



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Lynn MacLaren MLC
(Member for South Metropolitan)

Budget Debate

Legislative Council

Wednesday, 17 June 2009

Legislative Council

Wednesday, 17 June 2009

Inaugural Speech

Hon Lynn MacLaren MLC

(Member for South Metropolitan)

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

HON LYNN MacLAREN (South Metropolitan) [8.21 pm]: Thank you very much, Mr President, and congratulations on your election.

I would like to support the motion to take note of the budget papers. I also take this opportunity to introduce myself for the first time to this Council, assembled with a bit of *deja vu*. Four years ago I served briefly as a member for the South Metropolitan Region upon the retirement of Hon Jim Scott, MLC. At that time my inaugural speech was followed fewer than two months later by my valedictory speech. Someone suggested that this would be better termed my comeback speech rather than my inaugural one.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I begin by acknowledging that we meet on the traditional land of the Nyoongah people, and by paying my respects to their elders.

I also acknowledge my Greens (WA) parliamentary colleagues, Hon Giz Watson, Hon Robin Chapple and Hon Alison Xamon, who have worked tirelessly for many years in pursuit of the aims of participatory democracy, social justice, ecological sustainability, peace and nuclear disarmament. In particular I honour Giz for her unwavering commitment spanning 12 years as a member of the Legislative Council and for her wise guidance in the Greens party. I look forward to working beside those members and to contributing to the development of a kinder, more innovative and sustainable society. I also welcome an opportunity to work with each member of this Council to create a better world for future generations of Western Australians.

I say thank you to those who have ventured out tonight and joined us in the public gallery. In particular I acknowledge former Senator Jean Jenkins who is in the public gallery this evening, and the member for Fremantle, Adele Carles, who also joins us in the gallery; thank you. I will try to reward your efforts with a bit of reason, a bit of passion and a promise.

INTRODUCTION

From the accent, members would have guessed by now that I am a migrant. My first inaugural speech reveals more about my personal journey. Briefly, I was born in the United States and have lived in Western Australia for 27 years. It is to Rotary International, and in particular the clubs of Apple Valley, California and Albany, Western Australia, that I am forever grateful for widening my horizons. It was during my youth exchange in 1979 amongst the granite outcrops, stunning blue bays

and wild southern seas near Albany that I developed a reverence for Western Australia's unique landscape and biodiversity. Later, as a young adult, I returned to Western Australia, eventually settling in Perth, where I used my experience in journalism as the sole proprietor of a technical writing and desktop publishing business. Over seven years operating my own small business, I learnt to appreciate the Western Australian flavour of work-life balance. I shied away from public life until my 30s, when the live sheep trade from the port of Fremantle triggered my sense of outrage at the cruelty and my passion to make a difference. Community activism put me on a path to work for my local member of Parliament, Hon Jim Scott, MLC, and later as a researcher for Hon Giz Watson, MLC. From 2005 to 2008 I worked as a senior policy officer at the Western Australian Council of Social Service, researching antipoverty strategies and housing policy, providing training for organisations and developing regional community services networks.

AN HISTORIC ADDITION TO THE LOWER HOUSE

Last week I was privileged to be present in the other place to witness the maiden speech of the first Greens member of the Legislative Assembly, Ms Adele Carles, MLA for Fremantle. I congratulate Ms Carles on her historic election, and warmly welcome her to the Greens parliamentary team. Adele's promise is as an independent thinker and a deeply committed environmental activist. The newly elected Greens member for Fremantle and three new Greens members of the upper house represent a growing percentage of electors who courageously voted for change.

EXPECTATIONS OF CONSTITUENTS

The change that our constituents expect includes, but is not limited to, parliamentary leadership to tackle climate change; an increase in renewable energy sources in use; community involvement in development decisions; conservation of our remaining wetlands and remnant bushland; sensible planning processes that take both climate change and community involvement seriously; protection from genetically modified organisms in food and agriculture; preservation of Western Australia's biodiversity; and expansion of public transport to not only help us prepare for the impact of peak oil, but also dramatically improve our cities. In the South Metropolitan Region, we would like a light rail system, linking all our communities.

THANKS

I express my heartfelt appreciation to the hundreds of volunteers who mobilised quickly back in September to win this seat for the Greens in the South Metropolitan Region. Several people dedicated long hours most days on our campaign. I especially thank Kim Dravnieks, Jan Currie, Val Tomlin, Andrew Sullivan and Scott Ryan. I also thank Gill Irvine, who generously supported me personally. Fourteen individuals stood as candidates across the South Metropolitan Region, which stretches south of the river from Victoria Park to Warnbro. These candidates heroically represented the Greens and attracted more support than ever before. In particular, for their vision, commitment and enthusiasm, I thank Adele Carles, Dawn Jecks, Christine Cunningham and Andrew Sullivan. My sincere appreciation also goes to Sol Hanna, Rob Delves and Colin Booth, and I am grateful to James Mumme, Andrea Callaghan, Michael Bennett, Serena Breadmore, Roslyn Harman, Nicola Wiseman and Kim Lisson. I apologise to members if that sounded like a metrosexual zoo. I am also deeply grateful to a dozen or so individuals who interrupted their work lives and normal routine and sacrificed time with family and friends to wage last year's professional campaign in a difficult snap election, including Rachel Pemberton, Trish Cowcher, Adie Wilmot, Dave Paris, Jonathan Hallett, Luke Edmonds and Kate Davis. Finally, I thank the officers and staff of Parliament House for making me feel so welcome and for providing such high-quality induction materials and support for new members.

REFLECTIONS SINCE 2005

On reflection on the events over the past few years, and looking back at the inaugural speech I delivered on 31 March 2005, it is clear that some things change and some things remain the same. Australia changed our national leader by electing the Australian Labor Party and Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister. Western Australia elected to Canberra a second Greens senator, Scott Ludlam, who presented a climate of hope to electors with visions for sustainable cities and an economy based on renewable energy sources. Then the double whammy of climate change and peak oil intensified with the global financial collapse into what we now refer to as the “triple crunch”. On the world stage, a new player appeared with a dramatically different agenda. President Barack Obama made history as the first black man to be elected as the United States President. His campaign for change we can believe in evoked memories of the 1950s US civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr and John F. Kennedy. His first legislative action was to sign an act giving women equal pay. This is a battle that many thought we had already won. Here in Western Australia this battle is still being waged. President Obama also had the wisdom to include green jobs in his stimulus package and to employ energy advisers who are long-term experts in renewable energy, not lobbyists for fossil fuels. His presidency has the potential to herald a global shift in politics that focuses on opportunities and community building rather than dividing and conquering.

CHANGES AUSTRALIA WIDE

Here in Australia the changes under our new Prime Minister include a long overdue apology to Indigenous Australians, a national strategy and a new ministry for social inclusion, a national affordable housing strategy, national consultation on human rights, and the release of asylum seekers in detention centres. Unfortunately, in recent months world events have led to a number of asylum seekers fleeing their countries and seeking refuge in Australia—escaping from violence, civil war, and persecution from regimes that do not tolerate political, religious or sexual differences. In Western Australia we have witnessed the detention of more asylum seekers, with 340 on Christmas Island and seven in the Perth Immigration Detention Centre at the airport. Australia-wide, 100 children under 18 years of age are in detention, but at least they are not being held in detention centres.

Things have changed in the climate change debate, too. Not so long ago, this Parliament shunned the climate change debate; now it is widely accepted and documented. I particularly enjoyed Hon Phil Gardiner’s speech on climate change the other day. Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and Bureau of Meteorology projections reveal that no matter what the cause, climate change is upon us. We have been shocked and dismayed by the Rudd government’s proposed carbon pollution reduction scheme, which is aptly referred to as the “continue polluting regardless scheme”. All indications are that this Australian government will not effectively tackle the single most important public policy challenge of our time—that is, the transformation to a low carbon-no carbon economy to arrest greenhouse emissions. This makes it all the more important for Western Australia to demonstrate leadership in this area.

CHANGES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Taking a closer look in Western Australia at those things that have changed and those that remain the same, I know that in the four years since 2005 the state economy soared high on the back of our resource sector and an unprecedented economic boom. We are in a good position to face the challenges of the triple crunch, yet it must be said that the state government failed to make the most of those booming years. In my view, we missed a golden, or perhaps I should say ironclad, opportunity to build a foundation for social inclusion. The “no room in the boom” campaign lobbied for an increase of 3 300 public housing units each year to increase public housing to six per cent of all housing stock. Public housing is declining in Western Australia while the waiting list grows.

Secure accommodation is the most important factor in putting people who are doing it tough back on their feet. With a place to call home, people can attend school, improve their health, hold down a job and become part of the community.

SOUTH METROPOLITAN REGION ISSUES

In the South Metropolitan Region, our outdated transport planning threatens to destroy one of the last remaining wetlands on the Swan coastal plain; a habitat for migratory birds and threatened species and an Aboriginal cultural heritage site. Mr President, members have already heard in question time some of my concerns about the proposal for a Roe Highway stage 8 extension through the Beeliar wetlands. These concerns are unchanged from 2005 when I implored the then Carpenter government to delete stage 8 of Roe Highway from the metropolitan region scheme. This road to nowhere would not solve truck traffic problems along Leach Highway.

Although the previous government went some way to proving that better options exist, unfortunately it failed to delete the proposed road. Today we face the challenge not only to save the Beeliar wetlands, but also to ensure that the Fremantle eastern bypass remains dead and buried. This challenge is one of many that remain unresolved after four years. Therefore, it is with wry humour and, hopefully, the support of many members both on this side of the house and opposite that I set on a mission to make a difference this time around as I have considerably more than a 94-day term.

There is a better solution to our transport and planning dilemmas, and better than roads. Take, for example, the following development proposals along our coast. The Cockburn coast plan has been released. Here is the perfect location for a carbon-free sustainable iconic development. Some people might think it is known as NPQ, an abbreviation for North Port Quay. Although NPQ was represented as an exciting city plan, it was quite simply in the wrong place, being touted to be constructed offshore, just off the working port in Fremantle. Whereas in Cockburn these brilliant suggestions for water recycling, electric cars and renewable power can be implemented without having to first mine and then truck in tonnes of limestone infill to build the islands as proposed by the developer consortium.

As well, the Cockburn development near South Beach is in trouble. The beachfront has all but eroded, as has the hope of building two of four tower blocks due to financial constraints. The case arguing against its sustainability credentials is articulated in my inaugural speech in 2005. Some things change and some remain the same.

Proposals to develop our metropolitan coast have mobilised communities from Moore River to Warnbro Sound. We achieved some success in improving the planned urban village now taking place at Leighton Beach to incorporate a regional beach park. I can expect that much of my term will be focused on improving the sustainability of proposed developments and preserving public space and coastal environments for future generations.

Of those things that have not changed but remain the same, the transport of sheep from Fremantle is the most haunting. In the four years since I last spoke in this Council, 145 716 sheep have suffered and died en route to the Middle East. Our animal cruelty laws have fallen short of protecting them. These sheep are loaded onto trucks, hauled to the port and then shunted onto ships of varying condition. Just on Monday this week a new online campaign to end live exports, Handle With Care, was launched. Supported by Animals Australia, the RSPCA, Compassion in World Farming and the World Society for the Protection of Animals, the humanechain.org website states —

You can help to end the cruelty of live sheep export from Australia to the Middle East and stop the needless deaths of tens of thousands of animals a year en route. During their transport by sea, sheep are generally confined in poorly lit, cramped conditions. They are at risk of injury, heat stress and disease. Many starve due to stress or because they fail to recognise unfamiliar pellets as food. The sheep that do reach the Middle East are often

exposed to appalling handling and slaughter techniques that would neither be legal nor tolerated in Australia. But worst of all, this suffering is completely unnecessary, as alternatives do exist.

Since 1985, when a Senate inquiry found that the trade was inimical to animal welfare and should be banned, the community has waited for the government to take action. Sometimes it has to wait.

MORE LESSONS IN PATIENCE

If there is one lesson echoing back in almost every childhood, it is that sometimes one has to wait. Members will easily relate to this principle by reflecting on the eight-month wait from the extremely early election in September 2008 to our inauguration on 22 May 2009. Even now many of us are waiting—some less patiently than others—to establish our offices.

But, Mr President, I will draw members' attention to a few more things that Western Australians are waiting for.

IMPLEMENTATION OF GAY AND LESBIAN LAW REFORM

Though we have some of the best laws in the country for gays and lesbians, unfortunately, these laws are slow in being implemented. We still have really high suicide rates amongst gay men. When Hon Colin Holt was talking about the suicide rates in the country, I thought immediately of that. We have problems with homelessness amongst gay youth, and bullying. I congratulate the Labor Party for passing these laws, but we still need to work on implementing them to protect the human rights of these people. I must acknowledge that I am in that community and so I have a special interest in it.

OVERDUE EXPANSION OF RENEWABLE ENERGY INDUSTRY

A critical issue that comes to mind is the long overdue expansion of WA's renewable energy industry. The peak in oil production was first predicted in the 1950s by United States geologist M. King Hubbert. Simply put, if it takes the energy of a barrel of oil to extract a barrel of oil, then further extraction is pointless, no matter what the price of oil may be. Leading-edge researchers predict a combined global oil and gas peak some time between 2005 and 2011. WA, which supports a globally significant energy industry, needs a transition strategy that does not hinge on more coal-fired power plants. WA is rich in potential for wave energy, solar power, wind farms, geothermal power and new generation biofuels, yet the state government insists on squandering tax dollars to subsidise and build new coal-fired power stations. These greenhouse gas factories bring the globe closer to climate catastrophe. At this point, I am kind of glad that this is my inaugural speech, Mr President.

THE WAIT FOR BETTER PLANNING

On our watch, WA flora and fauna are threatened with extinction due to degradation or loss of habitat and changes in weather. We need to prepare for higher temperatures, less rainfall, and more frequent and more severe droughts. On our watch, coastal communities are endangered by severe storms, coastal erosion and rising sea levels. Climate change will have significant impacts on agriculture, water supply, settlements and infrastructure, natural resources, biodiversity and human health. Though the destructive impacts are predictable, our state government continues to support new coal-fired power stations, approve developments along the coastline and destroy native habitats for urban sprawl. For sensible planning policies, sometimes we have to wait.

THE WAIT FOR HOUSING AND SUSTAINABLE CITIES

For emergency accommodation and secure, affordable housing, we have to wait. In fact, people have to wait 18 months for high-priority accommodation. With more than 20 092 people on the waiting list for public housing, they have to wait a long time. This state government could make a real

difference to WA's future simply by adding more housing to its public housing stock. While the capital outlay is significant, the benefits are even more so.

TRANSITION TOWNS

This housing, whether it is newly constructed or retrofitted, could be the cornerstone to develop Perth into a transition town to put us in a better position to thrive in a post-carbon society. Public housing could be built to be energy efficient, making the most of passive energy design, renewable power and water efficiency. This housing, with cheaper energy and water bills, could set the tone for a whole walkable neighbourhood. With employment and services within a 20-minute walk, the pressures on our road system and the demand for energy would diminish. For more sustainable cities, sometimes we have to wait.

CALL TO ACTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

A human rights consultation is timely. In WA, we recently bore witness to a continuation of human rights abuses as evidenced by the recent death of Mr Ward while in the care of the state in custody. On Saturday, Western Australians will gather in Forrest Place once again to cry out for justice and human rights when we protest the death in custody of Mr Ward. For decades people have died in custodial care. For decades we have rallied for justice. Since 1993, following the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, from 1987 to 1991 the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Watch Committee of WA has monitored the implementation of the royal commission's recommendations. The committee reports that WA continues to incarcerate people at a rate far higher than any other state and, in particular, has a huge over-representation of Aboriginal prisoners, with the result that they make up just over 40 per cent of deaths in custody. This is one of those times when the wait for justice has been too long and the consequences dire. Like many before me, I call on this government to take urgent action to protect human rights and prevent this suffering. Yes, sometimes we have to wait but while we wait, we have not chosen to rest. I quote: "We who believe in freedom cannot rest, we who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes." In those moving lyrics from American civil rights activist Ella Baker, sung by Sweet Honey in the Rock, Bernice Johnson Reagon provides an anthem for the struggle for freedom and justice. This struggle continues right here in Western Australia. Like my colleagues, and in response to the community, I will not rest until the state government acts to ensure that people in custody are safe, to reduce Indigenous imprisonment rates in WA, and to tackle racism in the justice system in WA.

CONCLUSION

In concluding my speech tonight, I am mindful of those who have gone before and those yet to be born. With the deepest love and respect, I remember my late father, Alan, my mother, Madeline, and her partner, Walter. I express my gratitude for the wisdom, compassion and loving kindness of my mother, who could not be here in person this evening but who I hope is able to use the World Wide Web to be with us. I pledge that I will bring to this Parliament my intellect, my abilities and my sense of humour to pursue my aim of creating a better world.

[Applause.]
