

POPULATION GROWTH

Statement

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [9.50 pm]: I note the article on the front page of today's *The West Australian* about a plan to water parks with recycled water. It brought to mind an issue that I want to speak briefly on tonight—that is, the accelerating growth rate of Australia's population, and particularly that of Western Australia. Soaring population levels are not something that people think about very much; however, I came across a couple of articles recently which suggest Australia's population will continue to soar with a combination of migration and births over deaths. Our state has a high level of net overseas migration, with the level last year at 50 600 people being an increase of 46 per cent. An Australian Bureau of Statistics media release on 28 March this year points to Western Australia experiencing record growth, reaching 2.45 million people as at 30 September last year, an annual increase of 3.4 per cent or 81 700 new residents. It is the highest percentage since the early 1970s and as Australia climbs to 23 million people, WA's growth rate is at least double that of most other states.

ABS director of demography, Bjorn Jarvis, is quoted as saying that the Australian population could reach 33 million by 2035, only 22 years from now and, given the continued consistent high growth rate, 40 million by 2050. Traditionally, governments have pursued population growth as a means of driving the economy, but I wonder at what point we can no longer sustain a population of that level. I wonder what Western Australia will look like in 50 years with that level of pressure on housing, food and particularly water.

Just yesterday *The West* reported that WA Police has been struggling with WA's rising population, which has increased demand and pressure on that department. Notwithstanding that our state has a land mass about four times the size of Texas, our population is concentrated in a tiny corner of the state; and even with a relatively reliable rainfall our current population has struggled with low dam levels and the government has had to resort to desalination plants that are pretty expensive to build and expensive to run. To add to that problem, a lot of our country towns have water piped out to them. Things are critical enough that there is talk of recycling sewage, which is not a very pleasant thought but something that we might be faced with. There has been a fair bit of media commentary on this issue recently.

Hon Jim Chown: A lot of country towns actually have recycled water in their sewerage systems right now and they have been doing so for at least 10 years.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I am sure they have, Hon Jim Chown, but a number of them also have a lot of piped water, such as Northam, Narrogin and Wickepin, all drawing from the south west.

There has been a fair bit of media commentary on the issue over the last few months. Considering that unfettered population growth and environmental wellbeing do not really go hand in hand, I am a bit surprised that the Greens have not been onto this issue. The question is: is our government even considering these issues and are we preparing for additional infrastructure, food and particularly water with our burgeoning population; and what maximum level of population can our state sustain?