

**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

*Motion*

Resumed from an earlier stage in the sitting.

**HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary)** [5.08 pm]: I seek the leave of the house to continue my remarks at a later stage of this day's sitting.

Leave granted.

**The PRESIDENT:** I would like to remind members to observe the normal courtesies associated with a maiden speech.

**HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural)** [5.09 pm]: Mr President, I would like to begin my speech by congratulating you on your re-election as President and also Hon Adele Farina on her election to the position of Deputy President. Congratulations also to my fellow members who have been either re-elected or newly elected to the Legislative Council. I hope to establish good working relationships with you all over the next four years.

Today, like many before me, I speak for the first time in this house with a mixture of emotions, but above all I have a great sense of anticipation. Not only is this the first time I have spoken in this place, but also it is the first time in Western Australian history that a member of the Shooters and Fishers Party has spoken in the Western Australian Parliament, representing community values and signifying change. Many have asked, "Who are the Shooters and Fishers Party? Are they just about shooting and fishing?" I will come back to that a little later.

Firstly, as is custom with inaugural speeches, I will talk about my background so members can understand who I am and what I stand for. Apart from some primary school years in Harvey and a couple of high school years in Northam, I was born and raised in Bunbury, the son of an Italian migrant father and fifth-generation Anglo-Irish mother. I am very fortunate to have devoted and loving parents, who are here to lend their support tonight. Mum and Dad have always nurtured and encouraged me, my brother and sister in everything we have undertaken, no matter how audacious our plans might have seemed at the time.

When dealing with life's adversities and struggles, I always try to follow the example of my father's parents, Antonio and Catherina Mazza, for whom I have a great regard and deep respect. Southern Italy was a pretty bleak place after World War II and my grandfather was seeking a better life for his wife and nine children, so he made the life-changing decision to migrate to Australia. After saving the full fare, he temporarily left his family in Italy, and in May 1949 arrived in Fremantle aboard the *Toscana*. He was looking for opportunities and soon found work with the Public Works Department—the old PWD—out in the bush, living in tents and enduring the hardships of the time. My grandfather was used to going without and lived a frugal lifestyle so that he could send money home so that the family could be reunited. He first brought his older children out one at a time. Eventually, in 1954, and after five years apart, my grandmother and the two youngest children arrived in Fremantle aboard the *Neptunia*. I have often imagined the family reunion after all that time, which would have been made all the harder without the benefit of email, the internet or even the telephone. The spirit of seeking a better life, the acceptance of the risks and hardships and the sacrifices and determination to see it through is typical of many migrants to Australia. What I admire most about my grandparents' story is that although they had very few material possessions, they maintained their self-reliance, family values, compassion, faith, dignity and courage. These qualities have set an example that I have aspired to in my own life. Living to their 90s, they have now both passed, but their sacrifices have been well rewarded with their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren all doing well; all are an integral part of the Australian community.

Attitudes have changed since the 1960s and 1970s, but my family still suffered some moderate discrimination in those days, as happens now to people from different cultures who have chosen to make a new start in Australia. To me, however, growing up with the clash of two very different family cultures was a distinct advantage. One weekend we would be eating pasta and making Italian sausages and the next would be a typical Aussie barbie with an 18-gallon keg. I learned a great deal about people at these family gatherings, observing and learning the strengths and weaknesses and different attitudes, opinions, tolerances and expectations of people from different traditional backgrounds and cultures. This has held me in good stead all through my life and helped me understand and empathise with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Growing up in WA in those days was idyllic and carefree, with wide open spaces and plenty to explore. Like a lot of kids of that era, with no computers or video games, I spent many days camping, fishing, trapping rabbits and generally enjoying the great outdoors. I spent a lot of my teenage years spearfishing off the Bunbury breakwater with friends, scooping crabs in the Leschenault Estuary or hunting ducks with Dad. The eager expectation of duck season opening day is lost in WA for now but is still enjoyed in other states of Australia. These activities helped me develop my love of Western Australia and all things outdoors, which has continued to this day.

My father has always been a bit of an amateur naturalist, even back when it was not fashionable to be so. Dad spent many weekends with my brother and I examining insects like sand lions with their pits of doom or watching gold digger birds dig their nests in the sand, and generally just enjoying studying the cycles of life. I remember Dad once saved a cuckoo shrike abandoned from its nest, which we all helped raise over a couple of months. The bird would fly free all day but as soon as Dad arrived home from work, it would seek him out and land on his shoulder, the unusual story making it to the local newspapers.

After finishing high school I did what many young men did at that time and secured an apprenticeship, initially in private enterprise and later with Westrail. After qualifying, I moved into the fledgling south west mining industry working on heavy machinery. It was the mining industry, with its generous pay rates, that enabled me at the age of 21 and raising a young family to finance my first small business venture, a successful service station and workshop. Running a service station back then was hard work. The hours were regulated—you had to be open 12 hours a day from 7.00 am to 7.00 pm plus Saturday mornings from 7.00 am to 1.00 pm and weekend rosters. The hours were long, margins were tight and holidays, and even days off, were fairly rare. But it was there that I learned the valuable lesson that providing good service and developing people skills pays dividends. I also learned, often the hard way, that efficient administration, planning and systems are crucial elements in business survival.

After two years, I was looking for new challenges so I sold my service station business and entered the real estate industry as a sales representative. At the same time, I also started tertiary studies in real estate management so that I could get an agent's licence and operate my own real estate practice. Real estate is a very demanding business but at 23 it provided the challenges and rewards I needed to keep myself focused on what I wanted to achieve. After spending some time as a sales manager in a large real estate agency, managing more than 20 motivated sales staff—a big workforce with big egos to match—I completed the studies I needed for my real estate and business agent's licence and purchased a share of the company. I spent the next 20 years working in different facets of the real estate industry, building businesses in general real estate practice, property development, conveyancing and franchise networking.

In 2006 my wife, Brenda, and I decided it was time for a change and we liquidated all our business interests and moved on to our next stage of life as self-funded retirees. We indulged in spending time with our children and grandchildren and working on our farm at Rocky Gully in the beautiful great southern part of the agricultural region that I have the privilege to represent. The abundance of spare time I had rekindled my passion for the outdoors and I was able again to spend time hunting, fishing and enjoying a casual lifestyle after a demanding, hectic and sometimes gruelling business career. Having family with farming interests in the central wheatbelt and running our own farm in the great southern gave me the opportunity to travel through much of the agricultural region and meet local families. Getting involved with people in the region highlighted the many hardships facing not only farmers, but also other members of our rural communities. Poor seasons, live export restrictions, rising input costs and city-centric attitudes of the people in power have all contributed to a harder life for country people. When you hear of farmers having their neighbours on suicide watch, you know that things are pretty grim in the bush.

On reflection, it became apparent to me that a lot had changed since my youth. I recognised that a detachment had developed between the realities of country life and the fantasy of some urbanised attitudes; a disconnect between those urban attitudes and the realities of the natural world. Disturbingly, this disconnect with reality is being perpetuated and promoted by fanatical fringe groups with almost evangelistic piety and with little or no empathy for those people affected. These groups with their idealistic points of view offer no compromise and fuel their flawed arguments with half-truths and emotive rhetoric. I despaired at the way in which those influences determined opinion and attitudes and resulted in restrictions and loss of freedoms for the community. Some green and anti groups take the moral high ground and preach compassion, understanding and tolerance—that is, of course, unless your opinion differs from theirs. Animal rights extremists and their fellow travellers, with their self-righteous rhetoric, use emotionally charged campaigns that are designed to demonise and belittle anyone who opposes them, while country towns are penalised, sound farming practices are victimised, hunters and outdoor adventurers are being locked out and recreational fishers are squeezed out of marine parks.

All these things concerned me deeply, but I had hope that commonsense and logic would prevail. I began studying and researching the effects of different groups on our community and how certain outcomes had come into being. I became involved with clubs such as the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia, which has more than 150 000 members. I was also founding president of the WA branch of the Australian Deer Association, which is a nationwide hunting club with almost 5 000 members. The Australian Deer Association's code of ethics and hunter education courses symbolise respect for game animals and the environment in which they are hunted; it has some excellent field-to-fork training programs. Not everyone wants their food from the supermarket; free-range organic meat and fish harvested from the wild provide healthy alternatives and satisfy the natural need to provide for oneself and one's family.

It was in these organisations and among the wider community that I found a growing support for a change in attitudes towards hunting, shooting and fishing, and for a commonsense approach to environmental management. No fisher worth their salt wants to see a decline in fish stocks or the marine environment denigrated. No farmer wants to see their land degraded or valuable stock compromised. Responsible hunters, four-wheel drivers and campers respect the bush, and overwhelmingly these groups are conservation-minded. They resent, however, being locked out, banned and victimised because of the idealism of extremists or the bad behaviour of a few. If people are irresponsible, they should be prosecuted—ample existing laws are available to authorities to do so—but we should not punish everyone by excluding them simply because it is easier.

In my search for answers I set about completing a course with the University of Queensland's School of Animal Studies to better understand environmental and animal management issues. At the same time, I became aware of the Shooters and Fishers Party and followed the progress of the party over a number of years. I came to believe that the people of WA could benefit from representation by the Shooters and Fishers Party, and having always had a keen interest in politics, I thought that it might be something worth pursuing. Fundamentally, I am an optimist to a fault. While I am acutely aware of the realities of life, I believe that almost anything can be achieved with the right planning and mindset. I live my life with a glass-half-full attitude and I look for solutions to overcome adversity and setbacks.

Notwithstanding my optimistic outlook on life, I knew from the outset that to establish the Shooters and Fishers Party in WA would take a great deal of motivation and confidence. I knew that the controversial nature of the party would make it a substantial challenge and that, once started, it would have life-changing consequences. A couple of years ago I would have questioned myself on whether I had the courage and commitment to see the job through, then late in 2011 tragedy struck our family, with the loss of our only grandson, Mason. He was a beautiful little boy with a winning smile. The devastating effect on all of us was quite profound, particularly on Mason's dad—my son Aaron. For those who have lost a close family member, there is always a re-evaluation of our own lives and the realisation of our own mortality. As for me, it gave me the strength and conviction to not waste time being timid or half-hearted about fighting for what I believe in and want to achieve.

Early in 2012 I went to Sydney and met with the Shooters and Fishers Party of New South Wales. I found a common ground in the objectives of the party and that there was a real sense of genuine solidarity and mateship. On returning to WA I immediately set about establishing and registering a branch here. Time was against us to form the branch, get the minimum number of members, register the party and prepare a campaign for the March 2013 election. I was overwhelmed by the support from many different sectors of the community, with many people putting in countless hours to assist with the promotion and operation of the party. I am truly humbled by the commitment of those people and amazed by the speed at which things unfolded to the point at which I am standing before members today.

The original Shooters and Fishers Party, then known simply as the Shooters Party, was formed in NSW in 1992 by ABC journalist John Tingle. Like me, he was concerned by the lack of representation in Parliament for outdoors enthusiasts. John was elected to the New South Wales Parliament in 1995 and representation is continued by current Shooters and Fishers Party MLCs Robert Brown and Robert Borsak. However, the Shooters and Fishers Party is not just about shooting and fishing. It is made up of and supported by people who believe that excessive government interference in our lives has been a growing concern. People are worried that their basic freedoms and rights are being eroded and absorbed into a nanny state where the government legislates; the agencies under their control regulate; and the radical extremists scorn anyone who dares to challenge their point of view. Nobody wants to live in a society that is so bound up with legislation and regulation that we are not told what we cannot do, but what we can do.

The SFP recognises and is sensitive to the hardships experienced by those on the land and people who choose to live in country communities. The Shooters and Fishers Party strongly supports safeguarding our natural environment. Our supporters believe that proactive and sustainable use of our natural resources is a sensible way to manage our environment into the future. They believe our bush, rivers and oceans are there for everyone to share and enjoy in a sustainable and environmentally responsible way. The best way to do this is not by locking it away and restricting access in a misguided hope of preserving it, but to actively manage the landscape to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

I have been asked many times whether the party leans politically to the left or the right. The truth of the matter is that our members and supporters come from all walks of life and all political persuasions, all with a common interest of defending the rights and freedoms of responsible and law-abiding people. It has been the party's general practice to allow the elected government of the day to govern—that is what it is mandated to do—except when the government agenda is in clear conflict with sensible social, economic and environmental values or when it directly affects the people we represent. This is the very first time that the people of Western Australia have had a direct voice in Parliament to protect their cultural heritage and lifestyle through using commonsense

approaches to land and marine management. All Western Australians have a right to access and enjoy the environment while being mindful of conservation, but the current trend towards a lock-up approach to environmental management is alienating and unfair and fosters resentment. Western Australia has some of the nation's most onerous restrictions on fishing, firearms, hunting and four-wheel driving. In this thirty-ninth Parliament I will put forward for consideration and adoption sound policy for outdoor recreational sports to make them sustainable in the long term.

My major ambitions for this term are to introduce more sensible gun and fishing laws, reduce lockouts, allow for restocking of fish species, and permit regulated hunting in state forests. I will be working towards commonsense debate on issues such as a moratorium on marine parks and controlled access for recreational fishers through the use of rotational and seasonal closures to manage fish stocks rather than permanent blanket bans. I will also be working towards a review of some of the less sensible rules such as one dhufish per fisher rather than the current two dhufish per boat limit, restocking programs for prize species, and the formation of inland fishing hubs to provide fishing and camping opportunities for families, similar to that proposed by this government for Wellington Dam.

In the coming four years I will work towards a review of the Firearms Act to examine some of the unreasonable nonsense regulations and policies that achieve nothing for public safety and serve only to frustrate and entrap law-abiding people with unnecessary bureaucratic red tape. We all want effective gun laws, especially law-abiding gun owners, but we need effective gun laws that target criminals, not responsible sportsmen and women, people on the land or those with a legitimate reason to own firearms. Firearm ownership has been so marginalised that it is one of the only government services that does not provide a pensioners' discount on fees and charges despite being a major pastime for many of our seniors.

It is estimated that there are thousands of illegal firearms in the community; illegal firearms that are smuggled, stolen or manufactured and are mostly in the hands of criminals. That is where the focus of gun law enforcement should be. States such as New South Wales and Victoria have successfully utilised the free community resource of regulated recreational hunters to assist in feral animal control as an effective alternative method of environmental management. The economic benefits to New South Wales are estimated to be in the tens of millions of dollars. Its 2011–12 "Public Benefit Assessment" revealed that game-hunting licence holders directly spent \$76.2 million on conservation activities. Of this amount, an estimated \$56.5 million was invested in regional areas. That does not include the substantial social and cultural benefit to the community or the benefit to the state's environment and management agencies in managing and controlling feral pests. There is no reason a similar model would not work just as well in Western Australia.

In my term I will work to improve our often neglected country towns and regional centres, and I will be vigilant on any matters that may affect people in my region. Western Australia's large and growing four-wheel drive fraternity is losing access to more and more land through misguided environmental management principles. Four-wheel drive networks and camping facilities that allow controlled and responsible access to our public lands can only improve life in WA. Many tracks used by four-wheel drivers are also firebreaks, either real or de facto. Keeping firebreaks open to four-wheel drive vehicles keeps them free of vegetation and actually has a positive effect on the bush environment. Most four-wheel drivers—certainly the ones I know—are environmentally aware. Many clubs around the state have already "adopted" various tracks and areas of land. In recent years, for example, four-wheel drive clubs have restored many of the wells all the way through the long-abandoned Canning Stock Route. The track now has reasonably reliable water supplies at regular intervals and can once again be used, this time not by stockmen but by four-wheel drive adventurers. Four-wheel drive clubs have also resurveyed and recut other iconic tracks such as the Holland Track from Broomehill to Coolgardie; originally a shortcut to get supplies from the port of Albany to the goldfields and almost lost for 100 years but now open again for the enjoyment of four-wheel drive enthusiasts. There are countless other examples, but I will work to encourage the expansion of those principles so that areas can be kept open and responsibly managed by the people who use them for recreation.

I believe that in this house, as the state's house of review, we have a responsibility to explore and research ways to deal with issues other than simply banning the activities that raised the issues. That is certainly what I will be doing over the next four years. I am coming to the end now, Mr President; I thank the house for the opportunity to speak.

In closing, it is usual and right in an inaugural speech to also thank family, friends and supporters. Firstly and most importantly I thank my wife, Brenda, whose love and support knows no depth. I thank my five children, Mathew, Aaron, Elissa, Anthony and Jared; my parents, Carol and Gino; my brother, Mark, and sister, Laura, all of whose love and encouragement are my driving force.

Without support and guidance from the following people I would not be standing here today. I thank New South Wales Shooters and Fishers Party MLCs, Robert Borsak and Robert Brown, for their guidance and understanding that WA is its own state, and for the free hand given to do things our way over here. I thank

Shooters and Fishers Party analyst Glenn Druery for his keen negotiating skills and mathematical genius. He is a remarkable and gifted man who knows no peers in his field. I thank the Shooters and Fishers Party WA founding committee, particularly Ray Hull, Paul Marsh, Andrew Charleson, Dan Strijk, Mark McCall and Howard Barks. Their dedication, hard work and support have been invaluable and I treasure the strong bonds of friendship that have developed through this journey. I especially thank all the Shooters and Fishers WA members, many of whom travelled long distances to be at the party's foundation meeting, some driving more than four hours just to be there, which is an indication of their commitment. Most importantly, I thank the 22 000 Western Australians who gave the Shooters and Fishers Party their primary vote.

Finally, I thank the government and opposition leaders, Whips and members for their assistance and good wishes. Special thanks must go to Parliament House staff who have given me a warm welcome and eased the transition into parliamentary life with invaluable information, direction and effective induction courses. They certainly do a very professional and thorough job; however, I am sure they still have a fair bit of work yet on their hands with me!

I have probably been described as many different things, especially in my pursuit to establish the Shooters and Fishers Party here in WA, but I personally believe that I am fundamentally a simple family man with traditional family values. In my 52 years as a Western Australian I have seen many changes as our state has grown and prospered. There have been many positive changes with cultural diversity and economic prosperity in our vibrant, progressive state. There is much for the people of WA to be proud of and much more to be achieved.

I recently spent some time with my wife and one of our granddaughters in Kings Park, traversing the Kings Park walkway and generally enjoying the beautiful setting—a credit to the government of Western Australia and the authorities involved. On returning to the car park, I stopped under the old boab tree looking out to the south over the rivers and beyond. I read the plaque on the rail describing the scene of the landing by Dutch explorers in 1697 led by de Vlamingh and their climb to higher ground at Mt Eliza to look out at their surroundings. One could only imagine their thoughts. And later, in 1801, with the arrival of the French scientific research ship *Le Naturaliste*, explorers also climbed Mt Eliza to view the country. Eventually, in 1827, upon the arrival of Captain James Stirling to establish a future colony, explorers again climbed Mt Eliza and were effused by the view of the river and distant mountains, and considered the surrounding country to be particularly grand. Standing there in Kings Park, I also thought that the view was particularly grand and I was effused by the realisation of the depth of patriotism I have for this place where I was born, have always lived and now have the privilege to serve—the great state of Western Australia. Thank you.

[Applause.]

**HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary)** [5.39 pm]: I believe the Bunge initiative will bring a number of direct benefits to the grain-growing areas of Western Australia. Three of those that probably need to be highlighted are access to premiums available prior to the northern hemisphere harvest; access to direct port delivery premiums, meaning that on-farm storage and then delivery to a storage facility or an accumulation facility at port or up-country makes a very efficient transport chain from farm to port to vessel, and extra capacity provides greater ability to take advantage of grain price volatility; also of course there is a taxation benefit. Let us hope we have a string of very good years and growers can offset their income into the next financial year by storage and then selling when they can choose to take advantage of the spot-cash market. This grain going into Bunge will be by road delivery only. Railway lines from the interior or grain-growing areas direct to port no longer exist. There used to be lines in the 1920s, and probably up until the 1940s and 1950s, but they no longer exist. All this grain, therefore, will be rolling in by rubber. Everything we eat in this state rolls in by rubber. Somewhere it lands on the back of a heavy vehicle or a truck of some kind and then gets to its final destination.

As Main Roads informed me, the road traffic task is estimated at the peak of deliveries at 700 vehicles a day if Bunge is successful in accumulating its targeted tonnage. Those vehicles will be restricted access vehicles class 4, or pocket road trains, which are the ubiquitous form of heavy transport throughout the Agricultural Region and a very common and efficient way to move bulk products. There have been some contentious issues about the roads on which these vehicles will be carried. I must say to members that every kernel of grain that ends up in an accumulation point or a storage system gets there by road. The whole harvest of this state is delivered to a facility by road in a very compressed time. Usually over six weeks to two months, between 10 million and 15 million tonnes arrive at a destination point for delivery to a port at some future date. Bearing that in mind, Bunge officials had a number of meetings with all the shires involved and laid out their intentions to the shires. Some of the shires had issues about the increased traffic on their roads et cetera. I therefore took it upon myself on 1 May to visit the main shires that will be on the direct route from the Agricultural Region to Bunbury port. Those shires are Wagin, Darken and Collie. We had a good gathering of shire councillors at each of those shires. As I drove along the road from Wagin, down to Albany Highway, then headed back to Perth for about six kilometres and took the road that ends up in Darken and finally Collie, then ended up on the Coalfields

Road—highway—and eventually into Bunbury, I identified a couple of issues that I had brought to the attention of the minister and Main Roads. Probably the main issue is where the highway near Wagin hits Albany Highway. The intersection there connects with Albany Highway at a rise, and the road dips on the northern and southern sides of the intersection so that vision is limited for someone accessing Albany Highway from the direction of Wagin. The speed is limited to 80 kilometres an hour. However, that is fairly quick for a heavy vehicle pulling out onto a road, because it is virtually just moving after it has stopped at the stop sign, with cars or other heavy vehicles approaching at 80 kilometres an hour. I have suggested that the intersection needs significant work and realignment from a safety perspective. I have driven along that road many times in my role as a member of Parliament. The reality is that even in a car I find it dangerous; hopefully, that issue will be addressed. The other requirement is for a slip lane for vehicles turning off Albany Highway heading towards Darken. As these vehicles slow down to turn left, even though the road is speed limited, they need more road to slow down than normal vehicles and they need to be off the road. A slip lane would not impede traffic heading in either direction but it would help traffic heading north.

The responses from the councillors at the meetings were interesting. They were very supportive of the initiative. As one said, participation in the Bunge project by delivering his grain to Bunbury port will make an \$80 000 difference to the profitability of his farm on an average harvest. Coalfields highway, of course, is a quite congested point. It is the main highway from Collie into Bunbury. The government at this stage has invested a total of \$53 million in it. Another \$28 million will be expended there over the next three years, which will be spent on upgrading Coalfields highway; it includes \$22 million for upgrades between Wellington Dam turn-off and, I think, Allanson; and \$6 million will also be used to complete dual lanes in uphill sections of Redlands hill, because faster traffic obviously needs to pass trucks going up that hill as they crest over the top.

I fully support this program. I believe that it will enhance the bottom line of growers out there. It will bring real competition into the storage and handling of grain in this state. One must ask where this will leave Co-operative Bulk Handling. The reality is that Co-operative Bulk Handling has been around for a long time. If it loses one million tonnes out of the system—I believe in four to five years it will be between two million and four million tonnes—it will be under significant pressure. As I said previously, Bunge is not the only initiative. A Chinese consortium is also intending to export out of Albany. I am also aware of Japanese concerns that are seriously looking at doing something very similar in the northern wheatbelt out of Geraldton. The issue there is of course berth availability, but I am sure that if they get down and do the job and have a good look around, they will find a berth to fulfil their requirements.

Where does this leave CBH? I will give members a bit of background on Co-operative Bulk Handling. It was formed on 5 April 1933. In fact, it has just celebrated 80 years as the prime grain handler for Western Australia. It is based on the cooperative principles of one member, one vote irrespective of volume of grain delivered. CBH repaid all its start-up debts by 1943. Let me say that all those debts were paid by grower contributions. Those contributions were probably in the form of tolls, which I think growers stopped having to pay in the late 1990s. However, up until that time all growers paid a toll over and above the storage charges they incurred when they delivered grain to the system. CBH is a non-distributive cooperative. Growers are unable to sell or borrow against their shares to reduce debt and no dividend is paid to growers. Each shareholding has a value of \$2. When I left farming I had, and still have, my \$2 cheque from CBH. I do not know what it is worth today, but I imagine it is worth a bit less than the \$2 it was worth five years ago. A shareholding is achieved after growers deliver a cumulative amount of 600 tonnes of grain over a three-year period, and they lose the shareholding, of course, if they fall short of that parameter. Based on current grower numbers, with each shareholder valued at \$2, the current cumulative shareholding value by CBH shareholders is \$8 600. This is an interesting figure. I have tried to find out exactly how many growers were shareholders around the turn of the century. The number varies between 8 500 and 9 800, but today there are approximately 4 600 shareholders in CBH. That tells us that the attrition rate of growers out there in the community is enormous; it is better than 50 per cent. In the last 13 years, more than 50 per cent of Western Australian wheat growers have left the industry and are no longer shareholders of Co-operative Bulk Handling. That does not mean that land is not being put under agriculture. In fact, the same area of land is in the industry and is producing grain. In reality—this is an important point to make—the \$2 shareholders' cumulative value of their shareholding in their cooperative in an industry that is worth \$5 billion on average annually is \$8 600.

Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd's main asset is storage. It has about 198 storage facilities—it may be 199; 195 or 196 are up-country facilities. Every major port of this state has a CBH exporting facility worth large amounts of money. There is no doubt that they are the best in the world. This is a fantastic system that our grain growers have paid for. Of course, we have one at Kwinana, one at Geraldton, one at Albany and one at Esperance, and they have virtually captured the port side berthing arrangements for the export of all grains out of Western Australia. That is one reason why Bunge identified that Bunbury was a port that suited its purposes.

I will refer to some cash flow amounts from CBH's 2011–12 report. In 2011–12, CBH had revenue of \$3.089 million, a net profit after tax of \$162 million, total assets of \$2.155 billion, and an equity in those assets of \$1.242.8 billion. This raises a question. It is an issue about which I was quoted in the press recently, and that is the corporatisation of CBH. Corporatisation was attempted at the turn of the century. Under the cooperative arrangements that CBH has, 75 per cent of growers need to vote for a change of the entity. When it was first attempted in 2000, 58 per cent of growers decided that they wanted to vote to corporatise CBH, so it fell well short of the 75 per cent. The process that took place then was that the issue was debated for some time within the industry. At the time, the board pursued this outcome. It believed that this would be best for the cooperative in the long term. Mr Allan Watson was the board chairman at that time. Since Mr Allan Watson was the board chairman, the following chairmen, Mr Robert Sewell and Mr Tony Critch, whom I spoke to about this on a number of occasions, also believed that the best outcome for growers in Western Australia would be the corporatisation of this cooperative, which has done a fantastic job, I might add. However, as I said earlier in my address here today, sometimes beliefs about better outcomes or possible outcomes are ignored by what is really a very conservative industry. As I said earlier, the benefits of deregulation to the Western Australian grain grower have been absolutely immense, to the tune of around \$100 million a year, and that is just on the differentiation of \$10, if not more, between us and the eastern states. That is probably due to our proximity to Asia, which is our growing market for grain, and probably will be our prime market into the future.

What would the corporatisation of CBH be valued at? I was at a meeting in Lake Grace at which there were 30 grain growers. It was a Western Graingrowers Committee meeting, and a CBH director was there. He believed that CBH was worth in the vicinity of \$7 billion; that is what this cooperative is worth. As I said previously, the collective shareholding of our \$2 shareholders is \$8 600. At that meeting, I thought that that was a pretty high estimate. Of course, corporatisation was discussed, and there was a bit of toing and froing. This was prior to all the rains, when people down that way were fairly stressed. I asked the question, "How many people in the room are actually grain growers?" and the majority put up their hands as being active grain growers. Prior to that, the director said that if that price of \$7 billion was a factual amount of the worth of CBH, and if CBH was corporatised and that money was distributed to all the grain growers who are currently shareholders, they would receive, across the board, about \$1.5 million. That is an enormous amount of money when we convert the \$2 share into something that is tangible as such. I asked all these guys in the room, "Of the 30-odd grain growers here, would you corporatise CBH as a cooperative and would you be happy to receive whatever it's worth on the credit side of your balance sheet?" To a man they all put their hand up.

We have heard in this place on a number of occasions about how bad farming is. Farming is not bad; I think farming is very good. But the problem with farming is a lack of equity, a lack of cash flow, and a lack of tradeable assets in regard to a farmer financing his requirements. Here we have an entity, which is a cooperative today, worth billions of dollars. I personally believe it is probably worth about \$3 billion to \$4 billion. The question is: why should CBH, as a cooperative, not be corporatised before we have 2 000 farmers left, to allow these people to have on their balance sheet a tradeable share that they can keep themselves or sell? I believe that most of them would keep it, because these would be very tightly held shares. They would have a value. Facing the competition that I have just described, I think it is essential that something like this take place to allow CBH, as an entity, to have some loyalty from its growers, because if it does not have loyalty from people, they will go elsewhere. If CBH loses two million, three million or four million tonnes on an annual basis—that is its core reason for existing; it earns most of its income from storage and handling charges—it is going to wither on the vine; and, if it withers on the vine, it will be an absolute tragedy for this industry, because my grandfather, as opposed to every other grain grower in this state, my father and I have made significant contributions to this cooperative with the understanding that we would get something back. Up to this time, what we have had in return is efficiencies, but those efficiencies are not being met today. All I am asking is that a fair debate take place within the industry about this very important matter.

I am very disappointed about the response I have received in public from people such as Mr Neil Wandel, the chairman of CBH. In regard to his response to my article in the paper, I am sure Mr Wandel could not have read it correctly, because at the end of the article I said—I made it very clear—that I believe this debate needs to take place within the industry. I quote from *The West Australian* of 6 May 2013 —

CBH has declared war on critics of the co-operative as it prepares an aggressive strategy to take the fight to the multinational companies growing more active in the Australian grains industry.

I think I have addressed that. It continues —

CBH chairman Neil Wandel called for an end to speculation about the corporatisation of the grower-owned co-operative from what he described as a "vocal minority".

Let me inform Mr Wandel that I am not a shrinking violet. Regardless of what some people believe, this is an issue that I discuss quite openly with growers wherever I go in the Agricultural Region. In fact, on the occasion

that we visited the wheatbelt a number of months ago with the Premier and Hon Ken Baston, the Minister for Agriculture and Food, I raised this at a number of grower meetings. What always surprises me is that at the meetings we get the Western Australian Farmers Federation bullfrogs who jump all over the throat when the issue is raised and yell everybody down, but after the meeting the majority of people come up to me and quietly say, “I think you’re right. We would like to see this happen.” Responses from a board chairman about this very important matter along the lines that I have just stated and quoted from the business section of *The West Australian* are inappropriate, because a chairman who is representing a number of shareholders at the very least, I believe, should say, “Let’s have a look at this; let’s have a discussion about this; let’s have a pros and cons debate about whether this cooperative should be corporatised. Let me hear from the shareholders.”

In 2010, a CBH questionnaire went to a thousand growers—less than 25 per cent, I might add. I hope Mr Wandel is not using his response to this particular question and taking the information from that survey, because I do not believe that survey is comprehensive. It was not across the board. In light of the current situation with competition, I think Mr Wandel and his board need to be very serious about this issue.

*Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.30 pm*

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** I seek leave to continue my remarks at a later stage of this day’s sitting.

[Leave granted.]

**The PRESIDENT:** The question is that the motion be agreed to. I call Hon Paul Brown. Members, I remind you that this is the member’s maiden speech and the usual courtesies apply.

**HON PAUL BROWN (Agricultural)** [7.31 pm]: Thank you, Mr President, for the opportunity to speak to the house on this occasion. I first pay my respects to the Indigenous owners of the land upon which we meet, the Noongar people, and acknowledge their elders, past and present. It is with much humility and great honour that I stand before you today to give my inaugural speech to the house. I have been given a great amount of advice about this occasion—what I should say and how I can express myself to lay a foundation for my career as a state parliamentarian. It was all good advice and given by well-respected people who have walked this same path. To them I say thank you and I hope that I can do them, my family and friends and my electorate proud, both today and in the future.

My children are now the fifth generation of our family to live in the Avon Valley, and I take pride in knowing that I now represent this area as part of my duties to the house. The Avon Valley, as I am sure all members are aware, was the first inland part of our state to be settled as the early pioneers moved away from the agricultural restraints that were apparent on the Swan coastal strip in 1831 and set out to expand their estates and provide the certainty of a sustained food source for the developing coastal settlement. Balladong Farm, the first farm in inland WA, is still there at York today. This area became the staging post for the early exploration of the eastern parts of our state. Our new state needed to provide for itself and it was in the Avon Valley area that they found the ability to do this. With its rich fertile soils and abundance of fresh water, this is where agriculture as we first know it kicked off in WA. It was from there that the wheatbelt expanded to become the food bowl that it has been for the past century. We were able to earn our fledgling state its first dollars in export income.

I am just a simple country lad, born in country WA, grown in country WA and have made my life and my family back on our small farm in the Avon Valley. I was born in Geraldton in 1969, a year famous for so many special events, but two come to mind first in many people’s minds. It was the year that man first walked on the moon and the year that many tried to descend back into the Stone Age at Woodstock. My father was a crayfisherman and prawn trawler captain and he and mum were living in Dongara at the time when I decided to make my entrance into the world. So off they popped to Geraldton, not quite the easy trip from Dongara as it is today. Many apparently thought that mum was having twins but both then and probably now I am sure she was relieved that there was only one of me. I still take pride when driving past the old St John of God Geraldton Hospital where so many more of my father’s side of the family were born. I remember being there many years later for the births of my sister and brother. My mother and I moved back to Merredin, from where we had been living in Exmouth, due to the breakdown of my parents’ marriage. My first real memories are of our first house in Todd Street down by the railway line. Maybe that is why I sleep soundly when staying near a railway line these days.

Mum was born and raised in Merredin, and her family had been part of the community for decades. We were living in town and mum was working two or three jobs to put food on the table and clothes on our back, either cleaning up at the high school or working down at the doctor’s surgery. I cannot remember ever needing anything as mum always planned ahead, squirrelling money away for Christmas or birthdays to make sure that I was never disadvantaged. I never really grew up with a father in the house but my mum did the job of both, whether it was helping me to build cubby houses, fix my beloved pushie or coach my junior football side. I was always surrounded by the great role models from within the community. But on the down side, for me at least,



she was always ready to get the wooden coathanger out and give me a well-earned dose of home-style discipline, frequently.

It was there in the Merredin district that I spent my formative years learning how to catch yabbies in dams, playing footy and cricket and getting up to the general sort of mischief that country lads get up to while growing up. I can still run my hands along my shins and remember which chunk was taken out climbing over which piece of old farm machinery. Every time I look in the mirror, I see the scar near my right eye from when I tried to rearrange my own skull by falling off the pig fence onto the pig trailer. On the frequent times that I spend the night in Merredin, I stay in the B&B that used to be one of the doctor's surgeries where I got stitched back together on quite a few occasions. The bedroom that I sleep in is the old office where this was done.

Merredin was a fantastic town to grow up in back in the golden days of agriculture and general wheatbelt boom. The people were diverse, industries thrived and government departments were giants that helped to support the town with their large staff levels and all the services that they provided as part of the community. It was perhaps the largest town in the region by far, but everybody still seemed to know what everyone else was doing. It was in this environment that I learnt that you did not need to be afraid of a bit of hard work and that getting dirty was part of the job. It was drummed into me at an early age that you will only get out of something equal to that what you are prepared to put into it.

We had a number of great schools full of kids from a diverse selection of backgrounds. Buses full of kids from all over the district disgorged each morning at the entrances and then loaded up at the end of the day for what may be a long journey home for most. My grandfather drove one of those buses that took some to the far reaches of the district and he stayed at the farm overnight during the week. How times have changed. The buses still deliver kids to the wonderful new K-12 college in Merredin but the old schools have closed their doors these days and the numbers of kids carried on the buses are but a fraction of what they once were. I went to South Merredin Primary School for grades one and two before spending grades three and four at North Merredin. Friends made at these two places I count as some of my dearest, even now. We may not see each other with great frequency any more but it is like we have not been long apart when we do. Both of those primary schools are no longer in use and lie dormant waiting for their next incarnation or the wrecking ball.

Schools were an integral part of the social fabric then and I think that they are even more critical to our country towns now in the role of keeping kids in the regions and involved locally. I had some wonderful people help me to develop into a curious young man, perhaps a bit overconfident but certainly not afraid to take on anything. It was here that I learnt that everyone should be able to get a fair go regardless of their background or circumstances. My grandfather was one of my great mentors. He took me with him as a young boy and made me try everything that he was doing, teaching me how to fish, play a mean game of rummy and generally enjoy everything that I was doing. Winning was not big on his agenda as long as you had fun doing it. He and my grandmother even used to subject themselves to Sunday evenings watching *Countdown* on the ABC just so they could understand what I was talking about. My grandmother was a helper at the local kindy that I attended and was a great educator but probably missed her calling as a teacher. If only she liked being with people other than her family.

Our family travelled over the eastern wheatbelt, attending sports carnivals and to Perth for Country Week. My mother was a born and bred Merredin-ite and everywhere we went she was known for her sporting exploits. She was a champion at netball, basketball, swimming and athletics. So along with football and cricket for me, sport kept our family pretty busy. It seemed to me that our family was involved in just about everything that was going on in the community, whether we were participating in the debutante balls, one of those curious coming-of-age events that you no longer see today that have been replaced by school balls, or the continual roster of country barbeques and local dances that we had to attend—parents inside, kids outside or perhaps asleep in the car. The country was a great place to grow up and learn how to make your own fun and make lifelong friendships.

A few years later, we moved to Perth due to the illness of my grandfather, who was not expected to live much longer, and so I found myself living close to the beach and going to school in Scarborough. It was time to make new friends and learn the ways of city living, although in those years it was still pretty simple and we did not think much about the possible dangers that concern us about living in the city these days. I learnt how to surf and added this to football, cricket and squash as sports that I spent most of my time involved in.

I started high school at Churchlands, and I finished at Scarborough High, which has actually been demolished as well, so there appears to be a bit of a theme with the schools that I attended. I then went to TAFE to study horticulture. This appeared to be a good choice, as it was outside mostly and was physical in nature. I enjoyed this career for many years, becoming manager of a nursery, and having my own small landscaping business. I then went on to join the Department of Agriculture and as part of my duties became a stock inspector for the live export section of the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service.

After a few years working for the Department of Agriculture, I resigned and went to work for the live export industry, starting with Emanuel Exports and spending a few years learning about the internal workings of the industry. I decided to continue my studies at this point, and after some inward reflection I decided that many of my teachers at school had been a fairly good influence on me over the years, so it was off to Edith Cowan University to do a teaching degree. It took about two and a half years to realise that I wanted to keep working in the live export industry, which I had still been doing to put food on the table while studying. For those keeping score, the Edith Cowan campus that I studied at has long been demolished.

I went on to work for Wellard Rural Exports and spent the next eight years working as a livestock officer-stockman and had the pleasure of working in some great parts of the world that I would never have seen had it not been for that job. A small list of some of the middle eastern countries that I worked in includes Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Jordan, Turkey and Israel. Combine those with many parts of Indonesia and Malaysia, along with a little spell in Namibia, and members can see that I was fairly busy and always on the move to or from somewhere. But I learnt a lot from doing this job and was part of a small management team, and I look back fondly at the time I spent with them.

The agricultural industry has been the backbone of Western Australia since shortly after Governor Stirling first arrived in this state. We are an agricultural export state, and, long before the minerals boom, WA was exporting its produce, thereby feeding and clothing a good part of the world. Whether that produce is grain, wool or meat, or fruit and vegetables, WA has been at the forefront of agricultural innovation, and our farmers are widely regarded as the best dry land farmers in the world, operating in what now appears to be some of the most marginal conditions that one could ask anyone to farm in. The size of some of the farms in this region is considerable, rivalling some small countries, in fact, and the grain and produce that these farmers are able to grow in a good season is staggering.

The livestock export industry is a large part of agriculture in Western Australia. It has provided our sheep and cattle producers with a stable, competitive base that has allowed them a diverse income over many decades. I have been involved in the live export industry now for some 23 years, starting firstly with the Department of Agriculture and then moving to the private sector, as I stated earlier. For many years, I worked at two of Australia's largest exporters, as well as many of the smaller ones, throughout the Middle East and many South East Asian countries, and spent much time in Indonesia. I was lucky enough on many occasions to be involved with these companies when they were opening new markets for Western Australian produce that was in demand. I was also fortunate enough to be in many of these countries during times of political and social change.

The live export industry is currently going through a considerable period of re-regulation. With the introduction of the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System into all of the Australian markets that our livestock is exported to, we have seen a near halving in the number of animals exported, and the industry faces a growing army of the public that wants to see this number reduced to nil. Quite simply, the vast majority of the members of the public who oppose the live export industry are unaware of the fundamental dynamics of the global meat trade within which they want us to totally immerse ourselves. The animal welfare lobby wants the industry to be abolished and blames it for the loss of tens of thousands of Australian jobs. This claim is just fanciful. A wide range of structural changes within the meat processing sector, coupled with increased wage levels, had made smaller, more distant abattoirs unviable. Many of the larger companies within the animal processing sector were modernising and moving production into larger complexes that were located close to the main population centres. The reality is that the live export and meat processing industries within Australia actually complement each other. The type of animal that has generally been bought and exported live for many years is not of the standard that the meat processing sector has sourced, with the meat processors typically buying younger, ready-to-kill animals, while those for live export have traditionally been older, larger-framed ones.

Animal welfare is now a weekly headline that is thrown around as an accusation at the live export industry, and farmers, by the welfare lobby and a poorly informed public without any real understanding of what changes have taken place and the implications that their calls for abolition will have. One wonders whether they are aware that what they are also doing is engaging in racial and cultural discrimination towards our trading partners.

The current federal government is rushing this industry headlong into structural change and legislative over-reaction, and the void being created by our removal from these markets is happily being filled by a number of other countries. This over-regulated removal of our industry from these markets will undoubtedly lead to further detriment for our farming families and communities. It will also lead to a poorer animal welfare outcome for animals globally, as Australia is the only country that exports live animals that is investing in fundamental change in animal welfare, not only here at home, but in our client nations. Be clear on this! No other country is investing in animal welfare in the foreign countries for which their livestock is destined.

The rhetoric and accusations that are constantly being aimed at the people in the farming and live export and associated industries has now reached hysterical levels, with farmers and their families being demonised and

abused, along with truck drivers being spat on and their trucks being tampered with on occasions. Some of the activists have even been found trying to release animals from trucks parked close to main roads. Do these activists not think of the ramifications of their actions, both on the animals that would be wandering along these busy roads if they were to be released, and on the people in cars who might be adversely impacted by what they have just done?

The changes to the live export industry, initially brought about by footage from Indonesia, is causing massive ongoing hardship within the livestock farming sector. Pastoralists throughout the north of the state are under daily pressure to find market for their livestock that they have spent a few decades building into a large animal reservoir that would go on to feed a good portion of the planet. I know a number of these pastoralists who are hanging up the “for sale” sign, as upward pressure on inputs, combined with downward pressure on their meagre returns, has conspired to create a perfect storm, forcing many to leave the land and the industry forever. Many of the pastoral stations in the north of the Agricultural Region are finding that they have been removed from access to many of our markets because our client countries have removed themselves from trading partnerships that have lasted for decades and served our agricultural industry well. Combined with this is the detrimental environmental impact being caused to these pastoral properties by large numbers of livestock that can no longer be sold into traditional markets and are not being bought by the meat processors. The animal welfare lobby and the meat workers union say that the processors will increase their slaughter numbers and these animals will be sold as box meat around the world. Quite clearly, those statements are not grounded in the reality of what is actually happening to the livestock production sector and I consider them to be fallacious at best.

Having been an owner and operator of a number of agricultural businesses, I am well aware of the monetary struggles that many of our pastoralists and farmers are currently going through. A few years ago my partners, Drs Chris Cooper and Rob MacPherson, and I identified a demand in the Pilbara region for more cattle services. We looked at the predicted weather models, and, along with the burgeoning demand for Australian livestock overseas, it was apparent that it would be wise to invest in building a feedlot and depot for exporting cattle. For a few years we appeared to be geniuses, with our business undergoing a rapid expansion while we outperformed our competition. Then came the federal government’s decision to suspend the trade with Indonesia, and our feedlot now sits nearly mothballed, with employees laid off and a service nearly lost to the wider industry. It is only now likely to hold cattle again as they make preparations for a shipment bound for the Middle East, only the second to leave the Pilbara in over two years thanks to our federal government’s mismanagement of the trade and the relationships with our long-time partners overseas.

This pressure is also reflected in the eastern wheatbelt and other farming regions of Western Australia. With climate change contributing to varying rainfall from year to year, large increases in both input costs and bank finance restrictions, competition in a global market hampered by an Australian dollar that has been at record highs, along with a supermarket duopoly that restricts competition and supplier returns, it is little wonder that, when we combine this with the meagre returns to farmers from their livestock due to federal government intervention in our overseas markets, we country parliamentarians are being inundated with greater calls for assistance.

But the people of this region and our agricultural industry are very resilient and will continue to apply themselves to their trade with all the vigour and ingenuity that has been shown here for decades. Sheep and cattle will be bred, wool will be cut, and crops like wheat, barley, canola and lupins will be grown. Prices will continue to fluctuate with the vagaries of international demands and markets and the rain will also be a wish on the lips of its citizens. But the sun will still come up every day and the agricultural industry will continue to provide the backbone to this state long after the resource booms have faded into distant memory. The Nationals WA recently campaigned with a vision for agriculture that will help the industry set itself for what many say will be the Asian century, and we are committed to investing the \$300 million that we believe will lead to Western Australia becoming a major contributor to the Asian population expansion. We announced a package of investment that includes \$75 million for infrastructure and tens of millions of dollars for research and development innovation across a range of sectors for the development of projects to carry the industry forward to capitalise on our already considerable relationships with our near neighbours.

One of the reasons I joined the Nationals WA in the period after the 2008 state election was I saw how regional Western Australia was again being given the credence it had long been craving after many years of neglect by successive governments. The royalties for regions program has been able to instil in our regional communities a sense of gratitude made from the recognition that these regional communities have for so long held themselves together with their own ingenuity and sense of bloody-mindedness and that they forever just got on with looking after themselves. The royalties for regions program has been a godsend to many of the small country towns in the local shires. Ideas and projects that were for so long left to collect dust on the shelf due to the sheer financial burdens that would have been levied onto ratepayers were taken down and presented to a program, and a team, that was finally capable of determining a positive outcome.

To our leader, Brendon Grylls, I am proud to be able to say that after watching you change the face of state politics and cheering you on, I can now count you among my good friends. To my colleagues within the Nationals WA, thank you for your guidance and friendship, and the trust you have given to me. Particular thanks must go to the Nats' most recent president, Hon Col Holt, for the wise counsel he has given to me since I began to give voice to my potential candidacy. The blame falls squarely at your feet, brother, for me being here today! I would also like to acknowledge another one of my mentors in our party. Mia Davies has been, and continues to be, a good friend to my family and I, and the considerable amount of time I spent with Mia throughout the recent campaign showed to me the enormous expectations she puts on herself as her electorate's representative, which I can only hope to be able to emulate throughout my parliamentary career.

Royalties for regions will forever be synonymous with the Nationals WA. It has begun to revitalise our communities and is delivering fundamental economic and social change to Western Australia. I am proud to say that I have now become part of the team that was the catalyst for this momentous program and the vision that we have for our electorates and the people of regional WA.

The recent election campaign was a baptism by fire for me. Any particular ambitions for preselection that I may have been harbouring were tempered with the reality that I was standing against some great servants to the National Party. There were obviously a few contentious moments through the process and I finally found myself at number 2 on the ticket alongside Martin Aldridge, Jill Sounness, Cathie Bowen and Rosalba Butterworth. We had a great team that managed to cover the whole of the Agricultural Region throughout the campaign and our good management allowed us to provide a great level of support to our lower house candidates in Mia, Shane Love, "Tuck" Waldron and Shane van Styn. We were supported by a fantastic team of staff and volunteers who worked above and beyond the call, Joe Lundy, Jamie Forsyth, Heather Giles, Sue Middleton, Clare Creegan, Bryn Butler, Dexter and Leonie Davies, Barb Silvester, and Lisa Cole. I would also like to thank one of our great supporters in Sue Muntz, who is currently gravely ill, and I would like to let Sue and David know that we are all thinking of them. I apologise to anyone that I have not mentioned, but I am sure that you will know that your contribution was valued greatly by our team and I.

It is great to be part of the Nationals family and I would like to express my gratitude to all of the staff and members, particularly our volunteers from the eastern states who came over to help. To my personal support team, new and old, the Fullgraves, but in particular my Aunt Lyn; to Leon Musca, Jeff and Rebecca Miller, Glenn Thiele, Shannon and Debbie Metcalf, Chris Cooper and Rob MacPherson, I say thank you.

The Agricultural Region is a vast tract of land full of diverse people and backgrounds. It has in its 200 000 square kilometres places of such extreme harshness that have broken both men and machines since our European pioneers first started moving out into its rugged wilderness, areas that in some parts could only be tackled with camel trains in the early days. Nestled alongside this harshness are areas of such majestic beauty that their images would fill whole photographic libraries. Farming, forestry, fishing, tourism and mining are just a few of the industries across the breadth of the Agricultural Region that bring wealth to the local communities. The region has the luxury of vast resources and its hard-working citizens have been able to exploit this wealth to create a great variety of communities and fill them with vibrant, passionate people. It has only been over the last four years that the certain collapse of some of these regional towns, their clubs and local groups has been stalled and we have been able to see some revitalisation take place.

Throughout the Agricultural Region we face many challenges to ensure that these communities that have provided the lifeblood of WA for generations can continue to thrive and provide the diverse wealth that we as a state currently enjoy, and opportunities exist across the region to ensure that we are part of the mechanism that drives this state forward. Large wind farms in Geraldton, Merredin and Badgingarra are creating green power to help supply our towns and industries and solar farms are on the way. What was a fledgling mineral exploration and mining industry in our midwest has now turned its early efforts into vessels full of valuable resources and is now sending them off to our client nations to earn export income for our state. Towns like Morawa and Perenjori are ideally situated to capitalise on this development and the communities in that area are beginning to reap the benefits of collaboration with the companies.

The Turquoise and Batavia Coasts, from the north of Perth right up to Kalbarri, a coastline of stunning beauty, have now been made more conveniently accessible due to the opening of the Indian Ocean Drive. Tourist numbers through this area have exploded, bringing with them the additional demand for services and amenities, along with prosperity to the small businesses that have held on for so long and are now beginning to expand. Perth-based business and industry is now aware that many of the towns within the region can become supply and engineering centres and that their needs are being readily accommodated by the shires that welcome the investment into the area. These towns are able to leverage this expansion in local industry into better services and a more diverse range of business opportunities for their communities and those nearby.

The needs of the various individuals and communities within the Agricultural Region are too numerous to mention here in detail and I do not want to outline a litany of what I want to achieve during my time in Parliament. But what I will say is that my vision for the region is aspirational and I would like to say to the citizens of the electorate that my office will always be ready to help and that the phone will always be answered or calls returned so that they may raise with me any issue that they think is of enough concern that they need this great institution to be involved. I do not choose to gloss over any of the other particular hardships being felt within my electorate, but I feel that by highlighting only a small number here, I will be seen to be giving undue focus to those at the expense of other equally important concerns and this is not my desire. I would like to thank the people of the Agricultural Region for their trust in me and the Nationals to advocate on their behalf for what we believe is in their best interests.

Can I also say thank you to you, Mr President, and to all of the staff here at Parliament House for making me feel very welcome over the last few months and I look forward to a long and healthy relationship with you all. To my new colleagues here in the chamber, I say thank you for your good grace and for the best wishes that you have shown to me, and I look forward to working with you for many years to come.

I would not be standing here today without the unconditional support of my family. To my brother, Ashley, and sister, Melissa, my father and my wider family, I say thank you. To my mother, thank you just does not seem to be enough to express my gratitude and love for you or for the way you selflessly gave of yourself to ensure that I had everything that was needed, but thank you anyway. My wife, Rebecca, has been my constant companion and able partner for 13 fantastic years. She has raised our two wonderful children, Jaymee and Jack, and has provided to me something akin to the wisdom of Solomon on many occasions. She is my greatest cheerleader —

[Interruption from the gallery.]

**Hon PAUL BROWN:** Shush, dear!

She is my greatest cheerleader and harshest critic, and I still cannot see that her decision to allow me to follow this path was the wisest she has ever made. Knowing that I will be absent for much of the next four years and given that I have already been absent during much of the campaign, as well as with my business and work commitments over the preceding years, Rebecca was all too ready to support my endeavours and was an integral part of the campaign team and has been able to add many of the Nats to her list of good friends. Who could have foreseen that a drink and a dance at the footy club one night may have led to this? She actually does not like politics very much and I am sure she will learn to loathe it in time, but she still drove all the way out to Mt Walker on polling day by herself to set up and man the booth when a few of our volunteers had car trouble the night before, and we won that booth. I am sure that I will be copping flak about that for years to come—I am sure. But the love of my wife and my kids will always be victory enough for me. Regardless of what the future may hold, my life is better for them being in it. Thank you, Rebecca. I love you, Jack and Jaymee above all else.

[Applause.]

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Peter Collier (Leader of the House)**.