

**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

*Motion*

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

**The PRESIDENT:** Members, we are returning to the Address-in-Reply. We have another first speech, so I ask that members observe our custom and listen in silence.

**HON LAURIE GRAHAM (Agricultural)** [2.35 pm]: May I also take this opportunity to congratulate you, Madam President, on your election, especially for the place you now hold in history by being the first woman to hold this prestigious position in 185 years. Members, it is indeed an honour to address this house, something that in my wildest imagination I did not ever see as being a remote possibility given my age. Speaking of my personal life, I was born in Geraldton to Jim and Mary Graham in 1945 and have a sister, Kay Hopkins, and brother, Kerry. Both my parents were staunch Labor supporters all their lives. At the age of 18 months, whilst chasing after ducks in the next door property, I ran into smouldering ash from a burn-off the previous day. I received first-degree burns to my feet and legs and spent the next three months in hospital, and my walking days were over for the next 12 months. I am very fortunate that the only minor impact today is to my feet. Kids can be pretty cruel, and the nickname given to me by the kids in the street was “Nootes”, short for “no toes”. The family home had ovals, tennis courts, basketball courts, a Girl Guides hall and croquet rinks on the opposite side of the street. It was an ideal place to live, and I cannot remember an occasion when the front door ever needed to be locked. As children we slept on the verandah.

I was educated at Stella Maris College for the first three years and then at St Patrick’s College for the rest of primary school and lower upper school. Not being an academic student, I left school in 1961 after completing year 10. This was only possible after the principal told my parents I was a poor student who would not pass year 12, and their approval was reluctantly given. After a short stint of employment with the railways as a casual, I was fortunate to be employed as a junior clerk with the Harbour and Light Department, which administered most of the WA ports at that time. In 1969 I transferred to the Geraldton Port Authority on its formation and worked my way up in that organisation, and in 1981 I was appointed general manager, a position I held for 15 years until I resigned in 1996 after 35 years’ service. Early in my working life I pencilled at country race meetings for an SP bookmaker, George Wright, and in the mid-1970s held a bookmaker’s licence for several years, betting on local races. It was a great hobby and fun, but not much financial reward was forthcoming. At that time race meetings were held in most towns, and community events were held in association with the races to raise funds for various causes. Attending smaller race meetings involved considerable travelling when there were no meetings in Geraldton. Following a race meeting in October ’70 I went to the Meekatharra ball, where I met my wife for the first time. We were married two years later. No doubt, that is the best thing that has ever happened to me.

Dad always had a large fruit and vegie garden in the backyard in Sanford Street. I always complained about the jobs in the yard I was allocated, or no pocket money. From there I moved to Waggrakine onto a four-acre property in 1982, where my mother-in-law, Jen Eiffler, lived with us for many years. Being a keen gardener, she soon had a very large fruit and vegetable patch and today I am a keen vegie gardener myself. I do not have the green thumbs of my dad and mother-in-law, so I restrict the garden to mainly grow onions and beetroot. A number of my friends were very happy to see me elected to Parliament, but they were concerned that there will be no more pickled beetroot in the future. I hope that does not happen.

When my friend Kim Chance became aware that I was leaving the port authority, he approached me to consider standing for the seat of Geraldton in 1996 and I subsequently nominated and was endorsed by the Labor Party. The chance of winning the seat was slim, given the margin and time frame available for electioneering. My first tilt at running for a seat in Parliament was unsuccessful, but the pleasing thing was halving the margin at that election and Shane Hill winning the seat easily in 2001. Although I remained very interested in politics and a member of the party, I could not see that I would be a candidate in an election in the future as had I decided to pursue other employment opportunities as a port and transport consultant. My first clients were Kingstream Steel, for which I developed options for loading slab steel at the proposed Oakajee port onto panamax ships, and representing Rail Services Australia’s business development section in Western Australia as it successfully expanded its New South Wales based rail and construction contracts into WA. Following this, my clients included a number of engineering consulting firms, providing advice on cargo handling infrastructure and port operations for their clients in Australia and overseas. Until recently I had a small number of Geraldton-based clients who sought advice on how to negotiate leases and port charges. During my working life I had exposure to computer programs and developed programs for recording aircraft landings and a cleaning contractors’ database. Both of these programs are still in use today and I assist from time to time upgrading the programs.

I have participated in many sporting clubs and associations. In addition to being an active participant in most sports, I managed committee positions of treasurer or secretary of swimming, basketball, hockey, tennis and squash clubs or associations over a 20-year period. My first position was as the secretary of a swimming club when

I was 16. I was a bit inexperienced with meeting procedures at the time and too slow to say no to the nomination the night of the annual general meeting and was elected in a few seconds. I was fortunate to live in an era when competing in three or more sports each week was possible and not expensive at the time. Today's parents shudder when the accounts for sporting fees arrive. Following my sporting endeavours, serving on community bodies followed. I was the treasurer of the St Francis Xavier Primary School board for 10 years in the 1980s, when the school was transitioning from a one to two-stream school, which involved doubling the number of classrooms and considerable financial challenges.

The Geraldton Amateur Basketball Association formed a trustees committee to manage its finances to facilitate the building of additional indoor basketball courts. Management of its finances, at arm's length to its association management committee, was required to satisfy the loan conditions set by the town council. I was appointed to that committee of four at its inception and was the chair or treasurer for 10 years. Most of the borrowed funds were repaid by the committee before it wound up, and it disbanded when the association was financially secure.

In 1997, I was elected as a councillor for the Shire of Greenough and remained a member of that council until it was disbanded in 2007 to make way for the amalgamation with the City of Geraldton. During this period I was deputy president for two terms, chair of the planning committee for eight years, and served on numerous council committees. I was a strong supporter of the amalgamation with the City of Geraldton. A significant council appointment was to the Geraldton–Greenough Regional Council for six years. The Geraldton–Greenough Regional Council built and managed a new landfill facility for the City of Geraldton and the Shire of Greenough. Its operations were merged into the City of Geraldton–Greenough at the time of the amalgamation of Greenough and Geraldton councils. Today that facility receives waste from most local governments in the immediate area. Whilst a councillor, I was appointed a deputy member of the Local Government Grants Commission and the Local Government Advisory Board for one term each. I especially enjoyed being a part of the hearings on amalgamations, mainly initiated by larger councils proposing to join a smaller one. Generally, when council's realised that government was not serious about forcing reform, the smaller council most affected by amalgamation would pull back as its residents became agitated at the proposal. This was really about losing identity.

In 1997, I joined the board of Joblink Midwest and became chair the following year, a position I still hold today. Joblink mainly provides employment and training services to schools and young people finding their way into the workforce via contracts it administers for the department of employment and training. Profits from contracts administered by Joblink are mainly committed to disadvantaged groups, which is fantastic, and older people seeking to re-enter the workforce in the midwest Gascoyne areas. Joblink was formed by Jeff Carr about 30 years ago to help youth in the transition from school to work and still provides the same service today. The most pleasing part of being on this board is hearing of the staff successes of placing a young person in a job. Young people are often job ready, and a suitable position has been found but they do not have the financial resources to either get to the job or pay for tickets or safety clothing required. This cost is often not able to be funded from other employment contracts. The investment of a few hundred dollars by Joblink achieves an employment outcome in more than 90 per cent of the clients helped in this situation. It is a shame governments cannot take a risk and provide funding for bodies to provide such a service, because although it is risky—we sometimes filled up a car with petrol to find it ended up in Perth instead or Perenjori, where it was supposed to go—the 90 per cent of the time when it is successful, it is well worth the investment. Also in 1997, I joined the board of Apprenticeship and Traineeship Midwest when its core government funding was in jeopardy. I served on that board for six years; the last three years I chaired the organisation. ATC Midwest, as it is better known, is a group training company that was the hosting employer for more than 300 apprentices and trainees for 100 businesses in 2000.

In 2001, I was appointed as a board member of the Mid West Development Commission and served on the board for six years, chairing it for the last four years and was its representative on the Regional Development Council. At that time, the Regional Development Council was an advisory body made up of the chairs and CEOs of the commissions and chaired by Ian Taylor. It was tasked with providing direct advice to government on issues affecting regional WA. This structure, which I believe worked very well, was disbanded shortly after my term at the commission ended, which was most disappointing. In 2007, I joined the Monsignor Hawes Heritage Interim Board and in 2010 was appointed as the treasurer of the incorporated association. I remained a member of the management committee and treasurer until the 2016 AGM. Monsignor Hawes Heritage Incorporated was formed to raise the awareness of John Hawes' legacy and to assist with securing funds for the local communities' maintenance of the 17 heritage-listed buildings in the midwest. These buildings are mainly churches and are the main tourist attraction in many of the midwest wheatbelt towns today. With the injection of funding from royalties for regions and Lotterywest, the Monsignor Hawes Heritage Centre was recently built in Geraldton. It adjoins St Francis Xavier's Cathedral and houses a museum that tells the story of John Hawes and displays the movable objects that are now able to be put on public display for the first time.

In 2013, concerned with the rates increases that had occurred and those proposed for future years, I again stood for council and was elected as a councillor of the City of Greater Geraldton. I was pleased to be part of the council

whilst it restructured its operations, and the proposed rate increases under its long-term financial plan were able to be reduced considerably.

The community concern with the rate increases resulted in most of the sitting councillors who stood for re-election in the 2013 and 2015 elections losing their seats on council, which gives members some idea of people's concerns with rates. As a doughnut council, the amalgamation of Greenough and Geraldton councils was inevitable, due to the rapid increase in the Greenough population in the urban areas. However, the jury is still out on the benefits of the subsequent amalgamation of Geraldton–Greenough and the Mullewa councils. The main reason for the amalgamation in 2011 appears to be the desire of Mullewa council to reduce the need to expand its staff to operate under the changed Local Government Act and the new financial requirements that were being implemented. As part of the terms negotiated by Mullewa council, representation by two councillors for eight years was provided for in the governance orders for the Mullewa ward. The City of Greater Geraldton council has expressed support to reduce the number of councillors due at the 2019 election from 15 to 10 or fewer, but it has not formally voted to confirm this. If one vote, one value principles are strictly followed in the ward review of the Mullewa ward, a small number of electors will disappear. The rural areas of Greenough make up 98 per cent of the land area of the City of Greater Geraldton and have 2 000 electors compared with the urban area's two per cent land area and 25 000 electors. The challenge for a ward review will be to provide appropriate representation for rural areas. I also believe that de-amalgamation proposals will be forthcoming if Mullewa councillor representation is seen to be lost. I do not believe it has to be totally lost but at least it has to be seen to be there.

I turn to the recent election. It was fantastic to be part of the campaign team supporting Lara Dalton's attempt to win the seat of Geraldton. It was an extreme disappointment for Lara and her large band of supporters that she got so close and election looked likely on election night. I hope that Lara, who is a fantastic candidate, is willing and able to run again in 2021. Just a few weeks before nominations for the election closed, I was preselected for the Agricultural Region ticket. To be truthful, I did not believe that Labor could win a second spot but hoped my being on the ticket would help Lara get elected. A true believer is looking at me.

Special thanks to Lara Dalton, whose outstanding dedication to try to win the seat of Geraldton resulted in me being elected to this house. Also, thanks to Darren West, who helped the candidates run great campaigns in the seats of Roe, Central Wheatbelt, Moore and Geraldton. Labor had its best vote for many years thanks to Darren's efforts. Thanks also to Carol Martin and Luke Clarkson for being part of the Agricultural Region ticket with Darren and me. No doubt this helped our vote. To the large band of party members and Lara's friends who doorknocked, letterboxed, folded pamphlets, attended functions and worked on polling booths, a sincere thank you.

Thanks to Reg Clarke, who passed away a few years ago. Reg was the inaugural manager of the port authority and my boss for 20 years. No doubt, his influence helped with my appointment to the various positions on the board, especially my elevation to general manager. Reg was a brother-in-law of Senator Don Willesee. If Geraldton had not been in the safe Labor hands of Bill Sewell, he would no doubt have been a Labor candidate for the seat at some time. Thanks to my wife, Heather, and my children, Gemma, Stacey and Ross. Without their unwavering support, it would not have been possible to have been involved in the many community boards and committees I served on to the extent I did. When I indicated that I was putting my hand up for Labor for the Agricultural Region, I was shocked when they were fairly supportive of me doing that. I had expected that they may well tell me it was time to move on, as I had been threatening to do in recent times, and wind back my community involvement.

Thanks to the staff who facilitated the attendance of my six gorgeous grandchildren—James, Kate, Ben, Flynn, Emma and Sam—and Gemma's partner, Dan at Monday's swearing-in ceremony of. They really enjoyed being able to attend. There are many friends and acquaintances whom I could thank but the list would be very long, so I have kept my thanks brief and trust that no-one will be offended by this.

I move on to some of the things I hope to achieve in the next four years. I will be advocating for changes to the Local Government Act, employment and training, community boards and committees in the not-for-profit sector. My concerns with local government are numerous so I will highlight the main ones I have. The new Local Government Act imposes unreasonable requirements on many small councils in WA. They total about 100. I do not believe that change in the financial area is required for the metropolitan or several of the larger country local governments. A key change I see as being required is for the act to allow local governments to voluntarily merge their management via parish councils or a similar model that allows each council to retain control over representation, construction and maintenance operations, and income and expenditure setting within their local government area. There are currently several regional councils, mainly managing large landfill operations in the metropolitan area, and several smaller informal regional councils in WA. These or new entities created could manage groupings of smaller councils that wish to merge their management if the act allows that. This change would remove the high costs for small councils individually complying with the current Local Government Act.

Having served for 13 years as a councillor, I am concerned with the negative impact on all councils' reputations from the recent events in Exmouth and the City of Perth. These councils are governed by some 1 000 councillors who generally work tirelessly in the interests of their electors. Their efforts to deliver good governance are tarnished regularly by the actions of a few. Changes are needed to the Local Government Act such that those responsible for breaches can be suspended or dismissed more easily than is currently possible. Changes are also required to the act to protect councillors who commit technical breaches of the act that result in their dismissal by the State Administrative Tribunal due to incorrect advice being given to a councillor on the provisions of the act.

The capacity to allow vacant councillor positions to be filled by unsuccessful candidates from the last council election up until the next ordinary council election is another desirable change. Election provisions could be structured in a similar manner to that in place for unsuccessful candidates in this house who are able to fill the balance of a term when a vacancy occurs. This would result in more people standing for election against strong candidates than currently occurs when the prospect of election is slim. It would also encourage councillors who would like to resign due to changed employment or family circumstances to more easily make the decision to do that. Councillors tend not to resign in these circumstances due to the high cost of by-elections and feel obliged to complete their term.

When it was introduced, the waste avoidance and resource recovery levy was originally intended to fund waste-management initiatives and reduce the volume of waste to landfill. Now 75 per cent of that levy funds the activities of the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, which means that government is dependent on what is essentially a pollution tax to fund the department's budget. Only a small proportion of the levy is now being invested in waste management programs to help reduce the volume of waste to landfill. With the financial state of the budget, I recognise that it will be difficult to change how the funds are currently being used. However, with increases in the levy of \$5 a tonne scheduled for the next two years, it would be most beneficial if these increases could be allocated to the reduction of waste to landfill programs, as was originally intended when the levy was introduced. If the future rate for the levy for the next five to 10 years and the potential expansion of that levy to larger non-metropolitan landfill operations were known, this would also be a catalyst for industry and councils to plan for a certain future. I believe the wheels are currently spinning, waiting for government to indicate where levy charges are going. Obviously, the problem we have is that the increase in that levy will drive change.

Plastic bags are an ever-increasing pollution problem that needs to be addressed. A large number of councils are supporting the introduction of laws in this area. These councils should be encouraged by government to do so.

With my long involvement on management committees of incorporated associations, it is clear that the recruitment of members to serve on management committees is most difficult in these busy times. When people who are interested in serving on an incorporated board attend a training or briefing session on their obligations and personal exposure if things go wrong, the majority tend to lose interest in serving their community in this way. Other than employees of organisations who have the vested interest of their employer to serve on a management committee, it is rare to see community members under 50 years of age serving on management committees of non-sporting bodies. Changes to make sure that incorporated association management committees are less exposed when they have a demonstrated track record of managing well but get caught up by a single issue when the management decision looks questionable are most desirable.

The patient assisted travel scheme is a great program but needs streamlining to remove some of the impediments, such as the need for patients to consult their own doctor again to sign a form to justify the travel claim after a specialist has seen the patient at a county clinic and advised that a procedure is required in Perth. The application process should be far simpler and be available for lodging online without the need for visiting a PATS office or the doctor. Country hospitals need to be better funded to accommodate more visiting specialists so that the costs of PATS can be considerably reduced.

Apprenticeships and traineeships used to be monitored by departmental field officers and were later monitored by community groups under contracts. They provided invaluable services to apprentices, trainees, their families and employers and saved many apprenticeships over a long period of time. These services are now provided centrally from Perth and there are delays, sometimes of days, before they get back to the employers. With no intervention available at the local level in regional WA, many apprenticeships are needlessly lost. Local support for an employer experiencing problems with an apprentice or trainee should be restored in some form. With no support in dealing with indentured apprentices or trainees, smaller employers find it much easier to part company with an employee. The reintroduction of monitoring and support services to cover the regions would not only save many apprenticeships but also identify opportunities to place new apprentices and trainees with employers. That used to happen in the past when, in most positions, an apprentice completed their time, their position would be backfilled with another apprentice. That does not happen these days.

In closing, I congratulate all members in both houses for their success in being elected and look forward to working constructively with all members in the interests of all Western Australians. Thank you.

[Applause.]

**HON CHARLES SMITH (East Metropolitan)** [3.03 pm]: First of all, Madam President, I congratulate you on your election, and I look forward to working with you in this place over the next four years. I would also like to thank all the parliamentary staff members who have been most helpful and accommodating throughout the transition period since the election. I congratulate the Leader of the House on her recent appointment, and I also congratulate all the new ministers, parliamentary secretaries and Whips. They have a very important duty to carry out, and I wish them well in their endeavours.

Political allegiances aside, all of us in this place have an obligation to serve the interests of our constituents and speak on their behalf. We have been entrusted by the people of Western Australia to perform one of the most important duties in public life. The Westminster form of government that we inherited from Britain has served Western Australia well since the nineteenth century. As elected members of the fortieth Parliament we have an obligation to respect the enduring traditions and uphold the integrity of this place. I also wish to acknowledge the Whadjuk people, traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting. I would also like to acknowledge the early pioneers and their descendants, who laid the foundations of modern Western Australia.

Today, like others before me, I speak for the first time in this place with a variety of emotions, but above all I have a great sense of opportunity, and I am incredibly grateful to have been given this opportunity to represent everyday Australians—the forgotten people, whom Sir Robert Menzies defined so well in his famous radio broadcast in 1942. I am one of the many Western Australians who made the choice to move to this great state from elsewhere. I was born in a small market town called Hitchin in North Hertfordshire in the United Kingdom, about 60 kilometres north of London. I take this early opportunity to acknowledge my parents, who instilled in me—of course, the young man does not realise it at the time—a good sense of right and wrong, and later on a sense of wonder and inquiry. They are, and continue to be, the most wonderful parents any child and man could hope for. Although they unfortunately cannot be here today, they may be watching from the UK, through the modern wonders of the internet, and the parliamentary live streaming service, which is a victory for them as much as it is for me. If so, I say to them that I am so very happy that they can see me here today serving the Western Australian people at the very highest level.

In the UK I became a qualified biologist, and a student of crop protection, studying at the Scottish Agricultural College. However, as I am sure that all members can attest, career paths are seldom linear or follow predetermined plans. In the early 1990s, employment in the UK was very hard to come by—very similar to Western Australia at the present time, and I fortuitously fell into the world of banking and investment. I became fascinated by the global financial and commodity market, with its combination of risk and analysis at the forefront of making informed decisions. It is truly exciting and awe-inspiring to behold hundreds of thousands of dollars changing hands actually in seconds. Although it was initially riveting and rewarding, I gradually became disillusioned with it all, and decided a change in direction of life was needed—not merely a change in career, but also a change of environment. At this time, my interest in Australia grew, and I began to seriously examine the possibility of emigrating to the other side of the globe. In many respects, I was following a great tradition. Millions of people from the British Isles have moved to this land over the past few centuries, seeking to build a new life in a country with boundless potential.

I arrived in Perth from the UK in January 2005, with my wife and baby son, straight into the rather confronting heat of a southern summer. I came with a sense of renewal and with fresh opportunity about what lay before me. We had never before been to Perth, or even Australia. I have always taken calculated risks, and living with the regret of not knowing what I could have achieved was the driving force in selling up and jumping onto the plane. It turned out to be the most momentous decision in my life, and I am eminently grateful to Western Australia and its people for the opportunities they have afforded my family and me.

Coming from the financial industry, I now had ambitions to change my outlook and serve the community. I joined Western Australia Police in the same year as I arrived, and it is a decision that I do not regret in any way, shape or form. I heartily recommend that everybody live in the shoes of a frontline police officer just for a short time. It will forever change their lives and their outlook on life. I encourage members to go and ride along for at least a week of night shift, if they have the fortitude. In January 2007, I shipped out to Kalgoorlie–Boulder, where I stayed until 2015. The goldfields was an entirely different world from what I was used to, but in time I began to appreciate the region and its colourful collection of characters. I remain convinced that Western Australia's eastern regions are underdeveloped and offer an immense economic potential. I also believe that people in regional Western Australia quite rightly feel undervalued and ignored by the major parties, who often seem obsessed with issues that only people in wealthy inner-city suburbs care about.

While stationed in Kalgoorlie with Western Australia Police, I had the fortune of meeting Hon Dave Grills, a former member of this place. Mr Grills deserves a special mention, as that meeting in Kalgoorlie ultimately led to a warm friendship and my reinvigorated interest in politics, which culminated in my election to this place.

As a police officer, one gets to see life—real life. One witnesses the worst, and sometimes the best, of human nature. Through working in the real world, I have a good understanding of everyday people's concerns and what the important issues are. What my party and I represent to people is commonsense, hard work, understanding and traditional values. I fear that too many people within the political and media classes are detached from ordinary people and tend to look down upon those who do not share their so-called progressive values.

At the state election just over two months ago, the public of WA overwhelmingly expressed their dissatisfaction with the previous Liberal–National government and voted for a change of direction. It was a sweeping victory and a total disendorsement of the former Premier and his cabinet. The size of the swing indicates that people will resoundingly turf out governments that fail to deliver. Voter loyalty to the major parties is disappearing and people will no longer vote for a party simply because that is how they have always voted.

In my observation, many Western Australians are utterly fed up with all-talk, no-action career politicians, and are tired of hearing the same old promises from the same tired old politicians who never produce any results. I am here to represent those people, hold this government to account, and put Western Australians first. Those people have realised that politics is a battle of ideas—a philosophical contest, not merely a public relations competition, pitting reason against self-indulgent, self-righteous sentiment, which is divorced from objective reality.

Throughout Western Australia I see strong warning signs of disaffection, malaise and cynicism. A growing chunk of the body politic lacks drive and common purpose. Many people feel that their country is at risk of losing the values that made it strong and had it being looked upon with jealous eyes from overseas. Many people feel that their country is slipping away, socially and culturally. They notice the decline in community-mindedness and watch as reminders of our Western Judeo-Christian and British heritage are erased from school curricula and the public sphere. They see the growing entrenchment of asymmetrical multiculturalism, consumerism and hyper-individualism.

Significantly, they see a society in which responsibility and mutuality have been slowly eroded. It has been eroded through unemployment and chronic underemployment in low-paid insecure work. The healthcare system is creaking at the joints, our children's education is at risk, and year after year, our children's educational standards tumble down the global tables. Our economy is failing to provide improvements in real living standards. There is fear on the streets. Levels of crime and substance abuse only seem to worsen, and the traditional family unit is falling apart like never before. The social cohesion we used to enjoy is increasingly being replaced by a sense of alienation. Is it any wonder people are fed up with the same old all-talk and no-action governments that just look after the few rather than the many?

We must rediscover a society based on mutual rights and, most importantly, responsibilities. This is real social justice, in which people get something for something. This is the almost forgotten social contract which sprang from the Enlightenment of eighteenth century Europe and the great British philosophers, Hobbes and Locke, and also a Frenchman named Rousseau. Simply stated, we each have a duty to society in which we accept the responsibility to work and to improve ourselves and our communities. To quote Edmund Burke —

Society is indeed a contract. It is a partnership ... not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.

It is my view that we have inherited our state and society from previous generations, but do not possess it. Rather, we are temporary custodians, tasked with conserving a precious inheritance that will, in turn, become a future generation's inheritance.

At its core, the party I belong to wants to generate a culture of service and responsibility in which we all pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves, but each other. We know that individuals prosper best with a safe, secure and cohesive society. There has been much commentary—most of it widely inaccurate—about what One Nation stands for. Our supporters have been demonised and labelled with many vile epithets. I would like to now dispel some of the myths about our party.

One Nation is comprised of working and middle-class Australians whose basic decency, quiet patriotism, traditional moral compass and vigorous work ethic defines them as the heart and soul of our society. One Nation serves as a voice for those who feel they have been forgotten or abandoned by the major parties, which now increasingly seem to pander to special interests and vocal minorities. The great Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey once warned —

The more emphasis that is placed on the rights of minorities, and the need for affirmative action to enhance those rights, the more is the concept of democracy—and the rights of the majority—in danger of being weakened.

For our democracy to remain strong, establishment politicians cannot afford to keep ignoring a large chunk of the body politic.

I would now like to turn my attention to the East Metropolitan Region, which I have been given the great honour of representing. I am immensely grateful to the people of the East Metro Region, which encompasses Armadale, Bassendean, Belmont, Darling Range, Forrestfield, Kalamunda, Maylands, Midland, Mirrabooka, Morley, Mt Lawley, Swan Hills, Thornlie and West Swan. There a number of serious challenges confronting the fast-growing communities in the electorate. Wedged between the inner-city and regional areas, communities in the East Metro Region could be described as the ignored middle children of Western Australian society. Despite grand promises from successive governments, residents of Perth's outer eastern suburbs continue to lack access to the infrastructure, services and jobs that inner city residents enjoy. As a resident of Aveley, I can attest to the nightmare that is the daily commute on our clogged eastern roads.

Unfortunately, this situation is only set to worsen, with predictions that the population of Perth and surrounds will swell by around 75 per cent to 3.5 million, largely due to the high immigration policies pursued by the major parties at the federal level. As the 2016 Perth and Peel@3.5 million planning document noted, this rapid, forced population growth will place increased and unsustainable pressure on our natural environment, our economic wellbeing and our highly valued way of life.

I am obviously a migrant myself and I understand that some level of continued immigration is desirable. However, I do not believe the current rate of immigration-fuelled growth is sustainable or beneficial to the pre-existing population. We have seen over the last decade how incumbent residents have borne the costs through greater congestion on roads and public transport, as well as more expensive housing and reduced amenity. Perth's freeways have become car parks, our trains are overcrowded and our schools and hospitals are overloaded. Residents seeking affordable housing have been squeezed out to the urban fringes, far away from employment and services. The huge infrastructure costs associated with this population growth has also forced increased state debt borrowings and unpopular proposed asset sales. Yet the plan from the established parties is to continue the policy of high immigration, without any real measures to cope with the influx. To put it mildly, this is a recipe for disaster. Western Australia urgently needs its own population policy, aimed at protecting the quality and way of life of the existing population. We also need new ways of funding infrastructure in WA to ease crippling congestion, lift productivity, generate economic growth and jobs and keep our assets in domestic hands.

Another major issue facing communities in the East Metro Region is the volume of crime—not only reported, but actually committed—and in particular burglary, assaults, domestic violence and alcohol-related incidents. I have a strong commitment to the rule of law and order. I do believe that there is a strong community perception that our criminal justice system and our corrections system is a failing and dysfunctional one. From simple observation it is obvious that our courts have slanted too far in favour of the accused, and no longer reflect the views of everyday Australians.

Our communities want to see more robust sentencing from magistrates and judges, who are rightly perceived to be consistently out of touch with community expectations. When magistrates fail to meet community expectations they are in danger of losing their legitimacy. I fear we have reached that point. Those who commit crime have no fear of the police, no fear of being caught, and no fear of going to court, because the chances are they will receive very little in the way of any punitive measures against them. The fact of the matter is that the law, in most cases, is adequate, in that it contains provisions for magistrates or judges to impose a custodial sentence. However, in many cases, the sentencing is perceived to be excessively lenient for the crime committed and there is a view amongst many lawyers and judges that society is to blame for the crime rather than the offender, and this has to stop. This approach to crime has created a society without personal responsibility, in which there are no consequences to bad behaviour in school, bad behaviour on the sports field and bad behaviour in public life. It has created a society of excuse-makers and blame-shifters, where criminal and bad behaviour is seen as a less favourable career choice. It has taken away people's responsibilities for their actions. I believe individuals should be held fully responsible for their actions. Committing crime is fundamentally a matter of rational choice.

It will be my role in this Parliament to send a strong message of support to the police on the ground, who do such a difficult job so well with little resource and support from successive governments and, in particular, the judiciary. I will be seeking to increase the number of police on the front line and to secure the health, safety and welfare provisions that our police so desperately need. It really is tough enough. Our police deserve access to adequate resources.

To improve law and order, we need to ask: what are the ideological aims of policing—crime control, the protection of citizens and their property, the upholding of justice, the denunciation of criminality, the maintenance of order? I would suggest that our police currently fail all these tests. The fact is that there are simply not enough police on the streets. It is very, very straightforward. I know of case after case of police not even attending a job, or forensic officers not attending burglaries because of the enormity of the workload and the backlog of jobs. To put it bluntly, the police are in crisis. I fully support the call for an additional 1 000 police officers over the next four years and

the associated resources required. If members do not believe crime is out of control, again, I invite them to ride along with the police.

Policing is, by its very nature, difficult and dangerous. Police make mistakes and get it wrong. Police officers have to live for the rest of their lives with decisions that they made in a split second. Rarely do they see good things when policing and, because of that, they become cynical, which makes them seem hard and uncaring. Policing damages good people. When they leave the service, every police officer has issues that they must rationalise before moving forward. Some, sadly, never rationalise them. Many members of the police have been treated absolutely disgracefully, having been left to fend for themselves after being medically retired. Why is it that the police do not have a tailored workers' compensation-style scheme? I want a scheme to be introduced as soon as possible with retrospectivity to give peace of mind to those who are currently living a daily struggle. Every police officer of some years' experience carries with them post-traumatic stress disorder of varying magnitude. The rate of mental illness, especially depression, divorce and anger issues, is simply not acceptable for those people who sacrifice to serve and protect with very little reward.

I would like to recount to the house a short story of a former police officer's life that fell apart after witnessing too much trauma and distress. I will keep her real name secret, so I will refer to her as Nikki. At the age of 20, Nikki joined Western Australia Police, following in her father's footsteps. She served for 15 years doing pretty much what every front-line police officer deals with today. She witnessed death, violence, car accidents and families ripped apart by alcoholism, drug addiction and domestic violence. Towards the end of her career, Nikki noticed that she was wracked with sadness and mood swings and would relive some of the trauma she witnessed. She eventually admitted to herself that she could no longer do the job and she was medically retired. She was told by doctors that she was experiencing depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Nikki suffered with excessive suicidal ideation, along with the break-up of her marriage. She became mentally unable to work and relied upon a disability pension to get by. Eight years after being medically retired, she was eventually referred to a PTSD specialist and admitted to hospital, where her finances went from bad to worse and she had to declare herself bankrupt. Needless to say, the effect of Nikki serving in WAPOL has been devastating on her and her children. The whole family is in counselling and they struggle through every day. After experiencing severe mental illness that sprang directly from her work, Nikki, like hundreds of others, was just left out in the cold to fend for herself. Is this how we treat those who serve and protect our communities? Every state in the Federation has a workers' compensation package for their police, except WA. I am sure honourable members will agree that it is now time to change that.

I, along with my colleagues, will offer to assist in the passage of government legislation, but as a One Nation member, I will continue to insist on certain conditions being met—conditions that bring the very best outcomes for WA and my electorate. Our support for the government will not be taken for granted and we will reserve the right to vote against any or all government legislation. This new government has talked about putting Western Australians first in local content provisions and employment. We want to see it now deliver on those promises. I would also like to see the government ensure that Western Australians receive a fair return for the exploitation of our mineral and energy resources. WA has an abundance of natural gas, but we are failing to properly capitalise on this natural advantage. We must make sure that sufficient reserves of gas are set aside to meet the current and future needs of the local economy. We must also make sure that local companies, workers and communities benefit from gas projects and that the state receives sufficient revenue.

In closing, it is usual and right in an inaugural speech to also thank family, friends and supporters. Firstly and most importantly, I thank my wife, Helen, whose love and support knows no depth. I thank my children, Tristan and George, for their enthusiasm; my parents, Mike and Myra; my brother, Andrew, all of whom encouraged me to stand up in the face of abuse, insults and lies from political opponents. You are my driving force. Without support and guidance from the following people I would not be standing here today: I thank Ron McClean and Marye Louise Daniels, Senator Pauline Hanson, Lincoln Stewart, George Copley, Sonia Dixon, Jenny Bennett and Sandra Old. I would also like to acknowledge my One Nation WA parliamentary colleagues, Hon Colin Tincknell and Hon Robin Scott, for their encouragement. Finally, I thank my supporters who came out to volunteer on election day and who were verbally abused and bullied in the name of our democracy. You are true heroes to stand up for your beliefs and values in the face of that hostility. With your continued assistance and support, I hope to achieve the best possible results for the people of the East Metropolitan Region and Western Australia.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

**HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural)** [3.30 pm]: I join with others in this place in giving this Address-in-Reply contribution. Prior to doing so, I would like to acknowledge and commend Her Excellency the Governor Kerry Sanderson, AC, for officiating at the opening of the fortieth Parliament and especially for her presiding over the swearing-in of this significant chamber in this Parliament. I think we are all quite privileged to



have the first female Governor of the state carry out these very special functions. I find it hard to believe that this is the first time we have had a female Governor in this magnificent state of ours and, quite frankly, I hope we have more of them. Yes, shock horror, as a proud father of three daughters I think it is time that the female part of the equation stepped up, and it is great to see that happening at such high levels in this state. In fact, we have also set a first in this Legislative Council in having the first female President, Hon Kate Doust. I commend everybody here for selecting her. I am sure she will be a magnificent President. I believe she has a challenge in front of her, because Hon Barry House set standards of impartiality that I hope Hon Kate Doust achieves, and I have no doubt that she will do so. We have all witnessed her dedication here in the last couple of days. Obviously, it is a steep learning curve, and we wish her well and give her some leniency for at least another sitting week until she gets a grasp of what is required as President!

I also commend the Labor Party on winning the election. I mean that sincerely, but in reality I am disappointed with its performance two months in. The Labor Party put up a raft of promises to the community of this state that were believable. In fact, I almost voted Labor, but then I decided that it would be a bridge too far on my behalf! I thought that the chairman of the Commonwealth Grants Commission must have had a whisper in the ear of Hon Mark McGowan and let him know that our GST return was actually going up to 80c, such was the spending spree the Labor Party promised and undertook to the people of the state. I reflect on the comments of the Leader of the Opposition, Hon Peter Collier, yesterday when he said that never before had he seen such arrogance so early in a government of two months. At this stage I have yet to find any promise or commitment that this government has upheld. I hope that as the Labor Party goes forward and learns the responsibility of government, and the gravity of that position, that it stands by the commitments it made prior to the election.

**Hon Alanna Clohesy:** How many promises did you keep?

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** Quite frankly, we kept every one except for the rail line to—where was it? Please help me.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Ellenbrook.

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** It was the railway line to Ellenbrook.

Several members interjected.

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** I am more than happy for opposition members to interject. The people of this state expect the Labor Party to perform better. The Labor government's transparency at this stage, which it committed to, is negligible. I think the standard of the Labor government is reflected at question time in this house. The Labor government's response to questions from this side of the house is absolutely abysmal; it is shocking. When I was a parliamentary secretary and we had ministers on the other side of the house, we did our absolute best to answer questions honestly. On a number of occasions I withdrew answers because I was not happy with the answers I had received, and that is on the public record. I ask the government to lift its game to the level that this Legislative Council expects it to perform, especially at question time. Obfuscation is not the standard that I expected, practised and witnessed over the last eight years. I shall move on, because I will have more to say about this on future occasions. Government ministers need to lift their game and the cabinet must fulfil at least some of its election commitments.

I shall move on to the reason I am standing here today.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Remind us!

**Hon Col Holt:** It is a wideranging debate, surely.

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** Yes, surely. How long have we got?

On Monday, 8 May I attended a funeral in my home town of Dalwallinu where I spent most of my life farming. The funeral was for a gentleman called Mr Ormond Cail, who happens to be the father-in-law of my daughter. Ormond was born in the district in 1937 and, along with three brothers and sisters and his parents, lived and worked on a property in Goodlands. If members are not familiar with where Goodlands is, it is near Lake Moore, and across Lake Moore is the pastoral country. It is as far east as we can get in the agricultural area in that part of the world. The funeral was attended by well over 300 people who knew Ormond well. Ormond was one of nature's gentlemen, a hardworking farmer. Many people had played a hand in Ormond's life and in his role of the last 29 years as a local government councillor, an outstanding sportsman, a family man, farmer and community member. It was a sad occasion for the family, and for my family and I, and we offer our sincere condolences to Nola and her family. What impressed me at the time was the fact that Ormond was a second generation of pioneers in the Agricultural Region. As far as I am concerned the first generation were people like Ormond's mother and father who went there from Europe, all over Australia and the south west, which was developed well beforehand, and took the risk of going to unknown areas and developing and clearing land. Those people found it pretty hard, and Ormond's generation, who came along in the late 1920s and early 1930s, developed the industry we have today—that is, the grain industry. Necessity is the mother of invention and these people had to invent a lot of things. The Cail family was 70 miles from the nearest town; I have no idea how long it would take by horse and cart. They

started their own school, which was called the Cailbro School, with the support of the education department at the time and paid for a teacher. To keep their numbers up they employed staff—married couples with as many children as possible! There is an anecdote about one of the brothers who was in Wubin and met a gentleman walking down the street in a coat and tie, which is a bit unusual in regional WA at any time, let alone in the 1920s or 1930s, but this would have been in the 1930s. The brother asked the gentleman what he was doing and he replied that he was a school inspector and he had come to inspect all the local schools. Of course, the brother hopped on his horse and dray and went back to the property as quickly as possible. The Cailbro School had closed down two days prior, so he had to muster all the students up again and put them in the school for the school inspector's arrival the next day!

Anyway, it is the men and women throughout the Agricultural Region, as I said the second generation of pioneers, who developed the agricultural industry of today, especially the grains and wheat industry. They adopted any innovation, because they were working to try to make a living growing crops in one of the driest and hardest farming environments in the world. It is an environment with one of the shallowest soils in the world. There were enormous issues with acidity, of course a lack of rainfall and varying soil types. To overcome all those things and remain viable is an ongoing challenge. They adopted initiatives and technologies, things that we take for granted and that we do not even think about. For example, it was a massive transition to go from steel wheels to rubber wheels. A lot of properties took them up after the Second World War when rubber tyres became more plentiful. Just for the house's interest, going from steel wheels to rubber was a more comfortable ride of course, but it also increased productivity between 25 per cent and 30 per cent. Whereas before farmers had done three rounds of the paddock on steel wheels, they could do four rounds with rubber tyres. Of course, with every adoption of technology there is an adverse outcome—steel wheels never get punctures! Learning how to change rubber tyres became an art in itself. Initiatives have gone on in the grain industry to this day. There were little things such as superphosphate and trace elements. I can remember a time in my farming career when we went from bags to bulk. What a massive transition that was. The efficiency gains were enormous. Today, technology is certainly beyond comprehension. People even have mobile phones on most properties today. I am proud that it was my government, the previous government, through royalties for regions, that enhanced or put in place around 350 mobile phone towers throughout regional Western Australia. What a great adjunct that is —

**Hon Adele Farina:** We could do with a few more in the south west.

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** I thank Hon Adele Farina for that. Now that her party is in government, I certainly hope that it keeps the program going, because there are still deficiencies throughout the south west and even in the member's region. I certainly hope that the government finds the money to keep that program going, because information technology in any industry, but especially the grain industry and especially in isolated areas, is paramount to remaining commercially viable.

Of course, wheat varieties have changed over the years. We can all remember wheat crops about so high. Nowadays there is dwarf wheat, short-period wheat, high efficiencies and a whole number of things, including water requirements. That technology takes time to develop. One thing we have done in Western Australia—the figures change a little depending on the conditions in the eastern states—is that, as a rule of thumb, we export between 70 and 80 per cent of Australia's crop. We do that year in, year out. The grain industry, and the wheat industry especially, which is the major crop grown out there, is probably worth \$3 billion to \$4 billion annually on average—it varies from season to season. We have had a market for our grain especially in Indonesia with the Bogasari mills. I am not sure if members are aware of this, but the last time I went through the Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd terminal down in Kwinana there were two bulk ships plying backwards and forwards between Indonesia and the CBH port on a weekly basis carrying Western Australian grain. About 40 per cent of the grain grown in this state in any year ends up in the Bogasari mills to be ground into flour and used as a quality lifter for other grains that are purchased around the world and milled in those mills in Indonesia. Of course, we all know about the Australian Wheat Board and the differentiation between the prices on the east and west coasts. I was involved for at least four years, along with a number of other good, hardworking people, in putting the AWB as a monopoly exporter of grain out of this state, and certainly Australia, in the bin. I cannot believe any government would nowadays endorse the legislation that protected the Australian Wheat Board from prosecution and even from ministerial intervention. That was unbelievable, but that is all history now.

I would like to use this address today to voice some serious concerns about the prospects going forward over the next 10 years at least, if not into the future, for our wheat industry. We have a massive threat that is growing and growing from around the Black Sea in Russia and surrounding countries. I will get on to that in a minute. Just before I do, out of interest I will give the house some figures on the number of people who are farming in the Agricultural Region today. I am talking about farming families, who are the backbone of the industry. In about 1994, there were about 14 600 farming families in the agricultural area, give or take a couple of hundred. At the turn of the century there were 10 700. Today, there are about 4 100. The attrition rate in the number of people farming out there has been enormous, but the same area of land is still under cultivation. Efficiency gains in the production of grain in this state have almost peaked. I do not know what else we can do to become more efficient

using fewer people and bigger machinery. Certainly our transport routes could be better and certainly the grain delivery points could become more efficient. I am a believer in competition. We need competition there, and that will happen. CBH has done a great job, but I think its day is coming very quickly, as I have said before in this place. Monopolies become lazy and inefficient and charge the end users what they believe they can get away with. That is what happens. That is where competition comes in. As we know, when competition comes in, you sharpen your pencil; otherwise, you lose market share. That is what is required.

Let me get back to the topic of Russia. Russia possesses two and a half times more arable land than this country. Unlike Australia, it has significant reserves of fertile land. Today, 70 per cent of all Russian agricultural land is privatised. I am sure we remember from our days at school when Russia had the old communal kolkhoz during the communist era. They were totally inefficient.

**Hon Michael Mischin:** Collective farms.

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** They were collective farms; I thank Hon Michael Mischin. They were totally inefficient. In fact, the most efficient forms of agriculture when the collective farms were operating were those owned by private individuals in their backyards. That is what they lived on. Everything else was put in properly but nobody cared about it and it just rotted away or was sold or put on the black market. Today, 70 per cent of all Russian land is in private hands, and has been since the 1990s. The rich black soil lands of south Russia near the Black Sea are some of the richest agricultural lands in the world. From what I have read, the Russian agricultural industry is becoming more and more sophisticated. It is being backed by the Putin government. Agricultural produce out of Russia now exceeds its gas exports into Europe or its arms exports to the rest of the world. From a Russian perspective, agriculture is its main form of foreign exchange. Around the Black Sea, Russia has a number of deepwater ports. They are few in number, but they have been upgraded significantly and have had billions of dollars of foreign investment in them by international grain acquiring countries because those countries can see that they can make money out of the Black Sea export of those grains. The supply chain in Russia has had significant investment. I am talking here about fertiliser, chemicals, machinery and the labour force. In fact, they are becoming more and more westernised along the lines of the efficiencies that we have in Western Australia. Quite frankly, it is believed that Russian wheat exports will increase by 60 per cent over the next 15 to 20 years. I believe that we will be lucky to increase our wheat exports by 10 to 15 per cent. Just to give an example, the Russian Federation exported 30 million tonnes of wheat and is the largest wheat exporting country in the world today. These are last year's figures. The United States exported 26 million tonnes; the EU, 25 million tonnes; Canada, 21 million tonnes; and Australia, 20 million tonnes. If I combine the Black Sea countries—that is, Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan—the total tonnage exported on the world market is 54 million tonnes a year. It has a combined value of \$US7.5 billion, in comparison with Australia's \$US3.6 billion.

I am standing here today out of great concern, because these massive exports and the increase in Black Sea grains—wheat especially—are now targeting our Asian markets. We sell the most expensive wheat in the world. In May, Australia exported wheat from Western Australia at \$287 a tonne. Russia exported wheat at \$247 a tonne. Russia is exporting wheat \$30 to \$40 below what we are asking for in the international marketplace. But, more importantly, Russia's cost of production is a third of ours. The cost of production for every tonne of grain in this state today varies between \$240 and \$270 a tonne. In effect, most growers in this season, at current wheat prices, will be selling their grain at below production cost, yet Russia can make money at production costs of \$US200, which is \$US87 less than we are asking for our grain today.

**Hon Adele Farina:** Can I ask why?

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** Why is what?

**Hon Adele Farina:** Why is there a stark difference?

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** The stark difference is that their production costs are 30 per cent lower than ours. They do not need as much fertiliser because their soils are far more fertile, they have more regular rainfall, they have cheaper sources of labour and their machinery—it used to be state-produced; it still is in a way because it is made in state factories—is cheaper to purchase. Most of our machinery here is imported from the United States. For example, if someone wants to buy a class 7 harvester today, it will cost anywhere between \$800 000 and \$900 000, and they will utilise that piece of machinery for possibly six weeks of the year. A 10 000-hectare property here, which is pretty much the average wheat-growing property, could be worth between \$8 million and \$10 million, and they could very well need \$4 million to \$5 million of machinery to operate that property efficiently. That is before we get into the cost of fertilisers, fuel and transport. Russian transport costs alone are about 30 per cent cheaper than ours by rail to port. The shipping costs would be comparable, but when we add all those figures, we find that the Russian cost of production is a cost production we dream of having but will never achieve, due to our structures and input costs.

One of the great concerns is that these massive Russian wheat exporters are now targeting Asia. One of things we always had in Australia was quality wheat for milling with good protein content. But the variation in price is now

bringing it to the point that Asian mills are saying they cannot afford to buy great quantities of Australian wheat. In fact, a number of mills in Vietnam are using the latest technology in their grinding processes to calibrate their grinders to grind more Russian wheat so that its specifications—its milling or flour and baking quality—will come very close to Australian wheat. I do not know how widespread that is, but we all know that technology has the ability to overcome a lot of deficiencies so that we would not know the difference between real leather, for example, and synthetic leather. With good quality synthetic leather today, people would be hard-pressed to tell the difference; even the smell test would defeat people. That is the issue.

We have certainly seen great variations in climate in Western Australia in the last decade. I saw a little bit of it when I was farming. All the scientists say that if climate change becomes a reality in the next 10, 15 or 20 years, it will certainly affect agriculture in this state. The effect in Russia will be beneficial; they will actually have warmer winters and may even have a bit more rainfall. Once again, they will capitalise on climate change and we will be deficient because of it.

I am saying this because this issue has been ongoing in my mind, and I have had discussions with people with greater knowledge than I have on this matter for at least the last 12 months. I am talking about academics, certainly Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd, leading industry groups and buyers of our wheat. I am talking primarily about wheat, which is the largest crop we grow; there is a reason for that. Wheat can be grown year in, year out; with canola the hectareage is growing in larger numbers every year. This year, for example, we will probably have the largest hectareage of canola ever grown in Western Australia. There is a very good reason for that; it is all about budget. Canola is worth about \$500 to \$550 a tonne and wheat is around \$240 to \$260 a tonne, so when the farmer goes to the bank manager and says, “We’re breaking even or losing money on our wheat production, we’ll throw in another 1 000 hectares of canola”, the bottom line looks better. But canola cannot be grown year in, year out; it needs at least a three-year break because of disease issues that are now occurring out there. Monocultures always end up with disease, and canola is very susceptible to fungi and other diseases so the break has to be longer. Wheat is the predominant crop.

I have said that a number of people, not only me, are very concerned about what is likely to occur in the marketplace, how wheat goes to the marketplace and the threat from the Black Sea countries. What is the solution? The solution is more research. The solution is to increase production, or at least, as Hon Adele Farina quite correctly said, drop our input costs. For the same input costs, if we can grow more grain, our input costs per hectolitre or per tonne become less. The future of our wheat industry, I believe, is in genetically modified wheat. We need greater water efficiency. Greater water efficiency means that in a drying climate the plant can utilise more water or more rain from the ground. A lot of people probably do not realise that the driest piece of clay that can be found still has 18 per cent moisture in it. We need more efficient use of fertilisers and more crops that are resilient to frost damage. Last year we witnessed one of the best seasons ever, but frost wiped out thousands and thousands of hectares just before harvest time. Frost is becoming a real issue. We can have either GM or natural breeding.

It is interesting that the School of Plant Biology at the University of Western Australia has received a grant of \$2.5 million to look at the three things I have just discussed. It is doing it through the natural breeding process. I spent a number of hours meeting with a very knowledgeable person, Professor Jacqueline Batley, discussing this issue. She agreed with everything I am saying about the threat to our wheat market from the Black Sea countries. She and a number of other people in her team received a \$2.5 million grant for four years made up of \$1 million federal in funding, \$500 000 from the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences and \$1 million in kind from commercial entities. Quite frankly, \$2.5 million for agriculture research is an absolute pittance, but it is better than nothing; it is better than a poke in the eye. Professor Jacqueline and the School of Plant Biology at UWA are trying to utilise strains—or genomes, as they call them—out of Chinese varieties of wheat, and put them in varieties that we grow in Western Australia. Obviously, there are a number of strains, and China is the biggest wheat producer in the world. It does not export much but it grows more wheat than any other country. China grows wheat in a climate very similar to ours. The soil type might be different but the climate is very similar. Obviously China’s scientists and plant breeding technologies have strains that we could adopt in the varieties we grow here. That is what these people are about. The professor made a very good point when I asked her about the lead time—from finding, let us say, a genome, putting it into wheat variety utilised across the board here—from development to putting it out on a commercial cropping basis. She said it was a minimum of 10 years or possibly 12. That is a long time. I am disappointed that the Minister for Agriculture and Food is away on urgent parliamentary business —

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Member, I will make sure she sees a copy of your contribution.

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** Thank you.

One of the issues that the good professor mentioned was that the team had received funding for three to four years for something that could be significant to the industry and worth \$4 billion to \$5 billion to this state. When we say \$4 billion to \$5 billion, we forget that that accumulates by four times year in, year out. Halfway through the process, they would have to apply for more funding. They are dedicated scientists; they are not fly-by-night

scientists. They are not going to disappear. Professor Batley also said that, from her experience in Australia as a very senior geneticist, there is no coordination between developing crop strains or developing strains of grain that will benefit a certain area. Everybody is in their little silo, including the Department of Agriculture and Food. They are all doing their own thing. Some of them are aiming for the same outcomes as the one down the road but there is no correspondence between them. It is crazy. It comes down to a lack of hundreds of millions of development dollars. I appeal to the Minister for Agriculture and Food to use her department to try to get some coordination. At the very least, somebody should say, “Tom down there has developed this; what do you think about it?” If they do not want to share the idea, at least A should be talking to B so the whole process is fast tracked to some degree. I assume that one of the reasons for a lack of coordination at a professional level is that for a lot of academics, if they do not publish, they are dead. If they lose funding, they lose credibility. In reality, surely some coordination would help everybody.

I quote Professor Jacqueline Batley, PhD, MSc, BSc. She stated —

Wheat and crop development is absolutely critical to the future of broadacre farming in Western Australia. If more funding for R&D is not made available then we won’t have an agricultural industry.

Our ever changing environment, both climatic and economic, will leave us with varieties of wheat that are not competitive in a global market. Funding not only needs to be increased in a monetary value but also needs to be a longer term investment than the current funding arrangements that are put in place for 3 to 4 years.

Better co-ordination is needed between all research facilities and agriculture departments. Funding will be more effective if everyone is sharing their knowledge and research break throughs, ultimately we are all working towards a common goal.

I support that quote. As responsible members for the Agricultural Region, we should pursue some sort of outcome along the lines advocated by the good professor through the current Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Agriculture has been—I was going to say “the backbone”—the basis of the community in Australia ever since Captain Cook arrived on our fair shores. Today we are an urban society but in our blood we still think of when dad was on the farm or out shearing. It is still there in our genetic make-up and certainly in our psyche. Agriculture is certainly essential to this state, if not the whole nation. Its value to Western Australia is immense. Yet—I will keep repeating this—our investment in agriculture from a research and development perspective is abysmal in comparison with the rest of the world.

I will quote from an article that appeared in *The Australian* written by Sue Neales. Before I read the quote, let me say that we have heard the mantra—mining boom to dining boom. Apparently, we are going to be saved by our food exports. DAFWA says that by 2025 we will have to double agriculture production in this state. That is rubbish. It is just a line. It has no foundation unless we invest in R&D and we carry that R&D through to the farms. We need R&D that works. Sue Neales states —

Australia’s ability to become a food bowl feeding a fast-expanding Asia is being undermined by continued funding cuts to agricultural research.

John Muller from Charles Sturt University and Mick Keogh from the Australian Farm Institute revealed to the Australian Agricultural Economics Society in Sydney this week, that as agricultural research spending has dropped since 2000, the ability of Australia’s farmers to produce more food has stagnated.

I agree with that. It continues —

Mr Keogh said for Australia to be a food bowl for Asia by 2030 and for agriculture to become the next boom industry, farmers needed to be more productive, growing more food on the same amount of land using less water.

Earlier I outlined all the ways in which we can get to that point. I do not believe that we cannot get to that point because, as I said previously, our forebears overcame all the adversity this land throws up when living in the agricultural region and growing a crop.

Australia used to be placed ninth internationally in R&D into agricultural research. We are now placed sixteenth. Government, ministers for agriculture and departments, certainly in this state—I am a representative for Western Australia and certainly the Agricultural Region—need to take these statements on board and readdress the issues.

**Hon Adele Farina:** But wasn’t it your government that gutted the department of agriculture?

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** I will take that. I do not have the figures in front of me. I will be happy to look at the figures if the member has them in front of her. The depletion of the department of agriculture’s budget started in the previous Labor government.

**Hon Adele Farina:** No.

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** Yes, it did; and to some degree it was carried out by the government that I belonged to. The member made a very good point. In reality, there has been a vacuum in the department of agriculture for many years and that has been taken up by the commercial side of R&D. A number of fantastic groups of farmers are carrying out their own R&D with support from the Grains Research and Development Corporation and other commercial entities on a region-by-region basis. I do not believe that the old agriculture department ought to be revisited because we will never get it back. As I have said previously, a good role model in the growing of grain would be coordination of R&D projects in universities and commercial entities and whatever has been taking place in the department of agriculture.

**Hon Adele Farina:** But won't they claim commercial-in-confidence or commercial in research?

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** That is fine but, as stated, it is for a common goal. I do not have all the answers but I am saying that the lack of coordination is making developments slower, more expensive and probably less viable, and we do not have that time. We do not have time, and it is not because the communists or the Russians are coming and they are going to swamp us with wheat exports and our markets are going to accept them.

**Hon Diane Evers:** So if the government had supported the department of agriculture through the past eight years, wouldn't we be in a much better place?

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** Not necessarily. Why would the member think that? Most of our wheat varieties —

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! It is not question time. You should be talking to me, Hon Jim Chown.

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** I am more than happy to, Madam President. I did not see you come into the Chair. Welcome. Nowadays, most of our wheat varieties are sourced from the development programs in South Australia. From a wheat perspective, I cannot think of one that has been developed in Western Australia for the last 10 to 15 years but Hon Darren West might be able to name one. No, obviously not. From that perspective, to catch up on R&D in these sorts of developments does not happen overnight. If we have fallen behind by that much, we may as well get out of the game. The research and development in lupins, for example, is very good, and certainly apples and all those sorts of things.

**Hon Colin Tincknell:** We're not actually interested in who's responsible for cutting funding. What we want to see is advances made now. The past doesn't matter now. We need to do something about it. Let's look at the future.

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** That is correct. I could not agree more. Let us move forward because we do not have the time. If it takes 10 years to develop something, and that is fast tracking, and then we lose another three to four years through lack of coordination, it makes it very hard to make anything work.

I have another five minutes. What am I going to say now? Do we have afternoon tea in five minutes? I just thought I would bring this to the attention of the house.

As I said previously, I know that Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd has done a lot of work on this matter, not that I have seen it. There are certainly academics in Western Australia who would like more funding, and I have just given members a quote from one, which encapsulates the issues that I have discussed. If we do not do something, and if we do not take notice, it will be too late. I would be loath to see, as I said, the reduction in numbers back to 4 000-odd farmers, and small towns going. In 10 years' time, that could be halved again. In 10 years there could be just a couple of regional towns out there, living on Centrelink. One of the things we need is alternative crops. Let us get away from the monoculture of wheat and see whether we can find something that will grow out there. By "out there" I mean from Esperance right through to Kalbarri. It is a massive tract of land, and it is still outstanding agricultural land today, but we need more barrels to shoot—put it that way. With the monoculture of wheat, with the burgeoning threat—it is a very real threat—from the Black Sea, we will find our crops virtually unsaleable due to the expense. I would hate to see our growers, who work hard all their lives—most of them are third or fourth generation farming families—become unviable through the lack of innovation and the lack of the adoption of new technology. If that includes genetically modified crops, so be it; there is nothing wrong with GM crops. Part of our responsibility in this place is to get up and speak on issues of concern, and speak to the relevant ministers by giving them help, assistance and ideas. They are not the fount of all knowledge—we are, collectively.

**Hon Darren West:** What about the rail?

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** What are you on about? I used to have a little kelpie named Trixie. She would yap, yap, yap, yap all the time. She was not a bad little dog, but she was always outside the yard; she was never in the yard. She never quite knew what her job was. Hon Darren West reminds me so much of her.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Hon Jim Chown, I seek some assistance here. When we return after question time today, we have another inaugural speech. Do you want to seek leave to continue your remarks at a later stage of today's sitting?

**Hon JIM CHOWN:** Madam President, I am more than happy to wind up in a couple of minutes, and thank members for their interjections, and for their patience. I look forward to a response at some stage, if necessary, but I certainly look forward to discussing this with the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Alannah MacTiernan. If any of my colleagues on either side of the house want to give me some support in those discussions, they would be more than welcome to come along. I will inform them of when the meeting will take place, and we will take it forward from there.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 621.]

*Sitting suspended from 4.13 to 4.30 pm*