

## **DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY**

### *Statement*

**HON DIANE EVERS (South West)** [6.33 pm]: I want to go back to some of the things we were talking about last week when the Extinction Rebellion people were here. I want to talk about one of their points. They had three points. The first two were quite easy for everyone in here to understand: tell the truth, which we all think we all do; act now, which we all think we are all doing—they see it otherwise—but I also want to talk about beyond politics. Extinction Rebellion states on its website —

... government must create and be led by the decisions of a citizens' assembly on climate and ecological justice.

I understand that not everyone in here understands what a citizens' assembly is. I would like to take the opportunity to share with members what is meant by "citizens' assembly" so that we will possibly one day in the future take note of it, try to implement it, and follow along with the rest of the world who already do understand this.

A citizens' assembly is a technique used in participatory democracy. It is also known as deliberative democracy. It can provide a long-term view, more than just political cycles. Those political cycles make it very difficult to address some of the issues that take longer than three or four years to work out. It can also address bias and political influence, so it makes it a stronger democracy, something that we all share and is an important part of what we do here. Deliberative democracies are essential to deal with what are called "wicked problems"—problems that do not have a solution; there is no this way or that way. We have to come up with a balanced way of addressing them. These are complex problems that involve value judgement. That is why it is very hard for us to be representative of everyone, because we got in here through the system of elections that does not necessarily fairly represent the values of all people out there, because there are many other parts involved in our representative process. I have to say that there is no single answer that we can look to. Governments find it really hard to address climate change on their own. Climate change will take everyone to act. We will all have to work together—everyone out there, in here and across the world. Everyone has to get involved. It works best if the community has a meaningful opportunity to co-create the policy, the strategies and the actions.

A key aspect of participatory democracy is a demographically representative and inclusive group of participants. There is a process in which they can be randomly selected, but represent the diversity in the community. It is a process called "sortition". This makes sure that all perspectives are included, and it is similar to how we select our juries. We all understand the importance of that in the court, so why not take it to a larger scale? Another aspect is that it is informed and deliberative. Participants engage in informed deliberations to come to a wise decision that is widely accepted and supported. This has worked in the past and it can work again; it is being done in other places as I speak. It involves careful and respectful deliberation—not the sort of thing that we see in here all the time—and it is not a top-of-mind survey; citizens are provided with the information that they need to fully understand the issues. They hear all the major viewpoints and are given time to consider them. It should be influential. Something should happen as a result of it. People are getting tired of us saying, "We've done our consultation, we've gone out there." That is called the DAD system—decide, announce and defend. We go out there with what we are trying to come up with already in mind, or we go out to people in a community, listen to them, take back what they said and then continue to do what we said we were going to do in the first place. The processes involved in a deliberative democracy are designed and facilitated by independent professionals who have no vested interest in a particular outcome. It is guided by advisory bodies with diverse memberships to make sure that all views are included and that the process is fair. It is also informed by a range of expert panel members who provide knowledge for consideration. Random people are guided by people who facilitate the whole thing and bring in the experts and can call on more experts as they are needed. They can find all the information and then they are guided through a process to deliberate and get to some outcomes.

Techniques such as citizens' assemblies have been used successfully for decades over the world and in Australia. We have world experts in such processes. The City of Greater Geraldton is one place where it was used to develop its strategic community plan, "2029 and Beyond". That was run by Janette Hartz-Karp from Curtin University and the process won an international award for how it was run. There is also the New Democracy, which has run a number of very successful citizen juries in South Australia. There it is, again, in Australia.

I know that Labor understands this. Minister MacTiernan is recognised and known internationally for being a proponent of deliberative democracy, having used it with great success to create the "Network City: Community Planning Strategy for Perth and Peel" document, which is retained at the heart of the Perth and Peel@3.5 million plan. The minister also worked with Professor Janette Hartz-Karp to achieve these successes. Like I said, this is nothing like the usual forms of what we call consultation—decide, announce and defend. Those forms of consultation erode people's trust, and they lose faith in the political processes and make them less likely to want to be involved in the future. It just gets worse. We should not confuse this with what we have heard called plebiscites or referenda—they are very different. Those procedures have very little deliberative process, learning, sharing of information, or research. They are nothing like deliberative democracy. I am not saying that this is meant to replace representative

democracy, but it should be used to enhance it. We could even have a body equivalent to the Economic Regulation Authority or Productivity Commission on a national basis to decide when a deliberative public process is appropriate. This was suggested by the citizens who participated in a citizen jury run by the former Labor government of WA. At a time when the Australian public is clearly jaded by politics and governments, this is an obvious way to make better decisions, support action on climate change and win back public trust. I advise all members to do a bit of research of their own to find out what this process is about and to see whether we could maybe look into it here, as many other countries have done, such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, Poland, Canada, India and Belgium.

According to the Extinction Rebellion website —

Following a fragmented election result in ... 2010, Belgium spent 18 months without a government.

It states that during this time in Belgium —

... public intellectuals organised a mass exercise in deliberative democracy, the G1000. The project comprised three stages: an online consultation to identify topics—open to all citizens, a one-day citizens' summit of 704 people to discuss the three most popular issues (social security, wealth distribution and immigration), and a smaller 32-person citizens' panel which met over three weekends to refine the propositions of the summit. Both the summit and the panel reflected the population in terms of age, gender, education level, location and first language. The G1000 was characterised by its grassroots organisation and the fact it was not commissioned by a political institution. This—along with the fact that the political crisis came to an end during the course of the initiative—limited the impact of the G1000 on public policy. However, it gave rise to a renewed interest in deliberative democracy at political level and served as a blueprint for local initiatives across Belgium.

It got people involved, it got them interested and it got them paying attention. That is what we want if we actually believe that we want participatory democracy. Now, there is a permanent institution for citizens' assemblies in the German-speaking region of eastern Belgium. The website states —

The new body is set to convene its first assembly in early 2020 and is run by a citizens' council. Like the members of the citizens' assemblies themselves, the members of the council are randomly selected from the general population. They serve for a term of 18 months and are responsible for selecting the topics for discussion and monitoring the implementation of recommendations by parliament. Each citizens' assembly meets with members of parliament to discuss its proposals. Parliament must provide an explicit justification for any recommendations it chooses not to implement.

In that example, a random selection of people are in a permanent place and get 18 months at a time to let the government know what they want to do. If the government is not able to do that, it needs a good explanation for it. That way, people feel they are contributing to what happens. It is involvement. It is participation. I think it is what we need.