



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



Hon Alannah MacTiernan, MLC **(Member for South West Region)**

Legislative Council

Thursday, 1 December 2022

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Valedictory Speech — Personal Explanation

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (South West — Minister for Regional Development)
[4.37 pm] — by leave: I must admit that I was hoping to avoid this. My plan, which I had all mapped out, was that in early January I was going to come back, resign and slink away. It is very embarrassing to have this fuss again. This is my third valedictory. They say never say never, but I will tell you that I will absolutely swear that this will totally be my last valedictory.

Interestingly, it was almost 30 years ago when I first stood in this place, on the other side, to give what was then called a maiden speech. I am almost as nervous now as I was then, although I was much better prepared then because I had spent three weeks writing it rather than trying to put this together in the last hour.

In that speech, I called for the abolition of this house. It was not that I just favoured ordinary unicameralism; I was a great supporter of a thing called mixed-member proportional representation, as they have in the German Parliament and in New Zealand. They have single member constituents and list members sitting together. However, I really have changed my mind on this. Our dear Leader of the House, Hon Sue Ellery, tells me that I have been institutionalised, but I really have changed my mind about this. I actually think that there is a real purpose here. I think the structure that we have—with a lower house in which government is formed—is a better structure. In single-member electorates, the mainstream opinion is expressed, and that provides the stability to form government. I have often seen the difficulty in mixed-member proportional parliaments of having to cobble together a coalition. I do not think that is good for the stability of democracy. In our system I think we get it right, particularly with the electoral reform that will be brought forward in this place, and I note the debate on it this morning. I think the upper house has the ability to provide a greater array of community opinion.

With the reforms that will be proceeded with at the next election, I think we are going to see a more nuanced range of interests. I know there are some members opposite who think that the only dichotomy is city versus country. I do not think that is accurate. I think what we will see is a much greater diversity of opinion, where there are people in the city and people in the country. They probably will not be supporting daylight saving in any large numbers, Hon Wilson Tucker, but certainly legalised cannabis, for example. I think we will find that that will be a party and a cause that will survive into the next election. Hopefully, we are going to see a very dynamic democracy taking shape in this place. It might well be that at some point in the future we have to go back to the people and maybe reduce the size of this place, but I think this is going to enhance and empower democracy. It will allow new parties to emerge. It will give new parties the opportunity to form and evolve. I do not think our party is one that does not evolve. We come with a set of shared values, with everyone having an opportunity and a place in the sun, and we have been able to evolve how that is expressed. What we are going to see happen in this place is going to be immensely interesting, and I wish everyone here the very best of luck in dealing with that fluorescence of democracy.

I do not want to go over the ground I may have covered in some of my earlier valedictories, except to say that it really is an extraordinary privilege to have been able to represent the people of Western Australia, in both the state Parliament and the federal Parliament. I am immensely grateful for the faith that has been placed in me by the Labor Party and by the voters.

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I know I have always tried very hard to honour that faith and put my heart and soul into the job, but I have to say I have been really taken aback by the volume and kindness of the messages I have received from right across the state. Punters and business leaders from Armadale to Albany have sent me absolutely beautiful messages since I announced my departure. I hope it is not just that they want to make sure that I go! I promise that I will properly thank everyone after I complete this sprint to the finish line in my ministerial role. We have a lot to do in the next few days.

I want to thank the Premier, Mark McGowan, who invited me back to Parliament in the lead-up to the 2017 election. I really thank him for his astute and disciplined leadership, and for the political acumen that has given us in the Labor Party an opportunity over the last six years to win the support of the people of Western Australia and to move the state forward. I really think that the work that we have done in restoring financial management while making strategic investments and courageous decisions about developing our state has been fantastic. I want to particularly thank him for his support and preparedness to prioritise the voluntary assisted dying legislation. I know that was one of the things that motivated me to come back into Parliament when I was asked. This issue has been strongly supported by the community for so many decades, but it was too much of a political hot potato for anyone to take up. Premier and all the team, I think that we can all be very proud that we grasped the nettle and we dealt with that.

I want to speak a little about my portfolio. I have been totally engaged with this portfolio. I had an opportunity this morning to talk about regional development and our magnificent teams out there in our regional development commissions, but I want to make a few comments about agriculture and hydrogen. It was fantastic today, on my last day in Parliament, to be able to announce with the Premier the \$320 million new research and development and biosecurity science facility that we are building out at Murdoch University. This is the culmination of five years' work. It has been an issue that has been kicked into the long grass over the last two decades, but we have worked incredibly hard to get the support for agriculture, to get this facility. It is really going to benefit industry going forward, because the two ways in which government can best assist our extraordinary farmers in all their hard work is to provide that research and development into agriculture and to provide first-class biosecurity. It is fantastic that we will have a facility that will literally be world-class. This is the culmination of the work that we have been doing over the last six years to really rebuild that capability in the department after the great contraction, and it has not been easy. Certainly, the machinery-of-government process has been a challenging but incredibly important one. I think that we have certainly got through that process, and we can see, once again, this department becoming a really exciting place to work, where innovation and energy just oozes out from all those people in our department.

I want to thank the Premier and all my colleagues who have supported the money that we have been able to put into agriculture. Every budget, we have got a big allocation, whether it is the \$131 million that stopped the department from falling off the fiscal cliff that it had been headed for, the \$48 million for research in grain, or the \$25 million to kickstart an amazing collaboration with all the universities and the CSIRO. The thing that probably excites me the most is the rejuvenation and rebuilding of our research facilities in the country, whether it is the Frank Wise Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Kununurra, the Carnarvon and Merredin research stations or the extraordinary work at Katanning to make sheep environmental. I am so glad I have been able to get the support of my colleagues to do that.

Of course, the government has had fabulous partnerships such as the processed oats partnership and the wine partnership—my colleague here would tell me I had to mention wine. It is true that I am known as the patron saint of wine! We have been able to do extraordinary things such as resourcing InterGrain and securing the fabulous Australian Export Grains Innovation Centre. This has been such a satisfactory and important endeavour for what is the second-biggest industry in WA after the resources sector.

As well as doing that, I have been inspired by those farmers who wanted to explore new possibilities and were looking at how carbon farming and carbon sequestration could change their farming systems. Those farmers have been looking at how we understand the complexity of our biological system and our soils so that we can develop farming systems that are less dependent on chemical imports and can be more productive and produce food and fibre that can attract a premium. It was very important that the government supported those farmers and that we were prepared to back them in. They do not have the large agricultural industries necessarily backing them because it is by nature something that will reduce their reliance on many of the agrichemicals. The government backed them, but we did not stop rebuilding all the conventional stuff. We got money—\$30 million through the agriculture climate resilience fund and the land restoration fund to back those forward-thinking pastoralists, those great people from the southern rangelands and great farmers right across the south west land division who wanted to explore these possibilities.

I understand that change is hard and that some advocacy groups were not happy that we were backing those farmers who wanted to explore these new farming systems. Despite the grief, I have to say, I would do it again. I really believe that great future opportunities arise from understanding and unleashing the power of the biology of the system. Rather than being presented, as unfortunately it is in some sectors, as the problem child in the climate change debate, agriculture can in fact be a major contributor and a major part of the solution. I welcome all to come to one of my final acts, the Meaty Matters: Cows and Climate conference on 13 December at which we will explore all the extraordinary opportunities we have to make farming the twenty-first century solution for many of the issues we face.

It has also been fantastic to have the opportunity to develop the groundwork for a renewable hydrogen industry in WA over the past five years. Western Australia has an extraordinary opportunity to be a global leader in generation. We do not want to be just dig and ship; we want to ensure that the lower energy prices and the availability of renewable hydrogen can translate into upstream and downstream processing. We can finally have energy that is cheap enough to make it possible for us to produce iron and steel and to process many of our other minerals. Again, I thank my colleagues in cabinet for supporting me. To date, \$167 million has been allocated to this industry from state coffers. We have made some real progress on some of these regulatory matters. I cannot pretend that the job is all done. I really hope that we can continue this endeavour into the future, because this really is another fantastic opportunity for us to build an industry that is going to enable us to transition out of our dependence on fossil fuels.

Of course, as everyone always says, and they say it always because it is so true, you could not do this work without the support of all of your colleagues. Again, I want to thank all my ministerial colleagues. So many of the things that we have done have been jointly progressed. Also, I thank the staff of the offices of the other ministers. There are just so many fabulous people. I do have to give a shout-out to one particular guy, and that is Dave Coggin. He has just been an amazing support to our team.

Talking about parliamentary colleagues, I should also give a special shout-out to Darren West. I do remember when Hon Darren West first appeared at a Labor Party meeting sometime in the 1990s. He certainly created quite a titter of excitement amongst some of the younger female delegates. He was a pretty good-looking dude in his day! I am sure he has not lost any of his charm.

My chief of staff, Cole Thurley, instructed me this morning that I was to mention him. Because I always do what I am told, I am mentioning Cole. No, really. As I have often said to Cole, I just could not have done this job without him. People like Cole, who have come from the public sector and are smart and committed to good public policy, are people whom we absolutely need to value. I thank Cole for being so smart, strategic, incredibly hardworking and not averse to a bit of minister–staff biff. He has kept in there.

I also want to thank Mark Scott, even though the Premier did recently poach Mark from me. Mark was with me from my days in federal Parliament. I recruited him off the street. He then came over as part of the team. I cannot tell you just how completely fantastic he has been. That friendship with him has been so incredibly important to me.

Daniela Mattheys, my deputy chief of staff, has done such an extraordinary job in both the hydrogen area and the first four years of the Collie transition, when our beautiful friend Mick Murray was the member. I did not know whether Daniela was going to survive four years of hand-to-hand combat with Mick, but we got through it and we are doing fabulous things in Collie.

I also thank Shelley and George. Shelley Court also came from the other office, and George Foulkes-Taylor, who have been our team up here in Parliament, together with the fabulous Kris Doherty and Ollie Pincott—a great little team that has represented me and helped all the ministers here in the Parliament. I have also got Rica Graham, my fabulous executive officer.

I cannot mention all of my staff members. We are going to have a big shindig in a couple of weeks, dudes. There will be plenty of time for that.

I also give a shout-out to Guy Wroth, Claire Hanson and Jo Taylor in the electorate office.

Again, I just want to acknowledge all those public servants. We go through these cycles. We talk about fat cats and bureaucrats and we diss our public sector, and we do that to our detriment because we cannot be a good government without good people. We have to make work in the public sector something that is financially worthwhile and also satisfying. We all have an obligation here to talk up those people who choose to work in the public sector.

I have to give a special shout-out to Terry Hill, who did me an immense favour by getting off his yoga mat, getting back into the saddle and helping us get all the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development team very well focused for the future.

I have made some absolutely great friendships over the last seven years, from joining the campaign in 2016. Obviously, there were lots of people who I knew already, but we campaigned in those northern suburbs. I need to give a particular mention to the “crouching chief”, if I can say something as politically incorrect as that—Sabine Winton. We had a fabulous time together campaigning. We ended up sitting on Santa’s knee and being photographed by security guards who had swapped sides and came around to support us. Sabine, it has been fantastic knowing you.

On that same campaign was Hon Kyle McGinn. When I first saw him come into an event, I gave him the rounds of the kitchen because of his outfit! He took that in good faith and since then has been the most sartorially splendid, fabulous member in Parliament. In 2016, I was working with Lara Dalton. I first mentioned she should go into Parliament back in 2014. We did not win that one, Lara, but we went on to do that. We had a fabulous time with Kevin Michel, doing our Thelma and Louise across the Pilbara during that campaign.

In 2021, it was fantastic to be able to direct the campaigns for Rebecca Stephens in Albany and Caitlin Collins in Hillarys. It was fabulous and brilliant to see these great young women hit their straps. During my time in the Labor Party, I have always had those older people who supported me, mentored me and encouraged me. It is always fantastic to have the opportunity to pay that forward.

I must thank the strongest faction in the Labor Party. It is not one that everyone knows. It is the group called “Chicks from the Sticks”, who are the Assembly members from regional WA—Divvy, Lara, Jodie, Jane, Lisa and Rebecca. Peter Foster, I believe you have joined. I will not say how we incorporated you into the group but you did a fabulous rendition at the last love-in. I am proud to be the patron of the chicks and to be the big chick. Sorry; I forgot Ali Kent, who was just fantastic. Ali, it was great to campaign with you through that last election.

To Sue and Steve, it has been fabulous working with you and this whole team. We have worked very hard and very well together. It has been fantastic, all of you, even when we have had our ritual Thursday morning boxing match with our friends on the other side. I hope people will step up and keep that spirit going.

I want to, of course, thank my family, even though I promised that I would not say that I will spend more time with them. As always, I thank my fantastic family for all their support and really having to put up with a lot having a person in the family, the matriarch perhaps, as a member of Parliament.

Guys, truly, it is time for me to go after 26 years in the Parliament and 13 years in the ministry. I really look forward to so many other people having the opportunity to step up to that role. As for me, I am heading off for some great new adventures. Thank you, all.

[Applause.]
