



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**  
**INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Hon Robin Chapple MLC**  
(Member for Mining & Pastoral)

**Budget Debate**

**Legislative Council**

**Thursday, 4 June 2009**



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#### ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

##### *Consideration of Tabled Papers*

**HON ROBIN CHAPPLE (Mining and Pastoral)** [2.02 pm]: I acknowledge I stand today on Nyoongah land to deliver what is either a continuing inaugural speech or a second one—I am not sure—to this chamber. Mr President, I express my congratulations to you on your election to the position of President of this chamber. I look forward to serving in this place with you as President. As with all who have gone before you, I am sure that you will deliberate with great bearing and fairness.

Firstly, I offer thanks to the two groups of Assembly candidates who have helped the Greens (WA) to regain a seat in the Mining and Pastoral Region. These thanks stretch back to 2005, when five dear lower house candidates assisted in that attempt to retain the seat. They were Kelly Howlett in Central Kimberley-Pilbara; the inimitable Pat Lowe in Kimberley; Peter Burger in Kalgoorlie; Peter Shaw in North West Coastal; and in Murchison-Eyre, Scott Ludlam, my dear friend who has now gone on to take his rightful place in federal politics as the Western Australian Greens' second senator. For their efforts at the last election, which now seems a lifetime away—we must change to fixed-term elections—our thanks go first to Peter Shaw, our candidate in the seat of North West, a long-time resident and tourism operator in Coral Bay who has devoted a significant amount of his time to working to achieve sustainable management for the region. Annabelle Sandes, our candidate in the seat of Kimberley, is a well renowned Kimberley artist, photographer and passionate protector of the humpback whale nurseries along the Kimberley coast. She was ably assisted by her partner, driver and campaign manager, filmmaker Richard Costin, during that election. The tireless Kelly Howlett, our candidate in the seat of Pilbara, is a Town of Port Hedland councillor, whose drive in developing the turtle monitoring programs, tourism and establishing the Care for Hedland Environmental Association has established her well within that community. In the seat of Kalgoorlie, my thanks go to our candidate Andy Huntley, a superintendent for a local nickel mine, who brought a passion for sustainability and renewable energy to the campaign. I also convey my congratulations to Andy and his partner, Accarander, on the birth of their baby boy, Flynn. In the seat of Eyre, our candidate was one of the youngest, Linda Parker, the 2008 Kalgoorlie-Boulder Chamber of Commerce and Industry Goldfields Apprentice of the Year, who is currently completing an apprenticeship in the electrical trades in the goldfields, doing what she believes in by designing and installing renewable energy systems throughout the goldfields, wheatbelt and south coast. Although many hundreds of people devoted their time in supporting the 2008 Greens campaign in the Mining and Pastoral Region, all of whom deserve thanks, I must again single out my daughter, Sara, for her undying support. Along with her two sons, Tailor and Kai, and her

partner, Dave—the inimitable sandwich maker—her support for the Kalgoorlie campaign was incredible and untiring.

In 2005, when I failed to retain the Mining and Pastoral Region seat, we placed a sign at the front door of 1074 Hay Street—my former office—saying “Out to lunch. Back in 2009.” It was a pretty long lunch but, as Michael Jordan said when he announced his return to the Chicago Bulls, “I’m back”—this time with a new office team supporting our green effort. I welcome Tim Hall, Helen Beech and Annemarie Hindinger to the next four years of toil. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge my colleagues, old and new, in this chamber: Hon Giz Watson, our parliamentary bedrock and mentor; Hon Lynn MacLaren, a former fleeting member in this place in 2005; and Hon Alison Xamon, who joins us as the first Greens member to represent the East Metropolitan Region. We will also be joined shortly in the other place by the newly elected member for Fremantle, the epoch-making Adele Carles.

I intend to talk primarily of the future, but I first ask members to reflect on a heinous day for democracy that occurred in China on this day 20 years ago. The tanks and troops moved into Tiananmen Square and brutally ended seven weeks of occupancy by the democracy movement, causing an estimated 2 600 deaths. This is the same government, the perpetrator of so many human rights abuses, that Australia is now considering allowing to become an 18 per cent shareholder in Rio Tinto, through its wholly owned company Chinalco. On this anniversary of the Tiananmen atrocity, I ask members to reflect on the ethical line between economic expediency and our responsibility as parliamentarians to uphold and promote human rights at home and globally.

As I said, I have previously had the privilege of giving an inaugural speech, so I will endeavour—although I am starting to build on that endeavour—to keep this one succinct. Little has changed since 29 May 2001, when I first addressed this house. The guard has changed, but the rhetoric remains basically the same. No-one seems prepared to tackle the future crisis confronting the state. The same sad circumstances are evidenced across the nation. Any ostrich incapable of burying its head in the sand would find the Parliaments of Australia a great training ground. There is an irrational disconnect between what we will do in this place over the next four years and the realities of the conflict over climate change that is taking place around the world and on our doorstep outside these hallowed walls. Mr President, whether or not I reintroduce the voluntary euthanasia bill, debate the values of a feed-in tariff regime, debate truth-in-sentencing legislation or discuss budgetary constraint, these will all fade into relative insignificance if this house fails to confront responsibly the global crisis that is on our doorstep. The world and the community at large have now accepted that we are subject to the effects of climate change. The scientific community, the experts and our experts have now confirmed that we are dealing with dangerous climate change, yet over the next four years there appears to be no legislative program to deal with the elephants firmly grazing in the middle of either this or the other chamber. At the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia annual general meeting lunch on 22 May 2009, which I attended, the Premier stated that he disagreed with Bill Clinton’s statement, “It’s the economy, stupid” when he outlined his view, “It’s mining and petroleum, stupid.” I have a different view; I say, “It’s the future, stupid.”

Our global commitment on global change so far has been akin to setting out to individually polish each one of the *Titanic*’s deckchairs prior to attempting to rearrange them on the deck in response to our collision with an iceberg. If we carry that analogy to include Western Australia, it is fair to say that our policymakers have just decided to go below to order dessert in the grand ballroom. I remind members of the words of the sixteenth President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, when he said, “You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.” Our response to date has been to tinker with inadequate and short-sighted policy that has been woeful and blinkered. Much of our direction is still predicated on “greed is good”, as espoused in the semi-fictitious 1987 film *Wall Street*. Endless global economic growth is pursued regardless of the environmental and

human limits of a finite planet. Signs of ecological collapse are emerging around the world. Values equating welfare with possessions and conspicuous consumption prevail amid unhappiness and stark social and economic poverty. The belief that the “marketplace” is dominant implies that the environment is a subsystem of the economy and that social values exist to serve that market. The reverse is the case. The economy and society are very firmly subsystems of a global environment. Population and economic growth have exceeded the carrying capacity of this earth. The prevailing conservative value system is therefore fundamentally flawed. We see this in the uncontrolled expansion and support of the hydrocarbon industry and the desire to mine one of the world’s most toxic elements, uranium, with little concern for the tens of thousands of years of contamination and health hazards that future generations will have to deal with. Currently, we in Western Australia are spiralling towards doubling our carbon dioxide equivalent emissions from those established for our state in 1990 in the year of the establishment of the Kyoto Protocol.

It has been established that in 1990 Western Australia’s gross carbon dioxide equivalent emissions were 58.2 million tonnes per annum. By 2007 these had reached 82.8 million tonnes per annum, an increase of 42.3 per cent. Since 2007, with the advent of Woodside Train 5, the Bluewaters power station and other developments, such as the recommissioning of the Muja power stations, Western Australian emissions would now be in the region of 85 to 90 million tonnes per annum. If we tabulated the projected emissions from the two new Woodside Pluto trains, the Woodside Browse Basin project, the Dyno Nobel explosives plant, the current Gorgon two-train proposal, the Yarra Holdings explosives plant, the Apache Reindeer proposal and the BHP Scarborough gas development, the tabulation would indicate that emissions would rise by at least a further 21.5 million tonnes per annum, lifting Western Australia’s emissions to around 110.5 million tonnes per annum. This would increase WA’s greenhouse gas emissions to 90 per cent of our 1990 emissions. This does not include any of the proposed expansions articulated by Don Voelte, chief executive officer of Woodside, in yesterday’s *Western Australian Business News*. It is disconcerting to note that although the nation has committed to a maximum increase in emissions of eight per cent above its 1990 levels, this does not apply to Western Australia. We are truly living in isolation from the rest of the world, not just in our geography, but also in our avoidance of global realities.

On Wednesday, 25 March 2009 at the Theatre of the State Library of Western Australia in Northbridge, Dr Graeme Pearman—an international expert in research on increasing levels of carbon dioxide in the global atmosphere and former chief of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation’s atmospheric research from 1992 to 2002—spoke about the problems created by climate change. When asked about Western Australia’s CO<sub>2</sub> emissions associated with the burgeoning gas industry, Dr Pearman replied that there should be no gas industry unless it has zero emissions.

I now turn to another greed-is-good issue—uranium mining. This is an industry with no moral responsibility, no compassion and no concept of intergenerational equity. As a former member of the national Radiation Health Committee of the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency for the past three years, I can speak with an element of authority on this matter. I have recently read with interest many comments made on the uranium debate and its hazards or lack thereof. This debate is being skewed by a lack of understanding of the known radiation impacts or the relevant standards and regulations regarding radioactivity. The materials mined—uranium, pitchblende and produced yellowcake—are all highly radioactive. These materials emit in varying degrees alpha and beta ionising radiation with the attendant production of radioactive radon gas. There are two types of ionising radiation. One consists of particles—that is, alpha, beta and neutrons—and the other consists of electromagnetic radiation; that is, X-rays and gamma rays. It is recognised by all authorities that all of the above elements are harmful to life. When we are exposed to these elements, they either affect our genetic markers or, through ingestion, inhalation and

lodgement, create internal lesions that produce over time a cohort of cancers above the normal statistical background.

The hazards of ionising radioactive elements, as far as we, our children and their descendants to the nth degree are concerned, do not diminish over time. The industry has stated that we should not worry about the longevity of radioactive impact, as the 200 000 years required for uranium and its waste to decay is not a very long time in the life of a rock.

Any waste material or host rock is almost as radioactive as the uranium being mined, and has the same lifetime radioactive impacts as uranium ore. Research has confirmed that there is no safe threshold dosage of radiation below which no damage will be done. One radioactive decay trail through one cell can cause cancer. The average annual background dose of radiation to people in Australia is an absorbed dose of around 1.5 to two millisieverts a year. The International Committee on Radiological Protection—the ICRP—recommends an allowance of one millisievert, or 100 millirems, annual maximum exposure dose above the average annual background radiation dose for the general public. Its own studies indicate that, statistically, this will generate a risk of 3.5 cancers in 1 000 people exposed annually over a lifetime of 70 years.

The uranium industry cannot operate within the ICRP guidelines, due to the point source of radiation at a mine site being some 70 to 90 times higher than natural background radiation. As a simple numerical way of explaining this, the background radiation in this chamber would be in the region of 35 to 40 counts on a Geiger-Müller tube counter. Quite often we are told by the uranium industry that the Darling Scarp is as radioactive as a uranium mine. It is true that the scarp produces slightly elevated levels of radiation, but the levels are well within recommended safe doses. Not so uranium deposits—outcrops and mines—which produce, as I have already said, radiation levels some 70 to 90 times higher than recommended safe doses. The uranium mining industry has consistently protested the ICRP guidelines, because it would be impossible for people to work at a uranium mine if normal radiation health requirements were to apply.

As I have already said, the background radiation in this chamber is 35 to 40 counts on a Geiger-Müller tube counter. The granite outcrops in the Perth hills emit a safe count rate of between 60 and 80 counts. The piece of uranium lens ore I am holding is from a proposed uranium mine and produces a beta and alpha count rate of around 2 900 counts, and although it is not harmful to us because it is protected, if we were to be exposed to it for any length of time, it would be hazardous. To facilitate the existence of uranium mines, special regulations for exceedence of recommended radiation levels had to be established for the mining industry to allow workers to be exposed to 50 millisieverts or so a year above the general background level. This is 50 times the general public safe dose level. It must be noted that when those guidelines were established, it was with a provision that at least pregnant workers would not be permitted to be exposed to those levels. These guidelines are contained within the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency's 2002 recommendations for limiting exposure to ionising radiation dose limits.

We have to remember that with uranium there is always the issue of who takes the waste. I received an email on Monday, 25 May 2009 from Dr Charles McCombie, former chief executive officer of Pangea Resources, the British Nuclear Fuels Ltd waste dump company. This was the company that sought to bury 20 per cent of the world's nuclear waste near Cosmo Newberry in the northern goldfields. He sought my take on the status of the nuclear debate in Australia. According to my notes, his email stated —

Your email reminded me that it's a long time since we talked or exchanged information. We are struggling along at Arius —

That is, a Swiss think tank that mutated from Pangea Resources —

with our aim of making safe and secure disposal of radioactive wastes available to all countries that need it. Our main focus is on the viability of multinational options, either by partnering of smaller countries or by hosting of a large country.

As ever, this is a hot topic, but with the continuing rise in interest in nuclear power, it becomes ever more important. If even a fraction of the long list of small countries professing an interest in nuclear leads to actual power stations, then the global community should be concerned that the back end [a waste dump] is taken seriously.

Do not be fooled; uranium mining is merely a conduit to the contamination of our hinterland for all time.

It may appear that the Greens (WA) rail against the entire mining industry, but this is not the case. We are in favour of developments that are occupationally safe and aspire to carbon-free standards. The removal of carbon-based fuel systems is paramount. Although some facilities in the mining industry are presently dependent on fossil fuels for the mining, extraction and processing of ore, it is now the considered belief of many engineers, and examples are emerging, that all these processes can be converted to non-fossil fuel dependency. Most of today's underground mines operate on electricity, with the exception of ore handling and hauling. Drilling and pumping operations are electric. All hauling and handling can be converted to run from electric power sources by designing mines appropriately and by the use of vertical electric winders or monorail systems to bring the ore to the surface instead of the long declines the mining trucks use. The South African system of electric monorail mine haulage and those being promoted by the Kalgoorlie Chamber of Mines are a case in point. They not only run solely on electricity, reducing diesel consumption dramatically, but also produce greater efficiencies and deeper mines with bottom-up stope design. That design minimises the need for waste dumps and provides better occupational health and safety outcomes associated with reduced rockfall and less exposure of the underground workers to the inhalation of diesel particulates. Many open pit operations use diesel-powered shovels and drills. These functions can be performed, and in many cases are, using high-voltage electrical earthmoving equipment. Haulpaks use phenomenal amounts of diesel at most open pit mines. With the correct motivation and incentives, conveyor and lift systems can be devised and implemented to perform this function using electricity. Ore processing and refining uses mostly electrical energy, with the exception of plants that require steam and heat. Steam and heat can be provided as a direct by-product of solar thermal power plants or as the indirect by-products of any kind of renewable electricity generating plant that uses electric heating elements and electric steam boilers.

In the short term, the mining and processing of metals using fossil fuels emits CO<sub>2</sub>. But structural change in our industry must occur. It is essential to construct large-scale, grid-connected renewable energy plants, following America's lead, and to redesign the existing and new mining operations based on sustainable principles. The same could be said, I believe, of most other industries on the planet. At the end of the day, if the will to change is there, the mining industry, like most others, could become a zero-emissions industry. I believe that we have to think big in this regard. Tinkering around the edges of our existing system cannot deliver the large-scale changes that we need to make to become a truly sustainable society. This approach—thinking big and aspiring to true sustainability, compassion and equity in society—applies to all the issues that I intend to address during this term of Parliament.

I intend to continue my support for the introduction of voluntary euthanasia legislation in Western Australia. I will continue to champion the cause of Kimberley agricultural workers who have suffered contamination from working with herbicides. I will continue to campaign for the long-overdue World Heritage listing of Indigenous rock art on the Burrup or Murujuga Peninsula.

Mr President, I will continue to work with my fellow Greens parliamentarians and with all members to build an environment in this house of responsibility, transparency and rigorous debate as we

discharge our collective duty to the people of Western Australia. I would like to end by restating my final words from my principal inaugural speech made in 2001 —

I look forward to my term in this Chamber, proudly representing the future of the Mining and Pastoral Region, Western Australia, Australia and our planet. I commit my time in this Chamber to representing the needs of the community, the environment, a healthy and sustainable future for all future generations ...

It is for the future of my daughter, Sara, my grandchildren, Taylor and Kai, and the future of children of their generation that I take my place in this chamber.

Thank you, Mr President.

[Applause.]

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