

APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED FUND) BILL (NO. 5) 2003
APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED FUND) BILL (NO. 6) 2003

Second Reading - Cognate Debate

Resumed from 1 July.

MR J.P.D. EDWARDS (Greenough) [7.10 pm]: I understand that appropriation Bills provide an opportunity for members to speak on many interests. I will therefore concentrate on three or four issues. The Environmental Protection Amendment Bill that has been passed during the term of this Government has had a considerable effect on the farming community in my electorate of Greenough. The message from the farming community is that its members feel fairly isolated and that this Government has a do-not-care attitude. Many of the new regulations introduced under the legislation are causing them to feel as though they are being treated almost like criminals. I stress that, throughout generations, farmers have done what they always do - farm their land. As part of that, they are conservators of the land. I do not think that is acknowledged sufficiently by people who perhaps do not understand what is involved in farming practices. The farming community feels somewhat at a disadvantage because, as country people, their voice is not strong enough to put across their argument, although they have good advocates in this House and in the other place. Nonetheless, they feel that they are not sufficiently understood by the metropolitan community, particularly on land clearing issues. It is an issue that I have raised many times in this House and will continue to raise. The people in the farming community in this State should be acknowledged as some of the best conservators of land in the world and some of the best farmers in the world. Obviously, we have a very dry climate, which is becoming more prevalent as the years go by. The farming community is reacting to that with a no-tillage approach and various other means of growing crops. There must be better recognition of what the farming community stands for, especially when it comes to conservation. The cost to farmers of pesticides and fertilisers continues to rise. They must therefore be more efficient and more aware of how they farm their land. For some of them, the requirement to clear some land can mean the difference between whether they remain a viable enterprise or not. Three or four farmers in my electorate are in that situation. The new regulations have put an enormous amount of stress on not only some members of the farming community, but also their families and associated family members.

We must also recognise that government departments, such as the Department of Conservation and Land Management, have a role to play in being good, responsible agencies and helping to preserve the country and the countryside, which includes bushland. In the northern section of the State, large CALM reserves abut many farms. Feral animals, weed control and upkeep of the fence - the old rabbit-proof fence or the emu fence - are constant concerns. For farmers to be responsible, as the Government is requiring them to be about conservation, it is very necessary that departments such as CALM also live up to their responsibilities. I do not believe the farming community is being best served by CALM in that way. I emphasise the problems with feral animals and weed control. Wild dogs, emus and, to a lesser degree, kangaroos are problems for the farming community.

Another issue that concerns me somewhat is one that this Government has tried to address. However, I am not sure that the measures taken are the right ones to address the problem. Members will recall that some time ago I reported some events involving Aboriginal children in the township of Mullewa. At that time, most of the children to whom I referred were under the age of 10 and were running free on the streets of Mullewa any time after midnight, and sometimes at two to three o'clock in the morning. They had nothing better to do and were using rocks, sticks or anything else they could find to vandalise shopfronts and properties. It was only when I raised the issue in this House that the Government took some action. I give it credit for taking that action, albeit it was something of a knee-jerk reaction. I question whether the situation has improved since that day. Various meetings were held with the community in which townspeople, Aboriginal people, business proprietors and the local council were involved. I attended two or three meetings that various government departments attended. Some directions were taken for all the right reasons, but, unfortunately, to this day, I do not think the problem has been solved because the behaviour is continuing. One of the initiatives involved the old bowling club in Mullewa, which was vacated by the club because it was building a new bowling club. The suggestion was put forward that the young people should move into that. That was fine and very good. However, in the time between the bowlers moving out and some changes being made to the bowling club for the juveniles, some young vandals managed to get in there. They broke in and completely wrecked it. I am not sure of the cost, but certainly the Government put in money to repair the damage. It was brought up to an acceptable standard, and it is now basically, I suppose, for want of a better word, a youth club. I must be honest: I am not quite sure how much it is used. However, it is there for the use of the young people.

Nevertheless, I must tell the House that, according to my information, nothing has particularly changed. In fact - members would not be aware of this - there was a very good wildlife zoo in Mullewa, which was started by a gentleman by the name of Jack Murray. The member for Geraldton will certainly be aware of that, because he had some involvement with it. Sadly, that has closed. I am not saying that it was entirely for the reasons I am

about to give, but they certainly had a bearing on it. One of the reasons was that young Aboriginal children were getting into the zoo and either wounding or killing the birds and animals in it. There is still a problem in Mullewa. I relate that story because I do not believe it is common just to Mullewa; I believe it is common to many other towns with an Aboriginal population. I am conscious of the fact that I am making a specific point. However, I believe it needs to be addressed.

Members will recall some of the findings of the Gordon inquiry, its recommendations and the outcomes of them. We need to learn some lessons from that. Unfortunately, I do not believe we have the answer yet. I am conscious that the minister has released a new juvenile crime strategy, which will boost community safety in regional Western Australia. I have with me the media release that she issued at the time. However, we need to be able to pre-empt such matters. One of the ways of doing that is to bring in people who have an understanding of the situation and the authority to be able to deal with it.

I will give an example. In the Shire of Mt Magnet, the council took a positive view in trying to address this issue. It was fortunate to employ a gentleman by the name of Martin Seelander. I know Martin. He has an Aboriginal background. He is a large gentleman, and he has authority because of his bearing and standing. He has proved to be a very valuable person for Mt Magnet in controlling children under the age of 10 years. He has put programs in place. He can front up to those kids and - I do not know whether "make a threat" are the right words - certainly use the authority that he has to make them listen to him and, in fact, do what he tells them to do. If we could find 20 or 30 Martin Seelanders, we would be able to address this issue and probably solve it. I believe it is an avenue that the Government needs to follow. It is difficult to find people such as Martin Seelander. There are not many of them around, I guess. However, rather than trying to address the crime or the juvenile vandalism that takes place, as I said before, we should try to pre-empt it and perhaps we should employ such people. Rather than using the agencies, which operate from eight or nine o'clock in the morning until four or five o'clock in the afternoon, when the workers all go home, we need to have people there on a continuous basis. If something could be learnt from the situation in Mt Magnet with Martin Seelander, I believe we would be going in the right direction.

I will perhaps draw attention to a couple of other matters concerning that issue. Currently in the Geraldton region and in Northampton, there is the sad case of a 12-year-old girl who is being shuttled between Geraldton and Three Springs. Her family is dysfunctional. The magistrate in Geraldton decided that she might be better off in Three Springs than in Geraldton. However, nothing changed when she went to Three Springs. Three Springs is what I would call a fairly quiet country town. It just gets on with things and does not have too much of a crime problem. I believe that in the three or four weeks she has been there, there have been a number of break-ins. An 81 or 82-year-old lady has been scared out of her wits. I understand that that girl has now been transferred back to Geraldton. I know that the member for Geraldton is aware of that problem. We need to address that issue. I again come back to pre-empting the situation. We need to try to deal with these situations before they happen, rather than afterwards. This young lady of 12 has gone back to Geraldton. I despair about what will happen to her. I believe the magistrate has tried everything he can. The police do not have a facility in which to place her. She either goes into a cell or is sent to stay with relatives. If she goes with relatives, she finds time to break into somebody's home.

There is a similar situation in Northampton with another young lady, who I believe only three or four days ago managed to steal and drive a truck some distance down the road. I think she is only 11 or 12. There is an issue. I truly believe that we need to address that. Sure, we have juvenile crime strategies, but those sorts of things are after the event, not before it. We need to address the events before they happen, not after they happen.

Having said that, we perhaps need to address another area as well. Currently in the Geraldton and Greenough area, the police have a problem regarding a bail facility in which they can put these kids. There is nowhere they can go. They are put either in a cell or under the responsibility of a family member. That is not satisfactory and needs to change.

Mr J.L. Bradshaw: And they bring them to Perth.

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: Or they bring them to Perth. I thank the member for Murray-Wellington. However, that is still not a satisfactory situation.

Mr J.L. Bradshaw: It takes the police out of the area for whatever time.

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: That is absolutely right. Again, it is an issue that needs to be resolved.

I will very quickly move on to a local government issue. Perhaps this is more of a good news story than a bad news story, because what I have been talking about has probably been fairly negative. However, I needed to raise it because it is an issue in townships such as Mullewa, Mt Magnet, Meekatharra, Carnarvon and possibly Broome, which, without stating the case too clearly, all have Aboriginal populations. I believe it is incumbent

upon any Government to address that matter in a better way than is being done currently. However, there is a good news story, and I will recognise local government.

[Leave granted for the member's time to be extended.]

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: I acknowledge a local initiative for which I attended a function in the electorate the other day. In acknowledging that initiative, I also acknowledge the strength of local governments when they combine their financial and community resources. It is an issue for local governments, as a body, to better use their financial and community resources.

Mr J.B. D'Orazio: Amalgamations!

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: No; I was careful not to use that word and I am not espousing amalgamations. However, there is certainly a direction that local governments can take.

I was fortunate in attending a function the other day involving the shires of Coorow, Carnamah, Morawa, Mullewa, Mingenew, Perenjori, Three Springs and Yalgoo to launch a magazine called *Wildflower Country*. Those local governments got their heads together and decided that for the benefit of their communities they could better value their tourist dollar by launching the magazine *Wildflower Country*. I congratulate those councils for doing that, as it shows that councils can achieve an enormous amount when they get their heads together and work together. In that case, the vision and commitment put into the magazine came not only from councils but also from community members. I highly recommend that members take the opportunity to look at or get hold of a copy of *Wildflower Country*.

Finally, I want to comment on the proposed 27-storey building on the corner of Hay and Barrack Streets. Perth City Council, either tonight or tomorrow night, will make a decision on that proposal. I was heartened to hear what the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure said this afternoon on that issue. We are very light on with heritage in this State. The heritage precinct where that building is proposed comprises Government House, the Supreme Court buildings, St Georges Cathedral, the old Treasury building and the old Town Hall. It is probably the premier heritage precinct in the State. It would be irresponsible for any body, whether it be the council, the Government or any other body, to prejudice that heritage precinct by putting a building of some 27 storeys there. Over the years successive Governments have been irresponsible in the preservation of heritage. It is only when a building is gone and lost that we appreciate what we had. I heard Dr Jenny Gregory this morning on the radio say that at one time St Georges Terrace was like Collins Street, Melbourne. We could hardly call St Georges Terrace Collins Street any more. An enormous amount of history and heritage has been lost there and that concerns me. A 27-storey building overshadowing the premier heritage precinct in the middle of Perth would be a disaster. On that note, I will wind up my speech on the appropriation Bills.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Mr J.C. Kobelke (Leader of the House).