



## **PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

### **INAUGURAL SPEECH**



## **Hon Rick Mazza, MLC** **(Member for Agricultural Region)**

**Legislative Council**

**Address-in-Reply**

**Tuesday, 11 June 2013**

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## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

### *Motion*

**HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural)** [5.09 pm]: Mr President, I would like to begin my speech by congratulating you on your re-election as President and also Hon Adele Farina on her election to the position of Deputy President. Congratulations also to my fellow members who have been either re-elected or newly elected to the Legislative Council. I hope to establish good working relationships with you all over the next four years.

Today, like many before me, I speak for the first time in this house with a mixture of emotions, but above all I have a great sense of anticipation. Not only is this the first time I have spoken in this place, but also it is the first time in Western Australian history that a member of the Shooters and Fishers Party has spoken in the Western Australian Parliament, representing community values and signifying change. Many have asked, “Who are the Shooters and Fishers Party? Are they just about shooting and fishing?” I will come back to that a little later.

Firstly, as is custom with inaugural speeches, I will talk about my background so members can understand who I am and what I stand for. Apart from some primary school years in Harvey and a couple of high school years in Northam, I was born and raised in Bunbury, the son of an Italian migrant father and fifth-generation Anglo-Irish mother. I am very fortunate to have devoted and loving parents, who are here to lend their support tonight. Mum and Dad have always nurtured and encouraged me, my brother and sister in everything we have undertaken, no matter how audacious our plans might have seemed at the time.

When dealing with life’s adversities and struggles, I always try to follow the example of my father’s parents, Antonio and Catherina Mazza, for whom I have a great regard and deep respect. Southern Italy was a pretty bleak place after World War II and my grandfather was seeking a better life for his wife and nine children, so he made the life-changing decision to migrate to Australia. After saving the full fare, he temporarily left his family in Italy, and in May 1949 arrived in Fremantle aboard the *Toscana*. He was looking for opportunities and soon found work with the Public Works Department—the old PWD—out in the bush, living in tents and enduring the hardships of the time. My grandfather was used to going without and lived a frugal lifestyle so that he could send money home so that the family could be reunited. He first brought his older children out one at a time. Eventually, in 1954, and after five years apart, my grandmother and the two youngest children arrived in Fremantle aboard the *Neptunia*. I have often imagined the family reunion after all that time, which would have been made all the harder without the benefit of email, the internet or even the telephone. The spirit of seeking a better life, the acceptance of the risks and hardships and the sacrifices and determination to see it through is typical of many migrants to Australia. What I admire most about my grandparents’ story is that although they had very few material possessions, they maintained their self-reliance, family values, compassion, faith, dignity and courage. These qualities have set an example that I have aspired to in my own life. Living to their 90s, they have now both passed, but their sacrifices have been well rewarded with their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren all doing well; all are an integral part of the Australian community.

Attitudes have changed since the 1960s and 1970s, but my family still suffered some moderate discrimination in those days, as happens now to people from different cultures who have chosen to make a new start in Australia. To me, however, growing up with the clash of two very different family cultures was a distinct advantage. One weekend we would be eating pasta and making Italian sausages and the next would be a typical Aussie barbie with an 18-gallon keg. I learned a great deal about people at these family gatherings, observing and learning the strengths and weaknesses and different attitudes, opinions, tolerances and expectations of people from different traditional backgrounds and cultures. This has held me in good stead all through my life and helped me understand and empathise with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Growing up in WA in those days was idyllic and carefree, with wide open spaces and plenty to explore. Like a lot of kids of that era, with no computers or video games, I spent many days camping, fishing, trapping rabbits and generally enjoying the great outdoors. I spent a lot of my teenage years spearfishing off the Bunbury breakwater with friends, scooping crabs in the Leschenault Estuary or hunting ducks with Dad. The eager expectation of duck season opening day is lost in WA for now but is still enjoyed in other states of Australia. These activities helped me develop my love of Western Australia and all things outdoors, which has continued to this day.

My father has always been a bit of an amateur naturalist, even back when it was not fashionable to be so. Dad spent many weekends with my brother and I examining insects like sand lions with their pits of doom or watching gold digger birds dig their nests in the sand, and generally just enjoying studying the cycles of life. I remember Dad once saved a cuckoo shrike abandoned from its nest, which we all helped raise over a couple of months. The bird would fly free all day but as soon as Dad arrived home from work, it would seek him out and land on his shoulder, the unusual story making it to the local newspapers.

After finishing high school I did what many young men did at that time and secured an apprenticeship, initially in private enterprise and later with Westrail. After qualifying, I moved into the fledgling south west mining industry working on heavy machinery. It was the mining industry, with its generous pay rates, that enabled me at the age of 21 and raising a young family to finance my first small business venture, a successful service station and workshop. Running a service station back then was hard work. The hours were regulated—you had to be open 12 hours a day from 7.00 am to 7.00 pm plus Saturday mornings from 7.00 am to 1.00 pm and weekend rosters. The hours were long, margins were tight and holidays, and even days off, were fairly rare. But it was there that I learned the valuable lesson that providing good service and developing people skills pays dividends. I also learned, often the hard way, that efficient administration, planning and systems are crucial elements in business survival.

After two years, I was looking for new challenges so I sold my service station business and entered the real estate industry as a sales representative. At the same time, I also started tertiary studies in real estate management so that I could get an agent's licence and operate my own real estate practice. Real estate is a very demanding business but at 23 it provided the challenges and rewards I needed to keep myself focused on what I wanted to achieve. After spending some time as a sales manager in a large real estate agency, managing more than 20 motivated sales staff—a big workforce with big egos to match—I completed the studies I needed for my real estate and business agent's licence and purchased a share of the company. I spent the next 20 years working in different facets of the real estate industry, building businesses in general real estate practice, property development, conveyancing and franchise networking.

In 2006 my wife, Brenda, and I decided it was time for a change and we liquidated all our business interests and moved on to our next stage of life as self-funded retirees. We indulged in spending time with our children and grandchildren and working on our farm at Rocky Gully in the beautiful great southern part of the agricultural region that I have the privilege to represent.

The abundance of spare time I had rekindled my passion for the outdoors and I was able again to spend time hunting, fishing and enjoying a casual lifestyle after a demanding, hectic and sometimes gruelling business career. Having family with farming interests in the central wheatbelt and running our own farm in the great southern gave me the opportunity to travel through much of the agricultural region and meet local families. Getting involved with people in the region highlighted the many hardships facing not only farmers, but also other members of our rural communities. Poor seasons, live export restrictions, rising input costs and city-centric attitudes of the people in power have all contributed to a harder life for country people. When you hear of farmers having their neighbours on suicide watch, you know that things are pretty grim in the bush.

On reflection, it became apparent to me that a lot had changed since my youth. I recognised that a detachment had developed between the realities of country life and the fantasy of some urbanised attitudes; a disconnect between those urban attitudes and the realities of the natural world. Disturbingly, this disconnect with reality is being perpetuated and promoted by fanatical fringe groups with almost evangelistic piety and with little or no empathy for those people affected. These groups with their idealistic points of view offer no compromise and fuel their flawed arguments with half-truths and emotive rhetoric. I despaired at the way in which those influences determined opinion and attitudes and resulted in restrictions and loss of freedoms for the community. Some green and anti groups take the moral high ground and preach compassion, understanding and tolerance—that is, of course, unless your opinion differs from theirs. Animal rights extremists and their fellow travellers, with their self-righteous rhetoric, use emotionally charged campaigns that are designed to demonise and belittle anyone who opposes them, while country towns are penalised, sound farming practices are victimised, hunters and outdoor adventurers are being locked out and recreational fishers are squeezed out of marine parks.

All these things concerned me deeply, but I had hope that commonsense and logic would prevail. I began studying and researching the effects of different groups on our community and how certain outcomes had come into being. I became involved with clubs such as the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia, which has more than 150 000 members. I was also founding president of the WA branch of the Australian Deer Association, which is a nationwide hunting club with almost 5 000 members. The Australian Deer Association's code of ethics and hunter education courses symbolise respect for game animals and the environment in which they are hunted; it has some excellent field-to-fork training programs. Not everyone wants their food from the supermarket; free-range organic meat and fish harvested from the wild provide healthy alternatives and satisfy the natural need to provide for oneself and one's family.

It was in these organisations and among the wider community that I found a growing support for a change in attitudes towards hunting, shooting and fishing, and for a commonsense approach to environmental management. No fisher worth their salt wants to see a decline in fish stocks or the marine environment denigrated. No farmer wants to see their land degraded or valuable stock compromised. Responsible hunters, four-wheel drivers and campers respect the bush, and overwhelmingly these groups are conservation-minded. They resent, however, being locked out, banned and victimised because of the idealism of extremists or the bad behaviour of a few. If people are irresponsible, they should be prosecuted—ample existing laws are available to authorities to do so—but we should not punish everyone by excluding them simply because it is easier.

In my search for answers I set about completing a course with the University of Queensland's School of Animal Studies to better understand environmental and animal management issues. At the same time, I became aware of the Shooters and Fishers Party and followed the progress of the party over a number of years. I came to believe that the people of WA could benefit from representation by the Shooters and Fishers Party, and having always had a keen interest in

politics, I thought that it might be something worth pursuing. Fundamentally, I am an optimist to a fault. While I am acutely aware of the realities of life, I believe that almost anything can be achieved with the right planning and mindset. I live my life with a glass-half-full attitude and I look for solutions to overcome adversity and setbacks.

Notwithstanding my optimistic outlook on life, I knew from the outset that to establish the Shooters and Fishers Party in WA would take a great deal of motivation and confidence. I knew that the controversial nature of the party would make it a substantial challenge and that, once started, it would have life-changing consequences. A couple of years ago I would have questioned myself on whether I had the courage and commitment to see the job through, then late in 2011 tragedy struck our family, with the loss of our only grandson, Mason. He was a beautiful little boy with a winning smile. The devastating effect on all of us was quite profound, particularly on Mason's dad—my son Aaron. For those who have lost a close family member, there is always a re-evaluation of our own lives and the realisation of our own mortality. As for me, it gave me the strength and conviction to not waste time being timid or half-hearted about fighting for what I believe in and want to achieve.

Early in 2012 I went to Sydney and met with the Shooters and Fishers Party of New South Wales. I found a common ground in the objectives of the party and that there was a real sense of genuine solidarity and mateship. On returning to WA I immediately set about establishing and registering a branch here. Time was against us to form the branch, get the minimum number of members, register the party and prepare a campaign for the March 2013 election. I was overwhelmed by the support from many different sectors of the community, with many people putting in countless hours to assist with the promotion and operation of the party. I am truly humbled by the commitment of those people and amazed by the speed at which things unfolded to the point at which I am standing before members today.

The original Shooters and Fishers Party, then known simply as the Shooters Party, was formed in NSW in 1992 by ABC journalist John Tingle. Like me, he was concerned by the lack of representation in Parliament for outdoors enthusiasts. John was elected to the New South Wales Parliament in 1995 and representation is continued by current Shooters and Fishers Party MLCs Robert Brown and Robert Borsak. However, the Shooters and Fishers Party is not just about shooting and fishing. It is made up of and supported by people who believe that excessive government interference in our lives has been a growing concern. People are worried that their basic freedoms and rights are being eroded and absorbed into a nanny state where the government legislates; the agencies under their control regulate; and the radical extremists scorn anyone who dares to challenge their point of view. Nobody wants to live in a society that is so bound up with legislation and regulation that we are not told what we cannot do, but what we can do.

The SFP recognises and is sensitive to the hardships experienced by those on the land and people who choose to live in country communities. The Shooters and Fishers Party strongly supports safeguarding our natural environment. Our supporters believe that proactive and sustainable use of our natural resources is a sensible way to manage our environment into the future. They believe our bush, rivers and oceans are there for everyone to share and enjoy in a sustainable and environmentally responsible way. The best way to do this is not by locking it away and restricting access in a misguided hope of preserving it, but to actively manage the landscape to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

I have been asked many times whether the party leans politically to the left or the right. The truth of the matter is that our members and supporters come from all walks of life and all political persuasions, all with a common interest of defending the rights and freedoms of responsible and law-abiding people. It has been the party's general practice to allow the elected government of the day to govern—that is what it is mandated to do—except when the

government agenda is in clear conflict with sensible social, economic and environmental values or when it directly affects the people we represent. This is the very first time that the people of Western Australia have had a direct voice in Parliament to protect their cultural heritage and lifestyle through using commonsense approaches to land and marine management. All Western Australians have a right to access and enjoy the environment while being mindful of conservation, but the current trend towards a lock-up approach to environmental management is alienating and unfair and fosters resentment. Western Australia has some of the nation's most onerous restrictions on fishing, firearms, hunting and four-wheel driving. In this thirty-ninth Parliament I will put forward for consideration and adoption sound policy for outdoor recreational sports to make them sustainable in the long term.

My major ambitions for this term are to introduce more sensible gun and fishing laws, reduce lockouts, allow for restocking of fish species, and permit regulated hunting in state forests. I will be working towards commonsense debate on issues such as a moratorium on marine parks and controlled access for recreational fishers through the use of rotational and seasonal closures to manage fish stocks rather than permanent blanket bans. I will also be working towards a review of some of the less sensible rules such as one dhufish per fisher rather than the current two dhufish per boat limit, restocking programs for prize species, and the formation of inland fishing hubs to provide fishing and camping opportunities for families, similar to that proposed by this government for Wellington Dam.

In the coming four years I will work towards a review of the Firearms Act to examine some of the unreasonable nonsense regulations and policies that achieve nothing for public safety and serve only to frustrate and entrap law-abiding people with unnecessary bureaucratic red tape. We all want effective gun laws, especially law-abiding gun owners, but we need effective gun laws that target criminals, not responsible sportsmen and women, people on the land or those with a legitimate reason to own firearms. Firearm ownership has been so marginalised that it is one of the only government services that does not provide a pensioners' discount on fees and charges despite being a major pastime for many of our seniors.

It is estimated that there are thousands of illegal firearms in the community; illegal firearms that are smuggled, stolen or manufactured and are mostly in the hands of criminals. That is where the focus of gun law enforcement should be. States such as New South Wales and Victoria have successfully utilised the free community resource of regulated recreational hunters to assist in feral animal control as an effective alternative method of environmental management. The economic benefits to New South Wales are estimated to be in the tens of millions of dollars. Its 2011–12 "Public Benefit Assessment" revealed that game-hunting licence holders directly spent \$76.2 million on conservation activities. Of this amount, an estimated \$56.5 million was invested in regional areas. That does not include the substantial social and cultural benefit to the community or the benefit to the state's environment and management agencies in managing and controlling feral pests. There is no reason a similar model would not work just as well in Western Australia.

In my term I will work to improve our often neglected country towns and regional centres, and I will be vigilant on any matters that may affect people in my region. Western Australia's large and growing four-wheel drive fraternity is losing access to more and more land through misguided environmental management principles. Four-wheel drive networks and camping facilities that allow controlled and responsible access to our public lands can only improve life in WA. Many tracks used by four-wheel drivers are also firebreaks, either real or de facto. Keeping firebreaks open to four-wheel drive vehicles keeps them free of vegetation and actually has a positive effect on the bush environment. Most four-wheel drivers—certainly the ones I know—are environmentally aware. Many clubs around the state have already "adopted" various tracks and areas of land. In recent years, for example, four-wheel drive clubs have restored

many of the wells all the way through the long-abandoned Canning Stock Route. The track now has reasonably reliable water supplies at regular intervals and can once again be used, this time not by stockmen but by four-wheel drive adventurers. Four-wheel drive clubs have also resurveyed and recut other iconic tracks such as the Holland Track from Broomehill to Coolgardie; originally a shortcut to get supplies from the port of Albany to the goldfields and almost lost for 100 years but now open again for the enjoyment of four-wheel drive enthusiasts. There are countless other examples, but I will work to encourage the expansion of those principles so that areas can be kept open and responsibly managed by the people who use them for recreation.

I believe that in this house, as the state's house of review, we have a responsibility to explore and research ways to deal with issues other than simply banning the activities that raised the issues. That is certainly what I will be doing over the next four years. I am coming to the end now, Mr President; I thank the house for the opportunity to speak.

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, Brenda, whose love and support knows no depth. I thank my five children, Mathew, Aaron, Elissa, Anthony and Jared; my parents, Carol and Gino; my brother, Mark, and sister, Laura, all of whose love and encouragement are my driving force.

Without support and guidance from the following people I would not be standing here today. I thank New South Wales Shooters and Fishers Party MLCs, Robert Borsak and Robert Brown, for their guidance and understanding that WA is its own state, and for the free hand given to do things our way over here. I thank Shooters and Fishers Party analyst Glenn Druery for his keen negotiating skills and mathematical genius. He is a remarkable and gifted man who knows no peers in his field. I thank the Shooters and Fishers Party WA founding committee, particularly Ray Hull, Paul Marsh, Andrew Charleson, Dan Strijk, Mark McCall and Howard Barks. Their dedication, hard work and support have been invaluable and I treasure the strong bonds of friendship that have developed through this journey. I especially thank all the Shooters and Fishers WA members, many of whom travelled long distances to be at the party's foundation meeting, some driving more than four hours just to be there, which is an indication of their commitment. Most importantly, I thank the 22 000 Western Australians who gave the Shooters and Fishers Party their primary vote.

Finally, I thank the government and opposition leaders, Whips and members for their assistance and good wishes. Special thanks must go to Parliament House staff who have given me a warm welcome and eased the transition into parliamentary life with invaluable information, direction and effective induction courses. They certainly do a very professional and thorough job; however, I am sure they still have a fair bit of work yet on their hands with me!

I have probably been described as many different things, especially in my pursuit to establish the Shooters and Fishers Party here in WA, but I personally believe that I am fundamentally a simple family man with traditional family values. In my 52 years as a Western Australian I have seen many changes as our state has grown and prospered. There have been many positive changes with cultural diversity and economic prosperity in our vibrant, progressive state. There is much for the people of WA to be proud of and much more to be achieved.

I recently spent some time with my wife and one of our granddaughters in Kings Park, traversing the Kings Park walkway and generally enjoying the beautiful setting—a credit to the government of Western Australia and the authorities involved. On returning to the car park, I stopped under the old boab tree looking out to the south over the rivers and beyond. I read the plaque on the rail describing the scene of the landing by Dutch explorers in 1697 led by de Vlamingh and their climb to higher ground at Mt Eliza to look out at their surroundings. One could only imagine their thoughts. And later, in 1801, with the arrival of the French scientific



research ship *Le Naturaliste*, explorers also climbed Mt Eliza to view the country. Eventually, in 1827, upon the arrival of Captain James Stirling to establish a future colony, explorers again climbed Mt Eliza and were effused by the view of the river and distant mountains, and considered the surrounding country to be particularly grand. Standing there in Kings Park, I also thought that the view was particularly grand and I was effused by the realisation of the depth of patriotism I have for this place where I was born, have always lived and now have the privilege to serve—the great state of Western Australia. Thank you.

[Applause.]

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