

HON MARK MCGOWAN — CONTRIBUTION TO STATE

Motion

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Premier) [12.02 pm]: I move —

That this house acknowledges the retirement of Hon Mark McGowan, former Premier and member for Rockingham, and his significant contribution to Western Australia.

I think we have all taken the opportunity to acknowledge Mark in various forums and events, but I think it is appropriate that the Parliament pause to really acknowledge and formally make note on the record of his great contribution to Western Australia. This will be a great opportunity for us to pause and reflect on what a great Premier and political giant of our times he was to the state. From that perspective, it is humbling and an honour to be able to stand before you today, Madam Speaker, to make some initial remarks on Mark McGowan's time here in Parliament.

Mark McGowan was born on 13 July 1967 in Newcastle, New South Wales. In many respects, he was their best export. In sporting parlance, we perhaps should have paid a hefty transfer fee for him to come to Western Australia. It is one of those early talent spotting exercises whereby we did not have to pay a transfer fee and got a steal and a great player for the Western Australian team. I think he could almost play in black and gold nowadays. He joined the Labor Party in 1984. He spoke of being inspired by Bob Hawke and literally walked into a campaign office in 1984 to request a membership form from the elderly volunteer behind the desk. Particularly in the early 1980s, I think that was not really heard of in the New South Wales Labor Party. Most people were welcomed into the party by way of much more organised means, rather than organic recruitment. It was fantastic that he, like many of us, saw some of the great political leaders of our time, took great comfort and inspiration from them and became a member of the party.

He moved to Rockingham in the early 1990s to serve as a naval lawyer at HMAS *Stirling*. I ride with a group of people who hail from Rockingham, some former servicemen and women—some who have observed that he has had to defend them from time to time in various misdemeanours that they may have undertaken in the local pubs and bars of Rockingham. He was clearly an effective lawyer, too. Of course, Mark served on the local council and was deputy mayor at the time that he was ultimately elected to the Legislative Assembly in December 1996.

I remember Mark's preselection because I was responsible for organising some of the numbers for him that night. I want members to know that it was not a heavily contested ballot; it was just part of an organised ascension to the position as candidate for Rockingham. He was a great candidate—a dream candidate for the party. He was a local government representative, someone from the services and a great guy with a young family at the time. From that perspective, he was a rolled-gold candidate. It was not surprising to then see him take that great heritage forward to become a terrific member of Parliament.

He was made Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier Geoff Gallop in 2001, and was later a cabinet minister in both the Gallop and Carpenter governments in 2005 until 2008. As a candidate for the great seat of Kwinana, I remember Mark making contributions to the community through funding as the Minister for Education and Training at the time. He was elected Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party following the resignation of Hon Eric Ripper and became Leader of the Opposition. That was the first opportunity I had to serve with Mark as his deputy, which I very proudly did for over 15 years. He served as the opposition leader for two elections over a five-year period. I think that in the furnaces of serving in opposition, a member really gets to strengthen their character, find out who they are and make sure that they have got the mettle and steel needed to become a great leader in this state. I watched him over literally hundreds of meetings with parliamentary strategy groups. I could see a man with the most extraordinary political antenna and an eye to what we needed to be doing as a Labor Party and opposition to hold the government of the day to account and continue to craft our message to the people of Western Australia.

It was not always easy going. As everyone would remember, the 2013 election was a tough election for our side of the Parliament, and yet he carried us forward during a period of great difficulty. I think his strength of character and the way he could guide us provided a great deal of comfort and was a source of strength for everyone during those times. Of course, he was elected in 2017 and again in 2021 with a landslide election victory, which I think was in large part from recognition of his great leadership, particularly during COVID-19. I think that was a reward that the Western Australian community was very ready to provide.

As I said, I first met Mark during his preselection. Even at that point, it was clear that he was destined for a senior role in the Labor Party. However, the opportunity to work alongside him day in, day out, particularly during COVID, was an honour and a very important time for my development as a member of Parliament and, ultimately, as Leader of the Labor Party. His great sense of morality and common sense in understanding what the Western Australian community would be looking for from their leader provided an extraordinary example to everyone as they sought to represent their communities in this place. He was clearly a leader of conviction, but also a leader who sought

consensus when it could be found. His sense of judgement in that stead was absolutely important in providing long-term leadership to not only the political party he led, but also the people of Western Australia.

Of course, occasionally a Premier is called upon to make tough decisions on the spot. I remember the day when he was faced the most confronting of questions from the media, and that was whether someone should be convicted for running while eating a kebab! We were on the sidelines of that press conference. I had already made my contribution, and I turned to some of the staff and asked, “Who even thinks about that?” At that moment, Mark was quickly into the role, providing guidance to the people of Western Australia, particularly those seeking to run and eat kebabs, steadfastly ruling that no-one would be convicted of such a crime! He is well known for that adventure.

The highlights of his time as Premier deserve formal recognition and acknowledgement. Obviously, COVID-19 provided a great opportunity for the Premier to demonstrate his leadership and provide guidance to the state, but we should not forget that he was also the Premier who secured WA’s fair share of the GST, a situation that we are now ready to defend. It was an important rectification of the justice associated with fiscal arrangements between the states. He stopped the Roe 8 development, which provided a great opportunity to put in place his other great passion—care for the environment. The saving of the Beeliar wetlands in that incident comes on top of his other great legacy contributions, particularly the significant expansion of our national park estate as important legacy pieces for the former Premier.

He restored WA’s AAA credit rating. We all know how easy these things are to lose. They are nigh-on impossible to retrieve, and it is only through years upon years of discipline, and careful communication of that discipline, that we have now had that credit rating restored.

He provided leadership to Western Australia through the voluntary assisted dying debates. The Minister for Health and I continued to benefit from his insights and guidance during that debate. That goes to the point he made to us on a number of occasions that we must be good, commonsense leaders for our state, but it does not mean we cannot be progressive as well. As the second state to introduce those laws, Western Australia was particularly proud to be acknowledged as a progressive jurisdiction.

Along with Minister for Transport, he oversaw the transformative changes to our public transport system through Metronet, a multibillion-dollar program to turn around the great blight on the development of Western Australia’s metropolitan area, which has been poorly served by its public transport service, and now we are rightly proud of our public transport system. We have to remember that it is not just about moving people from A to B; it is about providing integrated communities where someone who lives in the deep southern suburbs can aspire to apply for a job in Perth because they have connectivity and integration, and the equality of opportunity that a good public transport system brings.

One of the things that Mark McGowan will be forever be known for is the Premier who stood up to Clive Palmer and those who sought to undermine the decisions that we were making on behalf of the people of Western Australia to keep them safe and keep our economy strong. There can be no greater demonstration of someone who stands up for the state against the unbelievable and relentless pursuit by others outside this place to tear down our borders.

There were a range of other achievements by Mark during his time here, but I want to finish on those achievements by talking about his legacy on the environment. As I said, there was a significant increase in the national park estate. We ended old-growth logging in our native forests. We established Containers for Change, saving two billion containers from landfill. We eliminated single-use plastic bags. We created the \$1.25 billion climate action fund.

Of course, there were a range of other measures that led to the economic prosperity of the state, including our diversification policies. There were numerous achievements that Mark can now look back and reflect on with some pride, and we hope he does take pride in these things.

We never come to this place expecting to be Premiers—maybe some do, but they are usually disappointed. I know Mark did not. Mark came here to represent the people of Western Australia and his constituents in Rockingham. When he arrived here, coming across the Nullarbor as he did all those years ago, he never expected to be serving in this place, but he understood through his sense of duty and the work he did in his community that he had to step up and make the sacrifices necessary to serve in the role that he did. As many members know, that comes with sacrifice. It comes with sacrifice to friendships and relationships with family, often direct family. We know that Mark has made those sacrifices more than anyone.

I want to conclude by wishing him all the very best. The opportunity now to spend more time with his family, particularly Sarah, is incredibly important, and one that he richly deserves. I hope he, Sarah and the kids take a long holiday and really have the opportunity to sit back and reflect on what he has done—really stop, breathe the fresh air and enjoy what life now richly offers him. Western Australia owes so much to Mark and the work he has done, and we also owe it to him now to provide him with the opportunity to really continue to enjoy life, to spend more time with his family and to sit back and quietly reflect on an extraordinary career in Western Australian political history. There is now the opportunity for us to reflect that we were part of the Mark McGowan show, and it was

a bloody good show. Congratulations, Mark, all the very best and thank you very much for your great service to the people of Western Australia.

[Applause.]

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Deputy Premier) [12.18 pm]: It is quite an odd occasion to be speaking on this type of motion. These types of speeches are normally reserved for condolence motions, but it is a pleasure to be able to make some remarks about the former Premier and member for Rockingham while he is still alive!

I remember the first time I met Mark, and that was in 1997. I had just commenced work with the then opposition leader, Dr Geoff Gallop, when the opposition staff were housed in a rusted old demountable nicknamed the “Summer Palace”, situated up the stairs on Harvest Terrace. Mark was a frequent visitor to the palace, working well with opposition advisers to develop attacks on the then Liberal government and develop policies for the future. Mark was very enthusiastic and energetic. He was very pleasant and, I remember, always respectful. He always treated us staff very, very well. He made an effort for us and we made an effort for him. That was the beginning of my working relationship with Mark.

Our roles have changed over time—opposition staffer to opposition spokesperson and government adviser when Mark was parliamentary secretary to the Premier. When I was the Premier’s chief of staff, he was minister. When I was an opposition backbencher, he was an opposition spokesperson. When I was an opposition frontbencher, he was Leader of the Opposition. I was a minister; he was the Premier. Now I am the Treasurer and Deputy Premier and he is a retired man living in Rockingham! We have always worked well together and we have shared many incredible experiences along that 26-year journey, experiences that only those involved in politics can understand. We were both independents in the party trying to navigate our way forward, and we formed a bond that has lasted the many ups and downs of political life.

It may come as a surprise to people in this chamber, but I was not always the most popular person in the caucus room! In the early years, I found the role of being a member of Parliament very, very challenging, and Mark was a constant support. He helped me when others did not and for that I will be eternally grateful. Mark, too, had many setbacks in his career. It was not all plain sailing. I will not list all those setbacks but here are a few. Mark recalls he almost missed out on preselection for the seat of Rockingham. Of course, he missed out on becoming a minister when Labor first won in 2001. He missed out on becoming Deputy Leader in 2008, and he was challenged for the leadership, as some people may recall, just one year out from the 2017 state election. But one thing about Mark is that he was very resilient. He always picked himself up and moved on. Of course, he was extremely loyal to the Premiers he served—Premiers Gallop and Carpenter. As I said, he was extremely resilient; he picked himself up and moved on. He held grudges as good as any Calabrian I know—in fact, better than any Calabrian I know—but he did not let that consume him.

I have many memories from over the years that I think highlight the true Mark McGowan. I remember when he first became leader in 2012 and a meeting was called in the front yard of Minister Ellery’s office. I had three children—twins who were about two months old and a two-year-old—and as members would expect, I was walking in a complete haze. But in that meeting I remember, after just breastfeeding my twins, looking at Mark and thinking: this is a person who is very driven. He was a man on a mission to get Labor back into government. As the now Premier outlined, there were strategy meetings, FOI applications and questions on notice; it was a relentless time. But he was absolutely driven to making Labor a new government and bringing Labor back. As we know, we have to be in government to make positive change, and so he worked tirelessly.

The 2013 election that soon followed was, quite simply, awful. We were fighting in an environment in which federal Labor and the Labor brand in general was poison. When we doorknocked, we hoped no-one would answer the door because we were not quite sure what people were going to say to us! Mark worked day and night to save as many seats as possible. I think a journalist asked, “How does it feel, Mark, to wake up in the morning knowing you are going to get beaten and still going about and doing your job?” But he dedicated himself to saving Labor at that election, and that helped us win the 2017 election. As I said, he worked every day and I know I would not be standing here without the performance of Labor during that 2013 election. I would have not been re-elected.

Of course, hard work in opposition, positive ideas and a really positive policy agenda saw the 2017 election victory. It was the culmination of a lot of hard work, but he created momentum and a sense of positive change. Of course, when we win government, it is always a bit hard, particularly coming from opposition. Mark, as we all know, was extremely obsessed about running a tight ship—whether it be the management of the finances or the management of the ministers and the management of caucus, it was sometimes tough going. But he was 100 per cent committed to delivering on his election agenda and making sure that Labor was a safe and competent government that delivered on the commitments he made—a socially progressive and fiscally responsible government with a focus on creating local jobs.

As has been outlined by the Premier, Mark supported the delivery of so many positive projects. In my portfolio, of course, it was Metronet, Westport and planning reform. Across portfolios, he took a great pride in particular on

progress on environmental changes, the creation of national parks, the banning of plastics and the container deposit legislation. Only a few years before, people said it could not be done and that it would be economic ruin for all of us. We brought it in, and look at the changes that have already been made. Of course, there was stopping logging in our native forests, voluntary assisted dying, as has already been outlined, and a lot of socially progressive environmentally sound things.

Mark was relentless, as we know. He had a notebook and he would write a list of tasks from every meeting. Early on, I thought he would forget those tasks. He would remind me occasionally and I thought: he is not going to remind me again. But, no; it happened all the time. I would be sitting at home and there would be a random text message, "Have you done this?" We learnt pretty quickly that we had to follow through; we had to implement. Follow through for Mark was a big thing. If you say something, you have to go and do it; that is what he did.

Of course, there was then the COVID pandemic. I know that this is a moment when I think the true Mark McGowan was demonstrated. He is focused, relentless, strong and determined. Mark became obsessed with saving Western Australian lives, and I believe that commitment saved thousands of Western Australian lives.

Government members: Hear, hear!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: There would be many empty seats around Western Australian dinner tables without the unwavering and complete dedication of Mark. Whether it was cruise ships circling out from Fremantle port or issues with Clive Palmer, he and the Deputy Premier, the then Minister for Health, were absolutely obsessed with saving lives. I think we owe him a great deal of gratitude for that. As I said, and I think has been commented on, the COVID years were like dog years; the amount of work and the relentless pressure meant that serving one COVID year meant many years of a normal political life. The intensity was great. At the 2021 election, the WA public showed their appreciation for Mark's leadership, as we won in a historic landslide. Mark's strong leadership continued until he resigned just a couple of weeks ago.

Throughout his political career, Mark was always underestimated. People did not quite grasp his complete dedication to the job, his focus, his work ethic, and his ability to understand what everyday people thought. He was 100 per cent committed to running a good and competent government. We delivered that, and that is something we are all very proud of. It was only after the biggest victory in Australian political history that people understood what a political force Mark McGowan was.

As I said, I used to share a lot of jokes with the then Premier. We had similar senses of humour, whether it be Austin Powers gags or *Get Smart* gags, but we will continue to share that humour, maybe from a bit more distance. I will now hand to the Leader of the Opposition for his comments, but I conclude by acknowledging Mark's friendship and leadership and everything he did to make WA a better place.

[Applause.]

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition) [12.28 pm]: I rise to make a brief contribution as Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the Nationals WA on the occasion of the retirement of former Premier Mark McGowan. We in this place know it is an immense privilege to represent the people of Western Australia in Parliament, and Mr Mark McGowan has been one of the longer serving members of this place.

Mr McGowan first entered public life as a City of Rockingham councillor in 1994, becoming deputy mayor in 1995, and in 1996 he contested the seat of Rockingham, which he held until his resignation. Mr McGowan served as a shadow minister, a parliamentary secretary, minister in a variety of portfolios, Leader of the Opposition, and, in 2017, became the thirtieth Premier of Western Australia. I acknowledge his service to the Parliament and to the state of Western Australia. Although we in opposition naturally have a different view from the government over decisions made in his time as the government's leader, we know that he is no longer a participant in this Parliament, so any critique of those decisions will be directed at the current Premier and the cabinet ministers who remain in place.

Mr McGowan's parliamentary and ministerial roles, and especially his time as Premier, will undoubtedly have taken an immense toll upon him and his family. I wish to acknowledge not only Mr McGowan, but also Mrs McGowan and the McGowan family, and wish them all the very best into the future.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party) [12.30 pm]: I also rise to extend my best wishes to the former Premier and member for Rockingham, Mark McGowan, and acknowledge his service to Western Australia. For three decades, Mr McGowan has dedicated his life to serving his community and his state. Before that, it is worth mentioning that he also served his country as a lieutenant in the Royal Australian Navy, serving with HMAS *Stirling*. Everyone in this place knows that it is an honour and a privilege to serve the people of WA, and I believe that Mr McGowan never forgot that.

Outside this place, and putting aside our political differences, I have a fond memory of introducing Mr McGowan to my late mother in 2021 in the foyer at Parliament House. This was right after the state election. My mum wished

him all the best and said it was not too late to jump ship to the Liberal Party, to which he clearly laughed, shared the joke, and said he did not think so!

At the recent Western Australian of the Year Awards and following Mark McGowan's retirement announcement, he and I enjoyed a chat and a laugh. He joked that he may well be most remembered for his response to a runner being fined \$1 000 for allegedly stopping to eat a kebab mid-run during the COVID lockdowns in New South Wales. The reality is that Mr McGowan will be remembered for a lot more than that. We certainly recognise his contribution to the state.

Public life can put an incredible toll on not only an individual, but also their family. This chamber and the broader community shared a level of concern, and even disgust, at the death threats that Mark McGowan and his family received during the COVID period. It is fair to say that no person should have to endure any sort of threats in that way.

From our side, Mr McGowan will not really be missed from this place, and he will not be missed from public life from our perspective! But we certainly respect his decision to resign and certainly understand his reasons. His commitment to serving his local area, our great state and country is admirable. I wish Mr McGowan, his wife, Sarah, and their family all the best into the future.

Members: Hear, hear!

[Applause.]

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Leader of the House) [12.33 pm]: I am very happy to close the debate today in which we are acknowledging the contribution by Mark McGowan, former Premier of Western Australia and member for Rockingham, and all those wonderful things that he was able to achieve over 26 years in this place, and, of course, other things in life, as well.

It is sounding a bit like a eulogy today! Maybe we should be a bit more lighthearted. I know he is watching today, because Mark, being Mark, always likes to control things. He is not in control today. Sorry, Mark! I know he is watching. He rang me this morning and he said, "What are they going to say? What are you going to say? What's happening?" I said, "Don't worry about it! It's all right. Everything is under control." So he hopes!

People have already spoken about his early life. Of course, he came across here in a Corolla. We can only imagine that when he was coming across in his Corolla—it is a long drive—he would probably never have envisaged when he arrived here that many years later he would end up leading the state. I think that is pretty remarkable. I was at his wedding. I remember—actually, I do not remember much of his wedding! I was at his wedding in 1996. I think a lot of people do not realise that Mark got married and was elected to this place within a week. There were seven days between the wedding and him being elected to the Legislative Assembly. As I think he said on a number of public occasions, no wife should have to put up with having to arrange a wedding, which is a special moment, and an election being tied into that process. Sarah—well done. Marvellous job. I know that he felt almost guilty about that, because weddings are very important things, and he was also up for election; he was contesting the Rockingham by-election at that time.

I went to his wedding. I will not go into the reasons why I do not remember it very well, but let us just say that he never forgot that. Before the 2017 election, I had arranged a very important opportunity for the potential Premier of the state to address a breakfast for the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia. It was a very serious matter. We had a big crowd coming. I had even dolled myself up a bit; I got my other Target suit out and I put that on. He was there and I had to introduce him. It was very serious. Here is the leader of the Labor Party, potentially the next Premier of Western Australia. The first thing he did was he got up and said, "I would like to thank Dave. He was the drunkest man at my wedding!" I was just cowering in the corner, because he used that term.

Of course, he went on to do many things. Lots of people talk about his reforms. There are lots of stories I would love to tell, but I will not, because what happens on camp stays on camp! I want to allude to one, but I will not go into detail. Let us just say that when a party is in opposition, lots of things happen in opposition. I was opposition Whip at the time, and I was also the shadow minister for a couple of portfolios. Let us just say that there was some very intense debate going on in the opposition leader's office at one time. It was very intense, very loud, and it was just before question time. There was a lot of loudness; a lot of noise coming from the opposition office. I suddenly realised that this might attract some attention, because some of the government ministers of the time were beginning to walk past, so I parked myself out the front of the office and as they came past, while there was a bit of ruckus going on behind, I would start coughing loudly. I remember Dean Nalder walking past going, "Everything all right?" I was coughing loudly, "Yes, everything's fine", while there was a bit of chaos going on behind us. It was very well masked. Let us say that those issues have all been resolved!

I refer to the State Disaster Council. I cannot go into that, because it is a secret, but, of course, as the Deputy Premier highlighted, they were remarkable, amazing days. I was a member of the State Disaster Council. I have to say, it was quite interesting in those early days when we were watching what was happening around the world. We had

a couple of people playing key roles here; obviously, the now Premier as the Minister for Health was playing a critical role, as was the then Premier. The now Deputy Premier was sort of like the statistician. I remember Rita would come in, and it was serious business, but she had all the figures. There was disastrous stuff happening. Terrible numbers of deaths were beginning to occur in Italy and other parts of Europe, starting in England, then in the United States, and then, of course, we started seeing deaths in other parts of the world. Those times were intense. I always remember that we had no drivers then; we had to drive ourselves. I would drive back to the regions into Mandurah and, of course, all the way down the road, we would suddenly start feeling that we were in the middle of something that none of us had ever experienced in our lifetimes at the time. As the Deputy Premier said, I think that the leadership was quite remarkable. In many ways, as she said, he was a leader for the time. I hope that Mark has a great time. He told me this morning that he has been clearing out his electorate office. He said, “It’s amazing the stuff you find. There are old branch minutes, historical documents, photos, pictures and things that people have given you that you wish they hadn’t, and all those sorts of things.” Mark, I hope you have a great time over the next few weeks and months while you plan the next stage. Sarah, as the Leader of the Opposition said, congratulations to you on what you, your family and your kids have endured being married to someone in a position such as Premier. I think it is a remarkable achievement.

I want to resolve one last thing. As has been mentioned, Mark has a razor-sharp memory. He would remember something and say, “No, that’s not what happened. I remember what happened.” Since 2006, he and I have had a long-running argument about who introduced and passed the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Bill in Parliament. He was Minister for the Environment in 2006 and I was the Minister for Community Development and some other things. I took over from him when he became Minister for Education and Training. Whenever the waste bill was mentioned in this place, he said that was the bill he put in. I said, “No, Mark. You didn’t. You did not put that bill in. I put that bill in. You might have put lots of other things in but that is one that I did. It was me.” To resolve this, I would like to table the second and third reading of the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Bill 2007, introduced on motion by Mr D.A. Templeman (Minister for the Environment).

[See papers [2022](#) and [2023](#).]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Mark, we wish you the very best. Thank you for your service to the people of Western Australia. You will be well remembered indeed. Thank you for what you have done for so many people in this state. Thank you.

[Applause.]

Question put and passed.