public? Up until then, I had preferred to help out people in the background. A few of us who were passionate for change ran as a block, which made it easier to hide my face among the few

others. My kids had to endure weeks of Snapchat selfies from their friends making faces with my signs. Dale Piercey and I were successful, and the two of us sat in a room with seven other hostile people who did not quite like the trouble we were causing for them. We quickly completed our diploma in local government to ensure we would know what we were doing. We never did manage to save the jetty, but the new jetty is open now and highly used and valued by the community. I still cringe at the process but I learnt a lot and it actually brought me here today.

It was the jetty process that got me wondering just how decisions get made, who actually made them and how, and how we could effect change. How could our community get listened to? How could the mentality change from “We know what’s good for you and what you need” to “Tell us about your issues and how you think we can help you solve them”? I could sense that this Labor government was on the right track. Until that time, I would always shake my head and think, “Oh, my gosh; why are these people running the country?” But this Labor government was something that I was keen to get involved with.

When it came time for the federal election in 2019, I asked Hon Darren West, whom Labor had to run in our federal seat of O’Connor, because I needed someone to vote for. People like me wanted someone to vote for. It did not matter to us that the seat was said to be unwinnable; we still wanted someone we could give our vote to. No matter where you live, you still want to be able to vote for someone who is standing up for your values and your community. So, as nobody had yet lined up to do it, I decided to have a go. It did not worry me that the electorate covered a third of the state, spanning from Esperance to Kalgoorlie, Albany and Collie; I was used to regional travel, having lived in Esperance for the last 20 years. But I kind of felt like the lone woman out there, on the ballot paper with eight men. Peter Watson was in Albany, Mick Murray in Collie, and there was a male member for Kalgoorlie. Hon Darren West and Hon Laurie Graham were in the Agricultural Region, and Minister Dawson and Hon Kyle McGinn were in the Mining and Pastoral Region. They were all very supportive and very helpful, but still, all men.

It is amazing the change we achieved for the regions in this state election, with Rebecca Stephens elected to Albany, Jodie Hanns to Collie–Preston and Ali Kent to Kalgoorlie. We now have two women representing the Agricultural Region—me and Hon Sandra Carr. We also have the lovely Hon Rosie Sahanna representing the Mining and Pastoral Region, and we cannot forget Lara Dalton’s historic win in Geraldton. Do you know that wherever you live in Western Australia, you can now call a female representative? Labor, in this Parliament and this house, now has a female representing every single square inch of Western Australia.

With regard to the federal election, I want to give a special shout-out to Hon Kyle McGinn and his Labor team in Kalgoorlie, including George Foulkes-Taylor and Bobby-Lee Field, who helped me in that election. The team worked so hard and were so keen for Labor representation. I am so pleased now that all their hard work over the past four years has paid off, and they have Ali Kent elected as their member.

Hon Kyle McGinn has been an amazing and much-needed force in Kalgoorlie—a place that had been neglected and was lacking attention, maybe as a result of too much fly-in fly-out creating a slow disintegration of the city’s community core. After Hon Kyle McGinn’s election in 2017, he set up his office there and stood up for the people of Kalgoorlie. This Labor win in Kalgoorlie is a credit to him and all the people he inspired that they could make positive change.

After the federal election, we calculated that with the itsy-bitsy swing to Labor that we achieved in O’Connor, it would take 100 years to win the seat. Frankly, I just did not have time for that! But I felt that there must be some way I could help bring our regional voice to the table, so I began to think about the upcoming state election and how I might be able to get involved. I feel fortunate to have had the support to run in the Agricultural Region in this last election after the retirement of Hon Laurie Graham, and to be a part of this historic election win, with the Labor government being rewarded by the people of Western Australia for all its hard work in keeping our state safe throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

With a quarter of all Australians born overseas and nearly half with at least one parent born overseas, we can take a minute to reflect on how hard this pandemic has been on a lot of Australians, being away from their families. I joke to my kids, “Remember when there were big planes that could take us over big oceans to other lands?” They miss travelling to visit family, too. I guess we took for granted our air travel. I know we cherish our memories and are grateful for the travel we did, but many like me wonder: will we get to see our ageing parents again?

With regard to the number of new Australians like me, I also want to touch on how hard it is being away from family and living in a different culture from the one you were brought up with. Not everyone you meet is cheery and welcoming of your colour or your accent. I guess I can count myself lucky, coming to this country with English as my first language. I remember my overseas placements to Thailand, where our pre-departure training was focused on not only explaining the culture shock upon arrival in a new country, but also the culture shock we would experience when we travelled back to our home countries again after being used to a new way of life, not quite really fitting in anywhere anymore.

Although, for the most part, people have been very accepting of my accent, some are not, and I do feel it takes a little longer for people to trust and accept me. I still regularly get asked, “Where are you travelling from?” That gets a little bit tiring after 20 years of hearing it! It sounds weird to say it, but interestingly, what I am grateful for is the opportunity to have been able to experience how awful racism makes you feel when you hardly get an opportunity to open your mouth, yet you are already judged as someone to disregard. At first I was really confused and my brain could not really work out what was going on. I have met bullies and people who did not like me, but this was different.

I remember hearing Tony Burke being interviewed recently and saying that, as a white male, he would never experience racism in this country, but he could imagine how awful it would be. Experiencing it firsthand gave me a new perspective on how hard it must sometimes be for our Indigenous Australians and our new Australians to feel comfortable and accepted in the communities in which they live, particularly in our regions. Growing up, we often had international visitors to our home, so I always had a lot of respect for those from other countries, but this gave me a deeper empathy for our Indigenous Australians and our new Australians, knowing at firsthand how awful it feels.

When I was first elected to Esperance council in 2017, I had to listen to not only criticisms of Labor’s target for 50 per cent women, but also negative talk about our first Australians. It made me passionate to work hard. It took three motions to council over two years, but we now proudly fly the Aboriginal flag outside our council offices. We have a fantastic progressive council now in Esperance, which I am sad to leave. It is working hard for the people of Esperance, and I would like to say a big thankyou to my fellow councillors, particularly our amazing shire president, Ian Mickel, for standing up for our town and working hard every day for the best for our community.

I am so very grateful that we have a Labor government elected in Western Australia that is committed to standing up for not only equality for women but also diversity in the party to represent the diverse community we have here in Western Australia. I feel we are very fortunate in Australia. This country has a long history of immigration, and I strongly believe that gives us a competitive advantage by having so many diverse views. A range of knowledge is brought into this country, which gives us the ability for us to tap into ideas from around the world and put them together for better solutions.

I would also like to acknowledge the wisdom we have amongst the traditional owners of our land, and how long it has gone undervalued. I am honoured to be part of this government with all it is doing for our traditional owners, with initiatives such as the move towards joint management. I feel privileged to be part of this forty-first Parliament where, for the first time, we had a welcome to country performed right here in this house to open our Parliament. With us all working together, we can continue to ensure we will remain a successful, globally competitive, leading country.

Esperance has been a fantastic place to raise our children: toddlers roaming free in the grocery store, helping to shop, with little worry for their safety; spectacularly white sandy beaches with turquoise water all to yourself; amazing, Instagram-able bike rides to school every day, with a stop to watch dolphins and whales; and weekend boat trips to our secret lagoon, where the Easter egg hunts were throwing Easter eggs overboard, and handing out a mask and snorkel. Free-range kids they were called, by those visiting from the city.

If I could fault it at all, it is that they are sun-damaged kids. No matter how hard you try, that Esperance sun will get you. Stress over your son, who hits the surf before 6.00 am and is sometimes still out there after dark, with way too many white shark sightings and brutal, aggressive attacks off Esperance. There are dangerous regional roads, where you know you risk your family's life each time you get in the car for the seven-hour drive to Perth. That is really the only option with a family of five and airfares to Perth that cost more than going to Sydney.

I am thankful for a government that is investing in our regional roads. It is funny, but after 20 years of travel, it was really only within the last term of government that we started to think that we should perhaps leave extra time for roadworks. This government's recent commitment to reasonably priced airfares has been welcomed by our regional towns.

I have spent much time over the past 20 years travelling throughout the Agricultural Region and one thing that upsets me is the continual degradation of our natural environment. With so much clearing already for our food production, there is less than half the natural vegetation remaining, with most of that fragmented, and the decline is still continuing. A large portion of our natural vegetation that remains that is not within our conservation estate is along our many road reserves, which are getting eaten up at an alarming rate, especially by all the regional roadworks. They are in a shocking state. In some cases, the road reserves provide the only wildlife corridors that link these fragmented pockets of vegetation. Not only does a healthy, diverse road reserve provide great visual amenity to tourists, it is also important habitat for our native species.

Perhaps we get too used to our current baseline—what we are used to, driving along, looking at vegetation in very poor condition—rather than considering what it could be and acknowledging just how much damage we have done. This land has been managed by Indigenous Australians for tens of thousands of years, and it must be terribly upsetting for them to accept what we have done to our environment in such a short time.

I would like to recognise the fabulous work of Minister Dawson in his last term as Minister for Environment. We have all heard about his great initiatives such as Containers for Change and the plastic bag ban; the work being done under Plan for Our Parks to increase the conservation estate is commendable; and we now have ministers responsible for climate action and the hydrogen industry. But I really hope that we can do more this term to focus on areas outside the conservation estate and stopping the decline there. If we want to secure our biodiversity for future generations, we need a plan to get there. It will be a challenge, particularly with the added issue of climate change we now face. It is great to hear that this government is currently developing a draft vegetation policy to be released for community consultation in the coming months.

My speech would not be complete if I did not raise the important issue of great white sharks on behalf of my community in Esperance. When I first met Marc, an abalone diver, 20 years ago, shortly after white sharks became protected in 1999, we never gave much of a thought to sharks. Marc had dived with no protection for years, but since I met him, he has had over a dozen encounters with white sharks while diving and has dived using the protection of a hydraulic shark cage for almost a decade now. At least he can drive his metal cage at the sharks to move them on.

Esperance has had the most fatal white shark attacks in the last five years of anywhere in Australia, with two last year alone. Two highly respected locals have been lost and we cannot forget the devastating loss of Laeticia Brouwer in 2017 while holidaying in Esperance with her

family. That attack followed the brutal attack on Sean Pollard in 2014. These attacks have significantly impacted our community and, in particular, our surfing community. Grown men no longer have the courage to undertake the sport they so enjoy, and in this hectic, modern world, that is so important for their mental health.

The community has been lobbying hard since 2017 to be heard for support and for action following white shark sightings and attacks to provide confidence to not only those in our community, but also those across our state thinking of coming to Esperance that action has been taken to make it safe to get back in the water. I look forward to working with the new Minister for Fisheries, Don Punch, to continue to address this important issue for my community. We must have an evidence and science-based approach to reducing the risk of shark attacks.

I have been involved with the Esperance Ocean Safety and Support group since its inception in 2017 after the devastating fatal white shark attack on Laeticia. The ocean safety group has worked hard to drive real and relevant research on white sharks with a view to helping improve beach safety. The group has installed a network of shark receivers around Esperance Bay that track white shark movements to learn more about their behaviour. I would like to thank former fisheries minister Peter Tinley for his commitment to assisting the group with our data analysis and working closely with the group to address our issues. I look forward to continuing this work with Minister Punch. The group also has a new research project underway that will map in detail the near-shore areas along our coastline with a view to better understanding how the underwater topography may contribute to shark visitation. There is always more to do when it comes to sharks, but it is easy to forget the huge progress made during the last term of government. We have a great SharkSmart app, with over 60 000 users, whereby we are alerted instantly to shark detections and sightings. We have a network of real-time satellite receivers linked to alarms around our coastline, centred on popular surf beaches. We have extended helicopter patrols over the summer season. I commend the work done by our fisheries research team, but we can do more, and I am confident we will continue to work with affected communities like Esperance to address these important issues. I welcome the recent announcement by Minister Punch for a \$5 million boost to shark hazard mitigation measures.

Speaking of sharks, I would like to talk for a few minutes about an amazing wild place off Esperance called Salisbury Island, which is home to the rare and endangered black-flanked rock-wallaby surviving out on this small island, home to our endangered Australian sea lions, and houses the biggest colony of long-nosed fur seals in the state. It is a wild island sitting out near the continental shelf—an amazing place. My husband came across Salisbury Island during his thousands of hours of diving underwater off our southern coast and discovered the fact that it was a white shark hotspot. We set up a non-profit organisation called Finding Salisbury to work to protect this amazing place and keep it wild. We knew with it being a white shark hotspot that it would eventually draw international attention, as it has, so we knew the importance of getting on the front foot to ensure its protection for all Australians. We feel privileged to have an organisation that is protecting a wild location, when often our land care and environmental groups are about rehabilitation and trying to put things back like they once were. We have received global recognition, with Salisbury Island designated a hope spot by Mission Blue, an organisation seeking to protect the diversity of the world's oceans. We have worked hard to drive world-leading non-invasive research here. We are fortunate to have a wild place where we can learn about natural white shark behaviour, particularly in light of the issues we face with shark attacks in Australia, but I believe we need to tread carefully to limit our impacts.

But, alas, Esperance is just one regional community fighting to be heard in the corridors of state Parliament, and I have been elected to represent the Agricultural Region, where there are many more regional communities, all with their own issues and needs and all wanting to be heard. The Agricultural Region has over 60 local governments, with over 50 community resource centres dotted across the nearly 300 000 square kilometres. As we now head into a discussion about

electoral reform, we need to think carefully about what it means to be able to properly represent those living regionally across our vast state. I am hoping we will continue to address the many issues facing regional Western Australia, and it is pleasing to know that this government, in its last term, invested more money in the regions than any other government in history. We are seeing the results on the ground, with important roadworks across our state, improvements in the facilities for our emergency services, the school maintenance program, investment in school STEM facilities and hospital upgrades across our state. Particularly, I would like to note the great job our emergency services are doing to help develop practical, tailored fire-response vehicles for the regions. But there is more to do with regard to encouraging people to live and work in regions—making our regions a place everybody can feel welcome, from our Indigenous to our new Australians, ensuring that we are supporting our towns to be individual and unique and to develop in the way they want to develop, and achieving the same level of services we have in our cities and perhaps considering how we can make these services more streamlined and easier to access.

The past year has been positive for visitation for our regions with respect to border closures and the stop to international travel, but there is still more to do to stop the decline in our small towns. There are many historic country pubs and hotels in many of our regional towns, highly valued by their local communities, in disrepair and in need of a new injection of life, yet the money is never going to be there to help refurbish these iconic places without our help. Dumbleyung and Tambellup spring to mind. It would be great to have a program to help revive these old historic pubs and hotels for these communities and for tourism. They make uniquely Western Australian stopping points to break a long drive and would help achieve more visitation to these regional communities, injecting much-needed money into the local economies.

I was very pleased to see the recent significant state government commitment towards the historic Carnarvon timber jetty. I know that commitment means so much to that community, so thank you. It has been heartbreaking to see firsthand the impact that demolition of highly valued heritage assets has on our longstanding community members, particularly those older members who have contributed so much to the development of Western Australia throughout their lifetime.

It has been 32 years since there has been a Labor office in Esperance, and for long-time Labor supporters like my friend Dale Piercey, who helped pack up the Esperance Labor office back in 1989, these are exciting times. I am excited for the day I can open the doors down there and we will again be better able to serve the people in the far reaches of the Agricultural Region.

I have realised that I am different from some people in Esperance, not because I was born Canadian, but because I have Labor values—fairness, equality, compassion and equal opportunity—and I am thankful to my family for instilling these values in me. I sometimes wonder why I have the privilege to be here when there are over 100 000 voters in the Agricultural Region, many just as worthy as I am. But maybe I am lucky to have sensed that this government was on the right track, and there was an opportunity and I grabbed it. I feel it is an important lesson for my children: do not follow the herd; follow your heart. You never know where it might lead you.

It was not easy at first, standing up publicly as Labor in Esperance, somewhere you generally would not admit to anyone that you voted Labor. But I am happy to say that at the recent election, we won all three booths in Esperance. Now, I cannot take all the credit for that, as we all know the amazing job done by Premier Mark McGowan and his Labor team in keeping us all safe, but it sure is great to be out in the regions, open and proud to be Labor and inspiring other people to embrace our Labor values.

In closing, I am honoured to be a part of this team of positive, hardworking people committed to building a better Western Australia for our children and their future and I look forward to the next four years.

[Applause.]
