

MEMBER FOR WARREN-BLACKWOOD - PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Land Clearing

MR P.D. OMODEI (Warren-Blackwood) [10.21 am]: I refer to comments made by the member for Innaloo yesterday. He said that a controversy had arisen whereby land had been cleared adjacent to my property and that the then Minister for the Environment had intervened to ensure that a prosecution did not go ahead. I want to set the record straight. Although I have previously spoken on this issue, which occurred a couple of years ago, the statement made by the member is baseless and false and I call on him to come into the House and retract it. If he had made it outside this place, I would have taken his house off him. My property and my family are dear to me. I am very proud of the contribution my family has made to the district in which I live.

I will give members the background to this issue. My property is located 16 kilometres south of Manjimup and 10 kilometres north of Pemberton. It has a road frontage of about 900 metres onto the Vasse Highway and it is surrounded by state forest. This year, we will complete the removal of the old boundary and replace it with a new boundary. Bearing in mind the issue of public liability in this day and age, it is important that boundary fences are made secure because of the risk of an accident caused by straying cattle or falling trees, in which case the property owner could be held liable. The issue in question was the second stage of the boundary fence being cleared, which is adjacent to the highway.

In the previous year, I contacted Main Roads Western Australia and informed it that I intended to replace the boundary and I asked whether I needed a permit to do so. Main Roads said that it would be a good idea to do that because it would improve the clearances of the road adjacent to the boundary. Although the road is practically straight, it does have a slight curve. At the same time, I was clearing an adjacent boundary close to a property that is administered by the Department of Conservation and Land Management. I sought and received the appropriate permits for the clearance. In that case, people are allowed to clear up to four metres outside their boundary. Indeed, I was criticised by some people from CALM for not clearing enough trees. We cleared the first 600 metres in one year and the second 300 metres the following year. Nobody complained when we cleared the first 600 metres. In fact, many people in the community said that it was great because they could now drive along that stretch of road without having their vision impeded.

The following year, we proceeded to clear the second stage. Of the 300 metres left to be cleared, only 80 metres of vegetation was on my property; the other 220 metres belonged to my brothers. I have since acquired that land in the past 18 months. At that time, the forest debate was raging in the community. It is no secret that some of the people in the extreme green movement who obstructed people from going to work, tied themselves to machinery in the forest, defecated on machinery and gave the police a hard time were not friendly towards me and nor was I towards them. The boundary fence is about 13 metres from the edge of the road. Usually, where the speed limit is 110 kilometres an hour, Main Roads likes to have a clearance of 10 metres between the roadside and vegetation. The road in question had been resurfaced about 30 years ago and Main Roads had completely cleared the roadside. Adjacent to my brothers' property and mine, my brothers had planted yellow stringy-bark trees, *Eucalyptus saligna* and yellow flowering gums. People are allowed to clear one metre outside the boundary fence that is adjacent to a road. Our fence was 40 years old. It was big, heavy and had rusty barbed wire. We cleared that one-metre boundary and there was a four-metre wide track alongside that. Since this controversy occurred, Main Roads has looked at the property and said that it would be good to plant some vegetation there. We asked Main Roads how much land would need to be rehabilitated if a clearance of 10 metres is required and three metres is left clear for the track that was already there. We were told that 300 millimetres - about a foot - would need to be rehabilitated.

When the greens became involved, a stack of fence posts and the trees that my brothers had planted were removed. Although the stack of timber was not significant, it was not on my property; it was on my brothers' property. At the time, the truth did not get in the way of a good story. The greens had a photo taken of them pointing towards the stack of wood that was on my brothers' property, which they claimed was my property, and said that I had devastated the fence line without having obtained the proper approvals.

At that time, the native bush growing on the roadside was still there. All of those trees are still there today. The Press took a photo from the extreme northern edge of what the boundary looked like. They then drove past the patch of native forest, which is still there, and took another picture. Those photographs gave the false and mischievous impression that massive degradation of the roadside had occurred. Being a public figure, I had to grin and bear it. In my electorate the hype about the roadside clearing is considered an absolute joke. We have not replaced the boundary; we have left the roadside open. I planted a line of macadamia trees six metres in from the boundary, and they are growing quite well.

A couple of weeks ago, my brother showed me a report by the Environmental Protection Authority, although I cannot remember what the subject was. Interestingly, the report showed a photograph of my property and said

that it was a good example of a well-planned, well-managed and well-drained property. I have had to put up with nonsense from the green movement, which has tried to create the impression that I have flouted the law and cleared the roadside without permission and, as the member for Innaloo said, the then minister intervened. The minister did not intervene at any time.

I have consulted closely with Main Roads on this issue. The member for Innaloo can look at the property if he wants to; it is quite a nice property. I might even make the member a cup of tea if he visits. However, I took great umbrage at his comments. I am a public figure and I can cop a bit of stick in this place because I probably dish some out too; all is fair in this game. However, my family is a different matter. My son manages that property. He does a very good job and I am proud of the way he does it. I am away from the property for hundreds of days of the year. The Omodei family cannot be accused of mismanaging or destroying the environment. The main assets of any good farmer are his soil and the way he manages his property. If he does not manage that properly, he will go broke. Members of our family have been on that property for 75 years. I do not think we have much to be ashamed of. Both those properties are model properties, and we are very proud of them. The roadside issue has been a beat-up. I can understand the reasons for that, and I can cop that. However, I will not accept that anything illegal has been done. I will not accept the allegation that the former minister intervened to stop a prosecution. There was never any talk of a prosecution, or of any fine by Main Roads. As a matter of fact, when the Main Roads officer saw the situation, he acknowledged to me that Main Roads also regarded it as a beat-up and was just going through the motions to ensure that everything was done according to law. That is the situation as it occurred. If the member for Innaloo wants to attack me for something I did as a minister or for something I have done in this Parliament, he should feel free to do so. I can defend myself. However, his comments have reflected on my integrity and that of my family, and I ask him to withdraw.