



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Dr Janet Woollard MLA

(Member for Alfred Cove)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly, Tuesday 22 May 2001

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

DR WOOLLARD (Alfred Cove) [3.09 pm]: Congratulations to the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, the Premier and my colleagues in the Assembly on their election to this, the thirty-sixth Parliament of Western Australia. I particularly congratulate Carol Martin, the first female indigenous member to be elected to the Parliament in Western Australia.

I am proud and honoured to be the first member elected to this House on a predominantly environmental platform.

This shows that our community is voting in a very different manner than in previous elections.

VOTE OF THANKS

I thank all the staff members here at Parliament House who have helped me adjust to my new role as a member of Parliament. I thank Jan O'Neill, my electorate officer, and Rick Fletcher, my research officer. My heartfelt thanks to the many members of liberals for forests and the wider community who supported the cause to save our old-growth forests.

I thank the voters of Alfred Cove, Applecross, Ardross, Attadale, Bicton, Booragoon, Melville, Mt Pleasant, Myaree and Palmyra. This community of many cultures has given me its support, and I assure the people that I will represent them in an independent manner. I thank other liberals for forests candidates and their committees - specifically Carol Clarke, Liz Davenport, Diane Evers, Pamela Dell, Chris Davies, John Daw and Frank Lindsay; my fellow board members - Peter Bath, Arthur Harris, Malcolm Hay, Peter Kyle, Murray McKay and Keith Woollard; my campaign committee - Pam Nevard, Shelley Thorpe, Adrian Kenyon, Duane Pennebaker and Greg Williams; my booth captains, booth workers, the people who distributed my pamphlets and other advisers and supporters, including but not solely Elaine Dacre, Tom Herzfeld and Maree Thompson; and in particular my unofficial campaign manager, Trevor Tobin, whose support and guidance was valuable and inspirational and on whom I now look as a good friend and confidante.

I thank two of the other Independents, Liz Constable and Phillip Pental, who gave me both advice and support during the election. I am proud to join their ranks to be able to listen to the debate and vote on behalf of my electorate.

I also thank many others who formed an extended family to me and liberals for forests. Some of these people have been fighting to save our forests for 25 years - David Mackenzie and Virginia Young from the Wilderness Society of WA; Beth Schultz from the Conservation Council of Western Australia; Peter Robertson from the WA Forest Alliance; Patrick Weir and Maggie Burke

from Campaigners for Ancient Forest; Doctors for the Preservation of Old-Growth Forests; the forest rescuers; the many environmental groups down south; the many disaffected Liberal and Labor voters; and last, but certainly not least, the Greens (WA).

In my electorate there were nine candidates, with three of us working together to oust the previous member. Working with me were Liz Peak from the Greens, and Denise Brailey, who has been and still is a great advocate for people affected by the finance brokers scandal.

I was very fortunate to get a great deal of support from friends, my nursing and medical colleagues and members of the teaching profession. There is simply not enough time to mention everyone. However, I thank all the people who helped me win this election, with a special mention to my family - my husband, Keith, and my children, Victoria, Noel, Penelope, Luke, Elizabeth and Charlotte.

INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE

First, to put the record straight, I have never been a member of the Labor Party or the Liberal Party. I have been attracted to the concept of Independents in Parliament. Like many members of liberals for forests, I agree with the principles espoused by Sir Robert Menzies, such as individualism, ambition, dignity, independence, democracy, accountability, tolerance and freedom. I ran for Parliament because I was disillusioned with the previous Government's lack of transparency and accountability, particularly with regard to forests and the finance broking scandal.

More people voted for other candidates in the last election because they were disillusioned with the two-party system. I believe our Premier has the ability to make a real difference for people in Western Australia, but can do so only if he and the members of his Cabinet and party listen and act in accordance with community wishes, and not necessarily follow the advice of the "Sir Humphreys" in their various departments. The community needs a Government that is willing to embrace a vision for the future. Along with many others, I have high expectations and hope to see changes that benefit the community.

I believe that Governments should be flexible, listen to the community and be directed by community will. Community needs must be placed before party doctrine. I will vote with the Government on some issues and with the Opposition on others. I will vote in a manner that I think best represents the interests of my local community in Alfred Cove.

PERSONAL HISTORY

I would like to tell members about myself. I was born in and lived in London for 21 years, and I thank my parents, who worked hard to allow me to stay on at a government girls school to take A levels. I cannot boast being related to any politician on my side of the family, but am proud to state that, through my husband, our family is distantly related to John Curtin, who was a great leader of this country. When I left school I became a nurse; I am still a nurse. I am married to Keith, a cardiologist, and we have six wonderful children.

While training I joined the Royal College of Nursing, the body in England representing the professional and industrial interests of nurses. I was asked to become a steward defending nurses' rights. Since arriving in Australia I have worked in public and private hospitals, at universities, in the community and in the business sector, predominantly in nursing. I joined the Royal Australian Nursing Federation, now the Australian Nursing Federation, and sat on the council and many committees before becoming President of the WA branch. I am proud to be a member of the Australian Nursing Federation as I believe it is only through this avenue that nurses will achieve appropriate working conditions. That is why I voted against workplace agreements in the House during the last sitting week. Our health care system might not be in the crisis it is currently, and might not be so desperately short of nurses, if the union had not had to fight repetitively against workplace agreements to gain even basic improvements to nursing conditions.

“LIBERALS FOR FORESTS”

I ran for Parliament because Keith, my children and I - like 80 to 90 per cent of the population - are opposed to the continued wasteful logging of our old-growth forests. Liberals for forests was formed to help stop the logging. We thought we could put pressure on the Liberal Party to change its policy and, initially, had no intention of running candidates for Parliament. As the state election drew nearer, we were faced with the reality that the Liberal Party was not taking us seriously and was calling our bluff. We responded by calling its bluff, and fielded eight candidates, none of whom had any previous experience in running for Parliament. The Liberal Party's lack of vision and lack of responsiveness to community wishes on this issue was reflected in an overwhelming expression of support for the protection of our forests, not just in the seat of Alfred Cove, but also in many other seats. The election was a win for people who care about the environment. This is not a new phenomenon, and I will read a quotation -

Human beings have been endowed with reason and a creative power so that they can add to what they have been given. But until now they have been not creative, but destructive. Forests are disappearing, rivers are drying up, wildlife is becoming extinct, the climate's being ruined and with every passing day the earth is becoming poorer and uglier.

It might surprise members to know that this was Anton Chekhov writing in 1897. How much more damage has been done since then?

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Even before woodchipping started, serious concerns were repeatedly raised in this House about the over-cutting of the forest. *Hansard* of 23 October 1974 records that the Minister for Forests told the Legislative Assembly that the future policy under consideration included -

- (a) A progressive reduction in hardwood intake from State forests, timed as far as possible to avoid disruption of the social and economic stability of the timber producing areas.
- (b) A progressive increase in the use of plantation-grown conifers, sufficient of which will be available to offset the total reduction in hardwood sawlog production.
- (c) Examination of the means of achieving the increase in the rate of softwood plantation establishment needed to meet the demands of the future population of the State.

Then on 3 May 1979 the Minister for Forests assured the Parliament -

. . . that no clearing is undertaken in Western Australia for the purpose of the production of woodchips. The chip mill mainly draws on forest residue resulting from sawlogging operations . . .

In answer to a follow-up question on 10 May 1979, the minister confirmed that clear-felling of the forest had more than doubled after the introduction of woodchipping. We all know that since then, clear-felling of native forest has become an art form. During the past 25 years, many millions of tonnes of woodchips have been exported. In addition, over one hundred thousand tonnes of jarrah are used annually for making charcoal. This shameful destruction of native forest for woodchips and charcoal must be stopped.

AREAS OF OLD GROWTH FOREST SAVED

I believe that Labor won, just as I won, with the help of the Greens (WA) and other independent candidates who wanted logging of old-growth forests to stop. I congratulate the Premier, Geoff Gallop, for the areas of old-growth forest that he has already saved, including the extensive Walpole wilderness area, the magnificent old-growth forests of the proposed Greater Beedelup, Greater Kingston, Greater Hawke and Greater Dordagup national parks, the high conservation value Kerr and Hester conservation parks, and the proposed Tone Perup national park.

HIGH CONSERVATION AREAS STILL ON LOGGING AGENDA

However, it is important that both major parties understand that the community was angry about the clear-felling and woodchipping of native forests. This means that the major parties must do more than just listen to the Department of Conservation and Land Management, which no doubt will work to ensure that logging stops only in areas of old-growth forest identified in the discredited Regional Forest Agreement. There is evidence that the Regional Forest Agreement process did not include all areas of old-growth. CALM decided to exclude areas effected by dieback and those forests which were minimally disturbed by selected logging decades ago but which are still crucial to the survival of many of Western Australia's unique plants and animals. A paper assessment of the forests was performed that did not consider the individual value of each block. Many of these contain significant areas of old growth that are still on the logging agenda, such as -

- Dalgarup near Bridgetown;
- Collins near Pemberton;
- Preston near Donnybrook; and
- Red Gully and Barrabup near Nannup.

AVAILABILITY OF PLANTATION TIMBER

All of this may be unnecessary. There is enough plantation timber in Western Australia to meet virtually all the current timber needs of this State. Yet woodchipping and clear-felling continues in high conservation value and regrowth areas of native forests. Western Australia could move almost entirely into plantation timber immediately. It is predicted that Western Australia alone will have enough plantation timber within five years to provide all Australia's domestic and export woodchips, which are currently taken from native forests.

The Government must change the focus of the timber industry. In the early settlement period, pine was imported into Western Australia for the construction industry. The timber industry in this State developed because the native forests were a ready, cheap, natural resource. The Government should remember that today only one per cent of Western Australia has any forest cover at all and that according to CALM less than 10 per cent of this State's original forest remains as old growth. Unfortunately, some of my colleagues have been fooled by CALM into thinking that logging of native forest in Western Australia must continue until pine plantations mature to be suitable for sawlog production. Sawlogs needed for construction purposes can already be taken from pine plantations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to table documents for the information of members for the remainder of today's sitting.

[The paper was tabled for the information of members.]

FINE FURNITURE AND WOODCRAFT INDUSTRY

Dr WOOLLARD: The fine furniture and woodcraft industry annually uses only 20 000 cubic metres of native forest. To put this into perspective, this is the equivalent of around 200 logs the size of the giant karri on display in Kings Park. However, the total native forest wood extraction is the equivalent of 12 000 logs the size of the karri log in Kings Park. Over 95 per cent of the wood taken from this State's native forests is not used for high-value products. Most ends up as woodchips, charcoal and sawdust. The requirements of the fine furniture and woodcraft industry can easily be accommodated in an ecologically sustainable manner.

COMMUNITY APPROVAL TEST

Liberals for forests believe that all future development in sensitive areas such as Leighton Beach, Smiths Beach and Ningaloo reef should meet a community approval test. This means that the shoe should be put on the other foot. The Government and developers should have to gain community approval before they commence negotiations for a contentious development. A similar community approval test should be applied to any logging of native forests. A community approval test for logging would mean that local stakeholders and environmental groups would be involved in the decision-making process, with independent scientists and government agencies deciding which trees in native forests could be logged to support the furniture industry. Fixed sawmills have been developed to use native forest logs. Native forest logs have to be transported to those mills. Those mills need to be relocated near to abundant plantation timber resources. Millers need to be helped to adapt their machinery to process plantation timber instead of native forest timber. Blue gum plantations, properly managed and thinned, can also play a useful role in providing sawn timber for construction purposes.

PORTABLE MILLS

Returning to native forests, portable mills, rather than fixed mills, used to supply the needs of the value-added timber furniture industry, may have less impact on the environment. This would be a realistic structural change that would help to preserve native forests for the future.

FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Government's forest management plan for the next decade will be released in the near future. I hope the Premier realises that many members of the old school are still involved in developing that forest management plan. Sadly, their indoctrination may be too deep for them to listen to community concerns and they may view their task as merely supporting the big companies that have already made millions of dollars depleting our natural resources. I ask that groups such as the Wilderness Society of WA, the WA Forest Alliance, the Conservation Council of WA, the Greens (WA) and a representative from the liberals for forests be involved now so that this management plan will meet the community approval test and will not be just another document to reinforce the status quo.

CARE OF OUR NATIVE FOREST

Some members may be aware of the renewable energy legislation passed late last year by federal Parliament with the support of both the coalition and the Labor Party. The Act contains an obscene provision to subsidise the logging of our native forests for wood to be burnt in furnaces for energy production. Will members never learn?

A recent report prepared by Marsden Jacobs for the Australian Conservation Foundation demonstrated that the native forest timber industry is subsidised by State Governments to an extent that undermines the commercial viability of the plantation timber industry. It would be irresponsible of this Government to continue wasting taxpayers' money by subsidising the use of native forests rather than plantations. The private sector is only too willing to continue expansion of the plantation

industry, if only the Government would stop tilting the playing field in favour of the native forest logging interests.

AGED CARE

As a nurse, I am gravely concerned about the deterioration of the health care sector. In particular, I believe we need to focus on aged care, which currently falls under federal jurisdiction. The 1997 Aged Care Act encompasses almost 3 000 nursing homes and 130 000 people. Prior to that Act, a percentage of funding was allocated to professional nursing staff who provided direct patient care. A change in funding has resulted in an increase in employment of cheaper, less qualified personnel. The elderly deserve nursing care that guarantees their dignity and respect. The number of people requiring a high level of care, both at home and in aged care facilities, is increasing. However, staffing levels in aged care facilities have not reflected the increase in patient dependency levels.

Aged care nurses have told me that currently the elderly are being treated as second-rate citizens because the federal funding is inadequate. The May 2001 edition of the *Australian Nursing Journal* states -

Experienced nurses are leaving aged care because they can earn up to \$130 a week more in the public sector. Those nurses that remain are seriously overworked, overwhelmed with paperwork, and are frequently unable to meet even the basic needs of their residents.

We need more beds to cope with our ageing population. Most nurses believe it is the excessive documentation and the poor salaries paid to registered nurses who care for the elderly and infirm that are at the root of the problems in aged care. The federal Government continually agrees to carry out more research to identify problems, but it will soon be too late to ask professional nurses to care for their patients. Registered nurses working in aged care are leaving the area in droves. Agency nurses - often different nurses each day - care for these elderly, often confused people, who especially need to be surrounded by familiar faces.

Several months ago I received a letter from a director of nursing of a local aged care facility. She stated that at times she had only two registered nurses to care for 95 patients. She is not alone in that situation. Since meeting her I have had several meetings with aged care nurses and they all tell the same stories about inadequate funding and the inability to care for their patients in a safe and proper manner. I ask all members to think about their elderly relatives and to help nurses care for all old people in the community in an environment in which members would be happy to have their own family members. I will support my colleagues in this sector to enable them, once again, to be proud of the nursing care they are able to provide. I hope my parliamentary colleagues will assist in pursuing with federal authorities a better outcome for aged care.

POLICE ISSUES

Not only are our elderly at risk because of inadequate funding in aged care facilities, but also many who are still at home feel like prisoners in their own homes because of the escalation of crime in Western Australia. I do not believe my constituency, Alfred Cove, has a sufficient community police presence, and I suspect many members feel the same would apply to their own electorates. While the proposed increase in 250 police personnel over the next four years will certainly help, I do not believe it will solve the problem. Having talked to our local police, I know that paperwork requirements prevent them from getting out into the community. I have been approached by the local police about two issues, both of which I believe are solvable. First, they are worried about elderly, confused people who wander from nursing homes and become lost. This causes distress for the individual, the staff and families, and also takes up a lot of police time. Without attempting to extend the concept of Big Brother, we could perhaps use some of our modern technology to provide a tracking or alarm system for "at risk" individuals.

The second concern was the supervision of individuals who have been released from prison with conditions that restrict their movements. The police are concerned that these conditions needed to be enforced strictly if the community is to be protected. There seems little reason that local police officers may not also be involved in the supervision of home detention.

LOCAL DEMOCRACY

While people are individuals and should be encouraged to follow their initiatives and nurture new ideas, they must also accept responsibility for their actions. Involving our local communities in decision making will foster democracy and good government. I am working with members of the Melville City Council to pursue the development of precinct or ward committees. Such bodies could successfully produce long-term involvement of the community in the decision-making process.

RECOGNISING AND CORRECTING MISTAKES

Mistakes will be made and I expect to make my fair share. However, with the help of my colleagues in this House, I hope that my errors will be few and that I will be able to apologise and move on. In moving on we have to accept that the dogma of the day may be the mistakes of the future. Environmental degradation has resulted in salinity and loss of biodiversity. Overuse of pesticides, fertilisers, herbicides and antibiotics are making them ineffective. Overconsumption has depleted our natural resources. These are problems that could threaten our very survival if we do not address them. A recent report by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) confirms predictions that the climate changes induced by human activity may well be dramatic within our children's lifetime. In the case of our south west forest region, increased temperatures and decreased rainfall could mean that the forests never fully regenerate.

A major mistake of the previous Government that many of my electors lament was the decision to duplicate the Narrows Bridge and to extend the Kwinana Freeway down to Mandurah without adding a rail line down the middle.

THE FUTURE

I was elected to represent my local community and I will make sure that I do so. In the weeks since my election I have discovered - as members already know - that much of a member's time is spent dealing with the day-to-day problems that arise in the lives of individuals within our electorates. My local community has other common goals, such as improving our school system, protecting our foreshores, enhancing our marine park and retaining our community assets such as Duncraig House, which is an important part of the Heathcote heritage precinct.

Australia's heritage is not predominantly based on old buildings as in Europe, but rather on its remarkable natural environment. Caring for that environment will ensure a bright future for this country and will bring long-term social and economic benefits that far outweigh the quick bucks generated by the destruction of our native forests for woodchips or the bulldozing of our coastal reserves for housing or holiday developments. Those who do not care properly for Australia's natural assets are stealing from my children and the children of our constituents.

My family deserves great thanks for all they have done to support me and all the sacrifices they will continue to make while I remain a parliamentarian. Their sacrifices will have been repaid many times over if I can help make some real progress in protecting our environment and caring for the community during my term here.

[Applause.]
