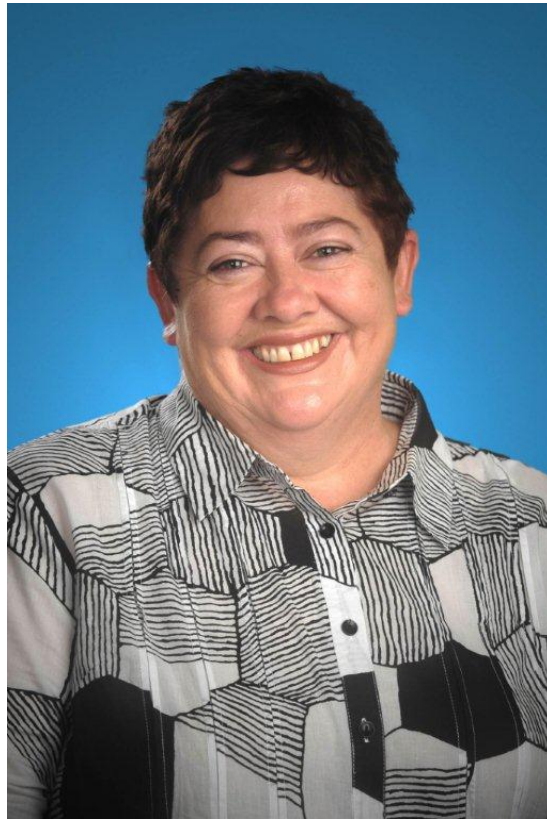




**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Hon Alanna Clohesy, MLC**  
(Member for East Metropolitan Region)

**Legislative Council**

**Address-in-Reply**

**Wednesday, 12 June 2013**

*Reprinted from Hansard*



# Legislative Council

Wednesday, 12 June 2013

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## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

### *Motion*

**HON ALANNA CLOHESY (East Metropolitan)** [7.31 pm]: Thank you, Mr President. I would like to commence by acknowledging the Noongar people, the traditional owners of this land, and I pay my respects to elders past and present.

I congratulate you, Mr President, on your re-election and thank you for the welcome and encouragement you have shown me. I look forward to working with and learning from you during my time here.

I stand before you tonight, very humbled to have been elected by the people of East Metropolitan Region to represent their interests in this place. It is an honour that I will not take for granted and one that I will undertake with honesty, integrity and fairness, and a lot of hard work.

## PERSONAL BACKGROUND

The East Metropolitan Region is my home. It is where I have decided, after many years of moving around the country and overseas, to lay my hat. Like many of my colleagues in this chamber and so many others who arrive daily, I am an import to WA—an import or a draft pick, depending how you look at it, but one that I hope adds value to our community. I chose Western Australia as my home because of the opportunities that were provided to me—opportunities to further my education, and from that came opportunities to be part of a community that was vibrant and engaging; and, of course, opportunities for me to give back to my community, to my chosen home; and not to forget opportunities to develop deep and enriching friendships. But opportunities are not available to everyone. We do not share equally or fairly in the opportunities of this great state. This could almost be the soundtrack of my life—that is, equality of opportunity. Having been in a choir, I know that this is music best sung in harmony.

So how, I am sure you are wondering, Mr President, does a woman from the north west plains of Victoria, the Mallee, end up standing before you, humbled, proud and somewhat nervous? It has been a long and winding journey to get to this place, but one that has shaped who I am, what I believe and what I hope to achieve. I was born in the Mallee in the heat and the dust and the flies, but with a few sprinklings of shamrocks around the edges and some Irish rebels in my background. Actually, I was born in August, so it was probably frosty and a sparkling, sunny winter day.

Nevertheless, I grew up in a small rural community. Like all small communities, this one offered the kind of support that closeness can bring. It offered the sense of community and of belonging that living in close proximity fosters. It also provided the kind of claustrophobia that being different in a small community, or any community, can generate. I learnt from an early age that to be different came at a price. I also learnt from an early age that fairness and equality were to be fought for and were not given easily.

My mother, Vera, raised six children as a single parent. This was of course before the life-changing social reforms of the Whitlam government, in particular before the introduction of the

supporting mother's benefit. At that time, my mother's sole income was the paltry child endowment—not nearly enough to house, clothe, feed and educate six children. There were very few opportunities available to her in this isolated rural community. Her ingenuity, her circumstances and her facility for mathematics, which I do not share, and a dear uncle who managed the local pub saw her venture into starting price bookmaking to make ends meet. The community rallied around; the women at the telephone exchange put the calls through; the blokes at the pub placed bets and the local copper saw and heard nothing—for a time. SP bookmaking, of course, was illegal, so it is hard not to see the irony in me, her daughter, now being a law-maker. I can still recall the local policeman in his full uniform—something I had never seen before—coming to the front door to speak to my mother. No-one used our front door; the back door was the welcoming entrance for all. So we knew that the police officer using the front door, combined with his full uniform, including his cap, meant it was something important. His formal visit was to strongly encourage my mother to apply for a licence to run a local Totalisator Agency Board that was coming up in the region. This she did with my aunt, because also at that time single women could not hold, or would not have been granted, a licence to run such a business.

My mother later retrained as a primary school teacher and spent the rest of her life instilling in her students, and trying to instil in her family, a love of learning. My mother and my community also instilled in me a deep-seated sense of fairness. Like sexism and the gender inequalities that she experienced, racism was deeply institutionalised in our community. It was deemed okay to barrack for the local footy team while screaming racial abuse at the best player on the paddock. It still seems that it is okay for some to do that, but just using different terms. It was also considered polite to look away when Aboriginal people were shunned and forced to live in dire poverty and shocking circumstances. It was easier, you see, to accept. It was deemed okay as well to vilify, denigrate and attempt to isolate people because of their sexuality, even if they were members of your own family. It seems that it is still okay for some to do that today.

But besides all this, I got on okay. I was the secretary of the local netball club and not quite a star of the local theatre production. I was kind of accepted. I relate these stories to you not to conjure up images of an impoverished and difficult beginning, but to share with you important facets that shaped who I am and what I believe. My rural and remote beginnings gave me a deep love of the land and the landscape. It gave me a respect for farming families and their trials, and a sense of community and the importance of belonging and giving. It also helped me to understand the importance and the necessity of an inclusive community. I also gained an understanding of the suffocating nature of gender inequality, racism and homophobia. In fighting to reject these, and in trying to find ways to do that, I later came to understand two important principles—social justice and social democracy. These principles are what drive me and they are what sustain me. They have been instilled in me from a very early age and have stayed with me through a number of periods that were not fashionable and not popular.

Throughout my working life, I have stood up for and alongside people from a range of backgrounds, many of whom did not have a say in the decisions that were made about them. I have consulted, talked with, negotiated and, most of all, understood their personal experiences and tried to do something about them. But it is my belief that all people, particularly those who are most disadvantaged, have a right to services and support that provide them with opportunities and that improve their quality of life. That is what drives me. That is my light on the hill.

### **SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Exactly 64 years ago to this day, 12 June 1949, the great Labor leader and Prime Minister Ben Chifley gave the now infamous “light on the hill” address. In this address, Chifley spoke about the potential of Australia, both economically and of its people. He talked about the importance

of infrastructure—public infrastructure—and about the moral and economic imperative of encouraging migration to Australia as mechanisms for developing this human and economic potential. It seems the more things change, the more they stay the same. Chifley went on to argue —

... the job of getting the things the people of the country want comes from the roots of the Labor movement—the people who support it.

He talked about the commitment of the people working in the labour movement, not striving for their own advantage or personal gain, but working towards bringing about better conditions for all people. It is these goals and purposes that are still evident today in the labour movement. I have always been a union member throughout my many workplaces and I am particularly proud today to be a member of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union. Steve McCartney, our state secretary, has at his very core a sense of fairness and equality that drives whatever he does. I thank him, the state council and our members for their unwavering support.

My own pursuit of social justice also led me to join the Australian Labor Party over 25 years ago—although I am not saying how far over! I have held many roles over this time—letterboxer, doorknocker, policy committee member, campaigner—pretty much anything I could give and anything my party asked of me. I have been deeply honoured to be elected by our members to the position of president of WA Labor. There are many challenges in this role, but they are tempered by the opportunities to meet and work with our members at the local level. Their commitment and energy never ceases to inspire me—always inspires me. It is this purpose and these goals that make me proud to stand here today as a member of Parliament for the great Australian Labor Party and I sincerely thank our members for showing their faith in me.

Western Australia provides many with opportunities and prosperity; however, these opportunities are not shared by all. This is the shame that must be addressed by this state, particularly in the East Metropolitan Region.

## **HOUSING**

Shelter is the most basic of human needs and a fundamental human right. The rising cost of living in WA is seeing housing become frighteningly less affordable and accessible. Emergency housing and women's refuges in particular are experiencing unprecedented demand for services and are filled to overflowing. Social and public housing have waiting lists that extend over the years and tens of thousands of people. The cost of renting privately continues to escalate, making it more and more difficult for families, single people and senior Western Australians to afford to find appropriate and affordable housing. Anglicare estimated in its recent snapshot of rental properties in WA that —

... less than 1% of the market in Perth was affordable for people on benefits or pensions, and only 5% was affordable for people on the minimum wage.

The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and the National Rental Affordability Scheme are steps in the right direction, but it takes a political will and a commitment to make sure that the prosperity of the state is shared by all. It also takes political will and not much ingenuity to make sure that public housing stock and other affordable housing options are constructed in a way that is adaptable for the needs of people with disabilities and older Western Australians. I believe that all new housing estate developments and redevelopments should have a planning quota placed on them for affordable and adaptable housing options.

## **TRANSPORT**

A related problem is that housing options that are affordable are often located in communities that have no or little social infrastructure, such as public transport. Although the East Metropolitan Region has many features that make it an attractive place to live and work, the

region is severely let down by the lack of access to public transport. If you live in Ellenbrook and work in Perth, or try to cross east to west, for example, your options for using public transport are extremely limited or non-existent. Your time spent travelling to work each day is time spent away from your family and from your community. Your choices for educational training are very constrained by lack of access to transport. The time spent in frustrating traffic congestion and long and multiple journeys is lost time—lost time with your family and lost productivity.

Building accessible public transport infrastructure makes good economic sense. The Alliance Commission on National Energy Efficiency Policy found in its recent report, “Energy 2030: Working to Double U.S. Energy Productivity by 2030”, that there are significant economic benefits to local communities where investment in public transport is made. The commission estimates that for every \$1 billion invested in public transport, some 36 000 jobs are supported or created. The commission estimates that the spin-off effects are over \$3.5 billion in sales and approximately \$500 million in tax revenue.

Having a healthy economy now and into the future requires attention to economic planning and detail. The effect of WA’s recent mining construction boom, as we have seen, is not shared by all. The absence of strong government policy to make sure that we all share in this state’s success has constrained opportunities for many.

### **MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY**

In recent years we have seen the local manufacturing industry, a lot of it based in the East Metropolitan Region, being hollowed out. Instead of getting the best deal possible from large resource projects by making sure that as much skilled work as possible is done in Western Australia, we see much of that manufacturing work and those jobs being exported overseas. Where our local manufacturing workshops and our local engineers have the capability and capacity to undertake this work, surely this work should be done here. But why should we worry about this? Why should we not allow our manufacturing base to wither? The answer to that is best summed up by Professor Dani Rodrik from Harvard University —

Without a vibrant manufacturing base, societies tend to divide between rich and poor—those who have access to steady, well-paying jobs, and those whose jobs are less secure and lives more precarious.

Surely that in and of itself is a strong purpose for making sure that what can be made here is made here, for growing our manufacturing capabilities rather than letting them wither. Surely that in and of itself should be a strong reason to invest in apprenticeships and training to provide our young people with real opportunities now and for the future.

### **GENDER PAY GAP**

Another social and economic concern in our state is the widening gap in pay between women and men. The WA Department of Commerce has reported that in November last year WA’s gender pay gap was 26.4 per cent. As the department notes, this means that on average for every dollar earned by a full-time male employee, full-time female employees earn 73.6 cents. Western Australia has the widest gender pay gap in the country. The national gender pay gap, in contrast, stands at 17.6 per cent. While some important and significant steps have been taken at the federal level lately to reduce this yawning gap, there are issues pertinent to this state that behove us to do more. WA urgently needs a review of factors influencing the state-based gendered nature of pay and we need a statewide strategy to deal with this widening gap.

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

A further indicator of the detrimental effects of rising costs of living and economic inequalities in our state can be found in the increased number of domestic assaults in our community. WA Police statistics indicate that over the four-year period 2007–08 to 2011–12 there has been a significant rise in the number of reported domestic assaults in the East Metropolitan Region. While I acknowledge that increased population and changes in reporting procedures may have some impact, an increase in over 2 000 cases per annum is extremely concerning, and they are the ones that are reported. There is a strong need for more support services for women seeking to leave violent situations. This is an issue that I will continue to pursue.

## **RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY**

Much of my working life has been spent working with people with disability. For several years I was the executive director of the Brain Injury Association of New South Wales, or the head injury association, as it was also known. I also worked for many years at a fantastic community-based disability rights organisation, People with Disability Australia. Approximately 21 000 people have identified as needing assistance with their daily tasks live in the East Metropolitan Region and a further 35 000 have not stated their need for assistance. The National Disability Insurance Scheme, or DisabilityCare Australia as it is now known, will provide people with disability—many of them for the first time—with services they need to live independently and to live with dignity and to have some choice. This, of course, is a basic human right and one that I championed in my previous roles through the development of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and will continue to champion in this place. I have also worked as an advocate to ensure that people with disability receive good-quality services at a local level. I will continue to advocate strongly for and trust that people with disability in Western Australia will receive the same rights, the same access to services and the same choices as people with disabilities across Australia, as is their basic human right.

## **FORMER EAST METROPOLITAN REGION MEMBERS**

The East Metropolitan Region has been fortunate to have been represented by a talented and committed range of people. I would like to acknowledge the work of some of the former members of the East Metropolitan Region. Hon Alison Xamon and Hon Linda Savage have both made important contributions to the region and the Parliament, and have been generous in their support of me commencing in this role. I am very pleased that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich continues to serve in this chamber. East metro's loss is north metro's gain. It is great that we still get to share her wisdom and wit. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the work and life of Hon Jock Ferguson, an east metro man, a union man, a Labor man, and a friend of many in this place. May he rest in peace. Senator Louise Pratt, of course, was a fabulous former member for East Metropolitan Region and is a terrific supporter of mine, and I thank her for all of her work. I hope I can fill those big shoes in east metro.

## **INTEGRITY**

Earlier I spoke about striving for integrity in the work ahead of me. I have been very fortunate in being surrounded by and having worked with many people who hold this quality and from whom I have learnt much. I acknowledge here one of those people, Hon Bob Kucera. Bob's integrity saw him fight an honourable and good fight in the recent election as the Labor candidate for Mount Lawley. Unfortunately, we were not successful this time, but the quality of this man cannot be understated. Bob, thank you for all you have given and continue to give to the people of this state. Like Bob, all the Labor candidates, staff and volunteers across the East Metropolitan Region and across the state acted with integrity. They worked unbelievably hard and gave it their all. Irrespective of the outcome of each electorate, they should be justifiably proud of their contribution, of their work and of their integrity.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This has been just an overview of who I am and what I am concerned with. I would like to thank all of my colleagues for the welcome that has been extended to me in this place. It is delightful and somewhat amusing to me to find myself in this place with my dear friend, Hon Stephen Dawson. I thank you for all your support. I thank each and every one of the Legislative Council and parliamentary services staff for their professionalism and the courtesy they have extended me. Without all of your support this would have been a much more daunting and difficult start than it otherwise has been.

There are many people in my life whom I owe so much thanks, as without their support I would not be here today. Many of them are able to be with us today from near and from far, and I thank them. Others are watching via the internet and I am pleased that they have been able to a part of this occasion. For fear of missing out on someone, I have done something very typical of me, I have made a list! There are many, many people who I owe my thanks to. Here is just a snapshot of some of them, and if I have missed you out, it does not mean I do not love you. The list is in alphabetical order: Feyi Akindoyeni, Bryan Bekker, Dascia Bennett, Donna Bevan, Michael Clohesy, Olivier Collas de Chatelperron, Hon Stephen Dawson, Kate Deverall, Thonya Deverall, Joan Erck, Hon Sue Ellery, Peter Fitzpatrick, Hon Jon Ford, Franck Gire, Aram Hosie, Maris Kavanagh, Alan Kirkland, Dennis Liddelow, Les Marsden, Tania McCartney, Steve McCartney, Necta Minis, Maire Ni Chaoim, Eilish O'Connor, Aileen O'Donoghue, Justine Parker, Cindy Portland, Senator Louise Pratt, Sarah Seymour, Oliver Scofield, Hon Penny Sharpe, Daniel Smith, Gede Sukertia, Hon Sally Talbot, Jo Tilly, Jemima Tilly, my Sydney family, my Melbourne family, Sharon Webb and last but not least, just because his name starts with W, Owen Whittle.

Of course, I would like to thank my partner of many years; we actually cannot agree how many years it has been, so I will just say my partner for life, Phil O'Donoghue. He has been my constant support and companion. He is a man who lives his values—our shared values of social justice—and for that I love him.

## **THE LIGHT ON THE HILL**

Mr President, Ben Chifley argued that our main goal—that is, the light on the hill—could be achieved by working for the betterment of all people wherever a helping hand was needed. This objective, for which we are striving, is the beacon, the light on the hill to which our eyes are always turned and to which our efforts are always directed. I ask: what else could be worth fighting for? This, Mr President, is my inspiration.

[Applause.]

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