



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

## **INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Hon Max Trenorden MLC**  
**(Member for Agricultural)**

**APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT) RECURRENT 2009-10 BILL 2009**  
**APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT) CAPITAL 2009-10 BILL 2009**

**Legislative Council**

**Thursday, 25 June 2009**



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*Second Reading — Cognate Debate*

**HON MAX TRENORDEN (Agricultural)** [2.01 pm]: Thank you, Mr President. I start by congratulating you on reaching your high office. I also congratulate all members, particularly those who have entered this chamber for the first time. I heartily and warmly welcome them into the realm of politics. I look forward to watching with great interest what we do in this house, working together, over the next four years.

Harry Walter “Mick” Gayfer is the person on whom I have modelled my parliamentary life; he is a mentor of mine. He was elected to Parliament in 1962 as a member of the then Country Party of Western Australia. Like me, Hon Mick Gayfer began his parliamentary career as the member for Avon in the Legislative Assembly and later served in the Legislative Council. He played an important dual role; he was also chairman of Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd, a role in which he excelled. I was the last member for Avon, and I express my admiration for the previous members for Avon, Hon Ken McIver and Hon Mick Gayfer. They were both outstanding men who represented the electorate of Avon with distinction.

I also take this opportunity to thank the people who have believed in me and supported me during my parliamentary career. At times things have been wonderful, but at other times I have been left wondering. My children, my new wife, Veronica, and my staff have always been and still are my greatest fans. They give me not only advice but also abuse whenever I need it, to keep me working hard and keep me focused. I also recognise the people who have put their faith in me to represent them.

I am told that in Chinese culture, if one says to another person, “May you live in interesting times”, it is regarded as a curse. Why that might be so is something that we might reflect upon. The implication is that in a society in which stability is prized above all else, change can blow that stability apart by placing demands that cannot be tolerated or endured upon everyone in that society. Whether or not invited, we live in interesting times. As a member of the party that represents rural Australia—in my case, regional Western Australia—I must try to bring the things that we know and have learnt into Western Australian society, for the good of all: the people, the land, the sea and all living things. That is our primary mandate.

We were always greenies; sometimes very good, sometimes not. We have always known that our prosperity is dependent upon sustainability, and that means finding good farming practices, good mining practices and good fishing practices, and this applies to all other endeavours. For us, this was

not just a sea change or a tree change; it was life change itself—a life that needed to flourish if we were to be, and remain, prosperous. Nothing has changed, and if we forget these things, we do so at our peril.

The National Party has changed. The election result was evidence of that change. Maybe the criticisms of our direction in the past were right; we have been confronted on so many fronts by new realities that we had to evolve. We can bring many skills to cope with the changes shaking our country and the world—I alluded to them earlier—but above all I want to suggest that the greatest skill we bring to our country is the ability to make some things happen—good, renewable, profitable things. However, our dreams must be based on reality. We must all dream, but for a dream to come true it must be anchored in reality.

We in the regions are part of the circle of life. We are part of the wind, the heat, the dust, the cold and the rain. These are the sorts of things we live through. We accept that change is happening. This seems, at first sight, a simple thing, but it is not. Anyone who has farmed or run a business of any size knows these things. Thousands of failed businesses every year are proof of just how hard it is to get things right, to make something happen sustainably and profitably. The skill to make something happen is a skill upon which we all utterly depend. Our party, and those who support our principles, need to reassure themselves that the primacy of life and productivity of our nation is not an optional extra. In the years to come we will have the opportunity to reinvent rural life. Much will be old and tested; much will be new. The new will grow, in large measure, from the policies and ideas that we talk about during our term of office. We have to be bold, imaginative, courageous and resolute, and have the tenacity of purpose that comes from being people who know how hard it is to make good things happen.

I would like to suggest some of the things that need to be thought about and done to create a bright future in a world full of adversity. Let us think about agriculture and climate realities, and new economic circumstances—things that seem certain. Our responsibility is to plan, not just react, but our plans and actions must always be grounded in reality. Only from this realistic base can we make sustainable change.

Firstly, we must look exhaustively at the means by which we generate and use energy for productive purposes. Nothing could be more important, and in our state nothing has been more neglected. It is decision time. There can be no more hoping things will be okay; they will not unless the government seizes the day, and it must. What kind of far-seeing energy policy would it have to be to give us energy security? Energy will have to be locally generated and controlled, be it coal generated, gas generated, wind generated, marine generated, biomass generated, or solar or thermal generated. From these technologies very important industries can, must and will emerge, such as plasto-chemical, hydrogen, desalinated water and many others. They will drive the marine, geothermal and solar power futures. Regional businesses and essential services will need to have technologies and infrastructure in place that will enable them to do this, plus a tax regime that can accelerate them.

We must not ever be caught unprepared and waiting for the boat to come in. The stratospheric oil prices of a year or so ago showed just how vulnerable we are, and how destabilising on our productivity they were and remain. These oil prices had an extremely debilitating effect on industry and the business sector in Western Australia. We need to concentrate on and recognise the importance of gas exploration; a single pipeline in Western Australia is extremely vulnerable. The stakes are absolutely the highest—not just high—because without affordable energy for all, we cannot make a living; we cannot live. Our policies must bring us energy independence as soon as possible. The trade and technical skills and planning and infrastructure we need to enhance or acquire to reach that goal of energy independence should be planned for and acted on now. There is no time to procrastinate; we need a policy framework that recognises the major challenges we face.

Secondly, we have an enormous challenge to add much more consumer value than cost in our ever-increasing competitive global food industry environment. With a population of fewer than 80 000, the wheatbelt punches way above its weight with an estimated \$5 billion contribution to the state of Western Australia in 2006 and much more in 2008. We need to meet newly developing international consumer tastes and demands, which have the overall description of “slow food”, while retaining mass export markets. Western Australia’s agriculture industry will be a world leader if it focuses on slow food. Slow food is an ideal that is about not only health but also wealth. Fresh top-quality local produce commands a far higher price for much less volume whether it is sold in our communities, interstate or overseas. It is now time for us to be involved in future health and economic prosperity.

As research compiled by Dr David Hughes, Emeritus Professor of Food Marketing at the Imperial College in London, attests, the reason behind the slow-food movement is that a health-conscious ageing global population is fully aware that almost 60 per cent of the population of western nations suffers from obesity and related serious health problems and that 15 per cent are glucose intolerant. In the future, the demand will be for fresher, healthier, seasonal, natural, traditional foods that contain chemicals and vitamins that are anti-ageing and disease inhibiting. Slow food is top-quality in-season produce that is prepared traditionally. The slow food philosophy is to consume fresh, quality produce that is in season and, whenever possible, is delivered almost directly from the paddock to the plate. Fresh food markets and high-quality food outlets are rapidly expanding. That can be seen occurring in Perth today. High-quality, high-cost outlets and high-quality, low-cost outlets are attracting people in their thousands. Businesses and governments that consider slow food simply to be a passing fad will rue the day they made that mistake. The Department of Agriculture and Food needs to move into this century. Quality products are the future for Western Australia. Obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular problems caused by poor dietary decisions are a potential massive multibillion-dollar market for Western Australia. Again, I refer to Dr David Hughes whose research refers to the migration to the poles, which outlines significant changes to the world food markets. Some of these food changes are from new and improved to traditional; from ready-to-eat to natural and unprocessed; from fast food to slow food; from just me to friends and family; from low price to premium price; from all year to seasonal; and from open supply to closed supply chains.

Thirdly, I move on to climate change. We are all painfully aware that climate change has become a new reality for the world, and for Western Australia in particular. This is impacting on the state every day. We hear constantly of the dire predictions that climate modelling is throwing out. Modelling has its benefits, but in the past it has shown that the predictions will be substantially wrong. Early modelling of the present pandemic of swine flu showed that tens of thousands of people would die. The reality has kicked in, and that has been found not to be the case. A magnificent library is in place that has recorded climate change for tens of thousands of years. The trees, ocean sediments, ice, stalactites, written history, seas, fossils and many other sources tell us exactly what we can expect in Western Australia in the future. Research in Western Australia needs to be based on these realities, so that our decisions are sustainable.

What is to be done? In Western Australia we need to bring as many farmers to the expanded Ord River scheme as quickly and as prudently as we can. We cannot make it rain, but we can take our skills and our knowledge base—the farmers—to where it does rain. This will have to be done with the utmost care and sensitivity, so that all stakeholders are happy with the outcomes. Our traditional landholders may well become the landlords of substantial new areas of food and fibre production that breathe new commercial life into vast areas of our north. We need a comprehensive strategy for potential new arable areas created by climate change. We need to expedite the farming of all those areas known to us already where good soil and reliable rainfall exist. The Western Australian Land Information System—WALIS—has been around for a long time, and has the capacity to identify land for future uses. We need to mandate increased funding of our fine research institutions to grow

the knowledge of tropical agriculture and all its risks in such a way that our footprint on the land and the rivers is light and sustainable. We must avoid the mistakes of the past, which means that we have to face them. In our rural schools we need to examine the curriculum very carefully. Although the known core skills remain essential, the emerging generation may have needs in science and technology, plant and animal husbandry, and in the built environment that must be addressed in entirely new ways. Again, change.

I will mention some examples. There are many more that could be given, but I will just give a couple. Firstly, there is the growing of fibre for paper: in Australia we have used our cool-climate, slow-growing forests as the principal source of fibre for paper. It has always been controversial. As a matter of some urgency, we should look at a very large number of plants that could easily substitute for slow-growing trees and grow quickly and well in our tropical, mid-west and agricultural regions. Furthermore, the technology exists to turn many long-fibre plants—rattan, bamboo and the like—into substitute wood. The results are astounding, and the practice needs to be introduced here. Our information base is entirely inadequate and this must be remedied. On one of my celebrated fact-finding tours, I visited Alberta in Canada and saw a farmer-owned plant turning wheat straw into fine-quality, widely used building products. A simple process of steam, resin and pressing produces floorboards, internal and external wall panelling and specified stress-tested roof trusses. The central wheatbelt, on several occasions, has been tested for the availability of wheat straw, and there is as much available product as there is in Alberta. This product is cheaper, more sustainable and more environmentally friendly than chopping down our precious trees. Grain straw and sugar cane are proven sources of building products and are a solution in the construction of houses and buildings in our tropical north. For too many years our tropical north has, at huge expense, imported the materials, style and construction methods that are best suited to our cities. In all candour, I have some doubts that style is even suited there. Nevertheless, it is folly that we have not mandated interested parties to modernise the construction of fine homes from local materials, and done so on an industrial scale. Missionaries built fine buildings with none of the technology or advantages that we have today, whether it was from stone, rammed earth, poured concrete or whatever the source. We can visit towns like Broome today and see buildings that do not take into account the locality and the needs that that climate creates.

We must create a level playing field for Australian food producers and processors. We produce the best and safest food in the world. That costs! Yet we allow imports that do not have the same standards for food safety and, therefore, those on-costs. That is unfair competition, and it also works against the interests of consumers. The Australian food safety watchdogs should be funded to do a proper job in assessing imports for pesticide residues, contaminants et cetera, and the results published so that consumers can make an informed choice. Many foods from overseas are grossly substandard and are cheaper because of not only low labour costs, but also farming and processing practices that would be illegal here.

By failing to take this issue seriously the federal government is helping importers to take market share from Australians, and in that process has exposed Australian consumers to greater food safety risks. If we cannot be profitable in our own domestic market, it will be even more difficult to provide capital to create an international market. The solution lies in Biosecurity Australia or Food Standards Australia New Zealand allowing in only those foods that meet the needs and standards that Australian producers must meet. The current situation in which our producers have to meet higher, and therefore costlier, standards than foreign competition is un-Australian.

Finally—members will be pleased—I raise the issue of electoral reform in reference to the process of the one vote, one value bill of 2005. Hon Jim McGinty, while promoting this bill, had discussions with the Liberal Party and the Greens (WA), who had input into the final effect of the bill. The Greens established a system for this house, and a section of the Liberal Party gave passage to the

bill. The Nationals were never consulted, but we were briefed. The bill was designed to give preference to the Labor Party in forming government. This was ill-conceived. The result of the legislation—I stated this at the time during debates in the other place—was that the Liberal Party was the major benefactor.

A paper on “Bruce Topperwien’s Legal Page” on the World Wide Web discusses three issues. The second issue relates to electoral equality and cites the cases of *McKinlay v The Commonwealth* and *McGinty v Western Australia*. The paper debates whether the constitutional requirement that members of the House of Representatives be directly chosen by the people of the commonwealth meant that equal numbers of electors are required within electoral divisions. All judges of the High Court of Australia except Murphy, J. held that the Constitution did not require equal numbers of electors in electoral divisions. The Supreme Court of the United States also held that, as nearly as practical, one man’s vote in a congressional election is to be worth as much as another. The Supreme Court of Canada has a finding of its own, and it settled on a definition of “effective representation”, which allows up to 25 per cent variation between ridings. In the United Kingdom several ridings have insisted on a single seat, whether it be a perceived advantage or disadvantage on the number of voters based on the community of interest. The mother of our Constitution does not use equality of voters as described by the American Constitution. I will quote the Australian High Court judges involved in this decision. Chief Justice Barwick stated —

Unlike the case in the American Constitution, the Australian Constitution is built upon confidence in a system of parliamentary government with ministerial responsibility.

He and other judges rejected the use of American cases to assist in deciding the matter. Justice Toohey declined to rely on American cases for guidance in this matter, and instead relied on Canadian cases for that purpose because Canada adopted and was built on the British tradition. Justice McHugh stated —

the Australian people do not regard one vote one value as an essential requirement of representative democracy.

He, too, rejected the American cases, as they would produce inaccurate results. Justice Gummow stated that the Canadian situation was far more applicable to Australian society.

The one vote, one value bill is based on the American Constitution and the premise of the bill has twice been found in our High Court to be against the intent of the Australian Constitution. The American Constitution speaks of equality. The Australian Constitution speaks of effective representation. The legislation requires amendment. Other matters worthy of a rewrite are: having people automatically registered for voting upon reaching voting age, based on their birth certificate and state records; an opt-out clause for voters based on the issues that are current practice—for example, religious beliefs; and a redistribution of seats based on population and not on registered voters.

I finish as I started: we live in interesting times.

[Applause.]

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