

[Tuesday, 22 June 1993.]

HON M.J. CRIDDLE (Agricultural) [7.45 pm]: Mr Deputy President (Hon Barry House), I am indeed honoured and privileged to be standing in this place today addressing you. It is a humbling experience to be chosen by the people I live among to represent them in this esteemed place. I place on record my thanks to the President for chairing the recent seminar on parliamentary procedure and practice. As a newcomer, the information imparted in that forum will prove valuable in the days and weeks to come.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Hon John Caldwell, who served the electors of the Agricultural Region diligently and with distinction. I also mention another former member, Hon Tom McNeil, whose parliamentary career spanned 12 years. It was Hon Tom McNeil and his Liberal colleague, Hon Margaret McAleer, who served as members of North West Province prior to the redistribution in 1989 that converted the seat to the Agricultural Region. After her distinguished career I wish Margaret well in the future.

I also thank the National Party for giving me the opportunity to run for Parliament, and my fellow party candidates, Hon Eric Charlton, Dascia Wreckett and Geoff Gill, for their support during the campaign. Special mention should also be made of the contribution by Dexter Davies, Roma Straham, Ron Aikenhead, Mary Graham, Glynis McDonald, Andrew Short and Bill Graham - and the people of my own local community. In passing, I place on record my congratulations to Viv Carson, the 1992 winner of the RAS Agricultural Achiever of the Year Award, and also more recently the 1993 winner, John Hawkins. His service to the noodle growers is well known. Finally, I thank the electors of the Agricultural Region for placing their faith in me and the coalition Government. I hope their faith and judgment in me will be vindicated.

I take this opportunity to explain where I am coming from and how I became interested in entering Parliament. I was educated in Perth for nine years. I came to Perth as a very small boy, and returned to a virgin block in a place called West Binu. The area was just a graded road through the bush with no facilities at all.

Together with other people in the area, I had the job of developing all the infrastructure required, which included roads, State Energy Commission facilities, Telecom facilities, the school bus and school ovals. Now, people come to me to convince me that the areas in the bush need upgrading and I am very aware of the job they face. Certainly it is a big challenge.

The next four years in Government will be a daunting task. I firmly believe that with resolution and commitment the coalition Government can successfully fulfil the expectations of the Western Australian people. I sincerely wish it well in that daunting task.

The issues of roads and their contribution to tourism, and the industrial site at Geraldton and the wool industry, are the basis of my substantive remarks here today.

One of my first tasks as a member for the Agricultural Region will be to press the Government for urgently needed road works to assist potential development in country areas. A priority, as I see it, is the upgrading of the Port Gregory access road from Northampton and the extension of the coastal road from Port Gregory north to Kalbarri. Once constructed, the Kalbarri to Port Gregory link will be a major scenic tourist drive. It provides a coastal link between the North West Coastal Highway to Kalbarri through to Northampton. This opens up potential for tourism development, beneficial to the small coastal communities located along this route. It is a major task, but in the long run a very worthwhile project that will reap enormous benefits in tourism, crayfishing and agriculture as it serves the little communities which serve the crayfishing boats as they move up and down the coast. It is no secret that Australians by and large are retiring much earlier in life. This means increased leisure time opportunities at the same time as personal travel is growing in popularity. Kalbarri is already a major tourist destination and a scenic road link with Port Gregory would not only benefit that town but also would add to the region's overall wealth generated by tourism.

Tourism is our fastest growing industry, positioned to supply two out of every 10 jobs in the 1990s. Apart from the boom, this road project will provide tourism and will enhance the efficient movement of our fishing products from Kalbarri. Closer to Geraldton the debate continues over a suitable site for the mid-West region's heavy industrial site. Although full environmental impact studies remain to be completed, the most favoured option is Oakajee, some 16 kilometres north of Geraldton. On the face of it, Oakajee certainly seems to be the best of the 11 sites so far examined. However, I urge the Government to look seriously at another option, 10 kilometres east of Maru. This area already has established industry and contains existing transport infrastructure for rail and road as well as a gas pipeline to meet energy needs.

A move to Maru would allay even the most intense environmental concerns about having heavy industrial activity positioned on the coast as would be the case with Oakajee. Exports could be conveyed from Maru to Point Moore, a possible site for deep water ship anchorage. Point Moore would be an ideal export point for the

minerals from the so-called “golden triangle”, along the Leinster-Mt Magnet Road, past Maru and along Port Way. This option would run out cheaper than the \$300m price tag attached to the Oakajee proposal. It is a bit of lateral thinking that seems to be gaining support within the region and I hope the Government looks seriously at the suggestion.

The proposal to transfer exports along a conveyor belt system to ships in deep water at Point Moore has been achieved in other parts of Australia and the world. For instance, Port Hedland uses conveyor belt systems to export in excess of 40 million tonnes of cargo per year. Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd uses the port system for grain out of Kwinana.

This system would also prove helpful to local grain growers by assisting with the through-port loading of grain at Geraldton. At present between 85 per cent and 92 per cent of ships load grain, firstly, at Geraldton and then sail to another port to complete loading because of draft problems at the port of Geraldton. In essence, the port is too shallow. Farmers who cannot get enough grain onto a ship to fully load at Geraldton must on-pass to another port at the additional cost of about \$2 a tonne, which is ultimately paid by the grower.

Obviously, other areas of great concern lie in the wool industry and the negative effect this has on graziers' incomes throughout the Agricultural Region and pastoral areas. All decisions made to date have been of a catch-up nature. I believe the wool stockpile should be commission sold where possible with full support also given to developing a local, viable wool scouring, top making and spinning industry with a view to handling a larger portion of the clip in this country, thus quickly removing as much of the debt as possible.

The industry can once again get back to producing the world's best natural fibre profitably, pay taxes and employ people, which is something that has been forgotten in this debate. Negative actions cannot bring positive results. It amazes me that people are taxed to keep a stockpile which does not allow any prospect of a price recovery and compounds the problem faced by producers.

Furthermore, the live sheep, lamb and mutton trade, along with the carcass trade, offers the industry a ready avenue to increased income. The Jordanian market is promising. However, there appears to be a real need to foster this market and other Middle East opportunities. The bottom line to greater success in this regard is to make our product more competitive. Recently, efficiencies introduced in abattoirs and changes to restrictive work practices are offering farmers savings of up to \$3 a carcass. This is a welcome start, but more must follow.

If we allow a loss of sheep numbers, it impacts back through the community in the welfare of shearers, shedhands, livestock transport, local stock agents and others. Then the towns are hit. Everyone suffers when Government services are cut back or closed down entirely due to a population drift from a town or region. It is comforting that some assistance is available under the rural adjustment schemes, but the only way to solve this problem is in the production and marketing of the product in an acceptable, viable way to get the most effective and efficient result possible.

Mr Deputy President (Hon Barry House), in closing, I wish the President and you well in your respective tenures as President and Chairman of Committees in this Chamber. I wish the Government well. I am proud to be part of this important institution and I hope I can make a meaningful contribution to the affairs of State.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!