



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**VALEDICTORY SPEECH**



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

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Tuesday, 11 May 2021

*Reprinted from Hansard*

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## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

### *Motion*

Resumed from 5 May on the following motion moved by Hon Pierre Yang —

That the following address be presented to His Excellency the Honourable Kim Beazley, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and its dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia —

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our most gracious sovereign and thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

**HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural)** [2.08 pm]: Madam President, as I make my last speech in this place, there is something that comes to mind very clearly; in this Parliament, time goes by extremely fast. Of all the occupations I have had over the years, I think for parliamentarians, with all the things we have to deal with—committee meetings, coming to this place, dealing with constituents—the years go by very quickly, so it hardly feels like I have been here for eight years. Back in 2012, we formed the Western Australian branch of the Shooters and Fishers Party, which had been established in New South Wales in 1995. We were registered with the Electoral Commission very late in 2012—I think it might have been around November. We ran a campaign and, as fortune would have it, I was elected, winning a seat in the Agricultural Region.

When I look around, I see quite a few members are still here from the class of 2013 and plenty of them will continue on. Some will retire and some will go on to do other things in this place. I came in here completely unprepared and inexperienced in any way with anything to do with politics. But fortunately, the fellowship and the assistance of all members of this place, regardless of their political leanings, was invaluable. I found many people were always willing to help, whether it be the clerks or other members of Parliament, to give me a bit of a hand in getting myself organised to operate as the single member of my party.

I remember meeting Hon Barry House, the former President, in the corridor after I had been here for about six months. He said, “Rick, when we first heard that a member of the Shooters and Fishers Party had been elected, we were expecting this gun-toting redneck to come in here, but you’re actually quite reasonable!” I did appreciate that he thought I was quite reasonable.

I have had a lot of occupations over the years, which has helped me a lot to relate to people and understand some of the problems in the community. Over the years, I have been a spare parts assistant at a tractor dealership, a motor mechanic, a small business owner, a cleaning chemicals salesman in the hospitality industry, a real estate agent, a TAFE lecturer, an insurance broker, a settlement agent, and a farmer. It might surprise some members that I also spent some time as an armed guard delivering payrolls to the Collie mines. That was a very interesting couple of years. We would get the armoured vehicle from the depot, which, ironically, is now where my former business partner Alex Marra operates his real estate agency from, and drive to this bunker in Bunbury. You would have to see it to believe it! It is all underground and concrete-lined. We would load these containers full of cash into the back of this rickety old truck and then drive down the South Western Highway, up the Coalfields Highway and into Collie to the ANZ bank, where we would unload the cash.

While we had a cup of coffee, the bank would distil all the cash into little brown envelopes, which many senior members here might remember being the form of payment before electronic funds transfers. Employees would all line up to get their little brown envelope, showing their name, designation, how many hours they worked and their pay rate on the front of it. We would then drive out along the Mumballup road and onto the long mine access road, and there we would see the line of workers waiting for their pay. We would get out and there would be jeers and sneers as we got the cash to the paymaster, who would then unpack the containers and we would go.

We did that on the same day, at the same time, every single week. How we never got robbed is still a mystery to me today! There were obviously no serious crooks out there, or the Collie coalminers had warned everybody off from touching their pay! For some reason, every couple of months we had to go to the local sporting shooters association's pistol club for some practice. With all respect to my two colleagues at the time, they were well into their retirement years, so when they held out their .38 Special revolver, they were very shaky and they rarely hit the target. I soon learned that if I was going to hit the target with the revolver that was issued to me, I had to aim a metre and a half to the left. I am very pleased that no-one took us to task, because the white flag and the hands would have gone up straightaway, I reckon!

Not long after I was elected to this place, on the advice of my very experienced electorate officer, Anne Fergusson-Stewart, we thought we would have an office opening that would showcase the Shooters and Fishers Party a bit. Many of you attended that office opening. In fact, when we were cleaning out the office, I found the menu for that event. I will read out some of that menu. We had wild harvest pork and venison bratwurst—style sausage and panini with special mayonnaise and green tomato chutney, flash-fried breast of quail on crispbread, and venison skewers. The wines, of course, were Mazza Wines from Dardanup, if anybody wants any of those! We also had wine from Victoria's game-hunting region—Ladies who Shoot their Lunch, which Hon Sue Ellery found quite amusing at the time, and Are you Game? from Fowles Wines in Strathbogie. That was quite a good night.

Unfortunately, at the time, Hon Barry House was hosting a delegation of MPs from Canada—I think they might have been from Saskatchewan—and he gave his apologies. He said, "Look, I'm really sorry, Rick. We've been invited to Government House, so we're going there." I said, "Priorities take their place; no trouble at all!" As the night started to wind down at about 8.30 or nine o'clock, in rolled Big Barry with the whole delegation behind him. He said, "Mate, they heard all about it and they wanted to come, so here they are." We had all the Canadian MPs there. We put the burners back on and we fired the whole thing up again. I will never forget that a First Nations female MP was there making her way through this big plate of yabbies that a Boyup Brook farmer had provided to us. I do not know what discussions they had in the car, but she looked at me and said, "Rick, if this is being a redneck, then I'm a redneck!" That was a good opening.

During my time here, I was fortunate to get a few inquiries started. One of the first was to get a review of the Firearms Act. Some members may remember that there was a massive fee hike on applications of some 400 per cent, so I moved a disallowance motion. At the time, a couple of government members actually crossed the floor and supported the motion with the opposition, but, unfortunately, the disallowance motion did not succeed. However, what it did do was to instigate an inquiry, I think by the Joint Audit Committee at the time, which outlined some anomalies in its report. The Attorney General at the time then asked the Law Reform Commission to undertake a review over two years. The Law Reform Commission did a forensic review of the Firearms Act; it heard a lot of evidence and travelled to other states. It looked at it dispassionately. A lot of witnesses were interviewed, including members of the Western Australia Police Force. That review resulted in 143 recommendations. Unlike with a lot of these reviews, both the firearms community and WAPOL were comfortable with most of the recommendations, so we looked at implementing them.

The former police minister, Hon Michelle Roberts, formed a ministerial working group for firearms reform, and we worked for about 18 months on that. On that group was Ron Bryant from the Western Australian branch of the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia, Bevan Steele from the Western Australian Firearm Traders Association, myself and WAPOL. WAPOL had broken the recommendations up into three tranches. Obviously, the easier ones—the low-hanging fruit—were in the first tranche, which we had agreed upon. We put that tranche to the minister, but for some reason it never got to the Parliament. I asked questions about it, but it never got here. I recall that amongst the manifesto of things this government wants to achieve in this term, as outlined in the Governor's speech, is firearms legislation reform, so I am hopeful that the new minister, Paul Papalia, will reinstate the ministerial working group, look at the Law Reform Commission's report rather than reinvent the wheel, and put forward some amendments that are consistent with that very good Law Reform Commission report project 105.

The next inquiry I managed to convince this house to set up was an inquiry into a recreational hunting system, which was undertaken by the Standing Committee on Public Administration, to which I was co-opted. Hon Jacqui Boydell and Hon Darren West were also members of that committee. Witnesses ranged from representatives of the Wildflower Society of Western Australia to the Commissioner of Police. It was a really interesting inquiry and it did entail some travel. A few of us travelled to New South Wales to look at the recreational hunting system in that state that had been implemented only 15 years earlier. It was a very sophisticated system, with very good technology. People had to book a forest block online, which limited the number of people who could go there. There were also phone apps. Through GPS mapping, forest blocks could be switched out if other activities were occurring there, such as a mountain bike competition, harvesting of a forest coupe or whatever the case. NSW suspended its recreational hunting system for about 12 or 18 months. It moved from the Game Council of NSW, which had a few issues, into the Game Licensing Unit under the Department of Primary Industries. While we were there, two things of interest were explained to us.

One was that the Game Licensing Unit had found that the amount of illegal activity in the forest had reduced because there were more eyes in the bush and more reporting back to it about issues that should not be going on—maybe some cropping there or whatever it was. The other thing was that during the suspension of the system, a lot of complaints came in from country New South Wales, because these towns were getting a lot of revenue from recreational hunting. It was helping their economy by people going there and paying for accommodation, supplies and that type of thing. That really helped those rural communities. Those rural communities were happy when the system was reinstated. It also had a big impact on the amount of expenditure that the state government had to undertake as far as pest animal control was concerned.

We then went down to Victoria where recreational hunting systems have been in place for probably 60 or 70 years. I think Hon Steve Dawson might have been involved in that at one stage or had worked in that department. Victoria has a very good system. Of interest there was that recreational hunters take something like 157 000 feral deer out of the forest system a year. If the deer were left to breed, they would really impact the forest. A study 10 years ago, or thereabouts, found that there was about \$439 million of value to the Victorian economy in recreational hunting. One of the highlights of that trip was when we visited an area called the Heart Morass. I recently watched a TV program about the Heart Morass. It was really something to see.

We learnt that a morass is a wetland that is lower than the bordering river's watertable level. The Heart Morass near Sale in Gippsland had been deteriorating and over-grazed for many, many years, and it was a mess. We saw all the old photos of how bad its condition had been. In 2007, Field and Game Australia in that state bought one parcel of land in the Heart Morass through funds granted by the Hugh Williamson Foundation and it set about rehabilitating the land. Obviously, it was looking to improve the habitat for the lifestyle of duck hunting that occurred there at certain times of the year.

Later on, the association bought another two parcels, with a total cost of about \$2.4 million, and it now encompasses 3 200 acres. It is really good example of practical conservation in practice. It is not someone tying themselves to a bulldozer; it is actually doing something. The association planted 60 000 trees. It worked with the catchment council in that state. It worked out when to drain areas and where not to drain. A lot of acid sulphates are in the soil there, so people have to be very careful when they drain areas. A lot of grasslands were replanted, and if people were to see it now, they would see it is absolutely pristine. The comment my colleagues made on that trip was that they could not believe there was not one empty beer can or one piece of paper lying about. It was absolutely and totally pristine and had been rehabilitated to a fantastic level.

In that area now, obviously duck-shooting season is only a few weeks a year, so when they are not using it, all members of the Field and Game association pay \$70 for a key that gives them 12-months' access. They can go and use the wetlands for camping, family picnics or whatever they like. School tours go there so kids get to learn all about the environment and what they can do to actually help the environment. The bird observation society goes there to identify birds. It works together with the association. It puts up nesting boxes. Even the local community gets to use it as a walking trail in the off-season. It is a really good example of hunting and conservation together. That was a good inquiry that I enjoyed. Some recommendations in the report have not been implemented, but there have been some alternatives presented, which I think are a good start.

The next inquiry was quite a controversial one. It was the Select Committee into the Operations of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Western Australia (Inc). I have since found out that that select committee had been, for some reason, the first select committee established in about seven years, yet, in the fortieth Parliament we had select committees established every other week. It was controversial, and, I must admit, at times it got a little bit uncomfortable. There were debates in the other place in which we were accused of being a committee of assassins and that it was a witch-hunt. The RSPCA certainly took umbrage at us looking into its operations. However, I am glad that we undertook that inquiry because quite a few things came out of it. Ironically, other states in Australia were at the same time undertaking similar inquiries. In the UK—the birthplace of the RSPCA—similar inquiries were also being undertaken.

Without going through the full report, one of the things that stood out the most was the fact that the RSPCA, as a private charity, does not have any legislative power at all to investigate or prosecute—zero. A lot of people do not understand how that connection and what an RSPCA officer can do that. How it works is that, under the Animal Welfare Act 2002, the CEO of the Department of Agriculture and Food appoints general inspectors. They also appoint RSPCA employees, which is also required under the Animal Welfare Act; council rangers; Department of Environment Regulation rangers; and, in a couple of cases, people who have operated animal shelters, which I do not think is a very wise move. Part of the problem is that those appointments, which last for five years, have no conditions on them.

Unfortunately, there was a lot of tension between the RSPCA and the Department of Agriculture and Food, to the point that they resented each other a lot. What the general inspectors were doing was taking all their direction from the RSPCA, not from the department. Justice Corboy, in one of his findings, said that the general inspectors are an agent of the Department of Agriculture and Food, and it follows for me that an agent should always refer to their principal for direction or reporting. These very same issues were being investigated in the UK. One MP in the UK said that the functions of campaigner, fundraiser, investigator and prosecutor should have oceans of blue water between them instead of Chinese walls. In fact, what should happen is that, like in Scotland and Ireland, they can investigate but then provide a brief to the state, and it should be the state that, in its own impassioned assessment, looks at whether charges or prosecutions should commence. I know that the Minister for Agriculture and Food is looking at a review of the Animal Welfare Act and I think that that is very important.

Then, of course, we have the *Private property rights: The need for disclosure and fair compensation*, which was the thirty-third report of the Public Administration Committee, which I was not co-opted onto, but I did attend some of the hearings as an observer. I think it was a really useful report. I think it was very accurate. I commend the committee members on the level of investigation it did and for being able to capture the issues that affect the community where private property rights are concerned. This affects the community directly. This is not some sort of airy-fairy thing that we might do to improve the community. It actually affects lives with things like environmentally sensitive areas or conditions on titles. Therefore, I think it is very, very important that at some stage the report be referred to. I know we had an inquiry into property rights in 2005—I think Hon Sue Ellery was on that particular committee. That is going back a while, but I think much came out of that. It was a very good report, too. I encourage the government to have a good look at this thirty-third report and make some changes so that people's lives are not so badly affected.

In his contribution last week, Hon Ken Baston spoke about the wild dog bounty that he had implemented while he was Minister for Agriculture and Food. I had many discussions with the minister at that time about this bounty because it is used extensively in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland as a means of reducing numbers of wild dogs and even foxes. For some reason the department here has a lot of resistance to it. The questions I asked in this place revealed that over 520 dogs had been taken within a very short period of time and it cost the state only about \$52 000, which is really good value for money. But for some reason there seems to be resistance to that. I know that Victoria has bounty systems for foxes and wild dogs and sometimes there is a bit of political pressure and the state backs off but then it reinstates the bounties again because the number of dogs and foxes start to climb. In the overall management of wild dogs and foxes, I know we have exclusion fencing, which is very important, and we also have doggers, which is also very important, but I think we should not underestimate using ground shooting and bounties as a way to also reduce those wild dog numbers. Pastoralists are not the only ones affected by this; members can imagine the devastation on wildlife and the pastoral regions by wild dogs. Some of the pastoralists who I have spoken to said that there used to be lots of goats, kangaroos, marsupials and everything else there but not anymore. They are all gone; the wild dogs have eaten them all. Therefore, I think that this should be revisited and I congratulate Hon Ken Baston for having the courage to actually do something about that at the time but unfortunately it did not continue.

Madam President, I would just like to touch on the fact that you, as the first female President of this place, showed a lot of courage in protecting the conventions, the privileges and the institution of the Legislative Council. Listening to the condolence motion for Hon Clive Griffiths, I heard a common thread from all the speakers: that the protection of the conventions and the privileges of the upper house is paramount. Hon Clive Griffiths served under both Liberal and Labor governments, and he pushed forward that the protection of the Legislative Council is paramount. Madam President, you took your solemn duty seriously and you have protected as best you can the privileges of this Parliament. We will wait to see how things turn out with that. I certainly encourage the new President, whoever that might be, to also look at the fact that this is not about party politics but the institution of the Legislative Council, and that democracy relies on all the pillars of democracy, including privilege. I think to erode that is the start of a slippery slope. Looking back through the centuries, a lot of blood has been spilt and lives lost in the forging of the democratic system.

Depending on electoral reform, I look forward to the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party contesting the next election in 2025. I raise that because I was listening to some talkback radio while on the south coast a few weeks back when the Attorney General flagged that there would be a review of the Legislative Council electoral system, and a lot of talk was about one vote, one value and that a vote in the Mining and Pastoral Region in particular had a weighting of about 6.5 times that of someone in the city. I have great concerns about that.

In fact, I heard on the radio Hon Darren West reply to a question on that. The Australian Senate has 12 senators per state. If we had one vote, one value for elections to the Australian Senate, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland would have far more senators than we would. I do not think Western Australia wants to see a reduction in the amount of representation we have in the federal Senate. Western Australia is definitely the powerhouse of the entire country's economy; therefore, we need to have 12 senators to represent us. If we look at the Mining and Pastoral and Agricultural Regions, sure they do not have the population, but they are the powerhouses of the state economy. There are many challenges in those regions that city people do not have when it comes to essential services, and just getting around the place because it is so huge. I think it would be a travesty to reduce representation for those regions. Some reform could be required. But what shape that would take, I do not know—whether we adopt a Senate type-system or New South Wales-type system or whatever. I think that one vote, one value is fraught with a lot of problems, and I would not like to see it in place. The SFFWA will go into caretaker mode for now. Where we go will depend on how that electoral reform works out, but hopefully we will be back to have another go.

As I come to the end of this speech, I would like to thank a few people. First and foremost, would have to be my wife, Brenda, who has been by my side the entire time and has always encouraged me. When I was licking my wounds, she would always give me a pat on the back and a red wine to calm me down. She has always been there supporting me all the way through, and I am very grateful for that. I also thank my family—my parents, my children, my grandchildren and my soon-to-be great-grandchild in November. You have always been very supportive of me right through.

I thank my electorate staff. Anne Fergusson-Stewart has been there from the beginning. She is a very experienced electorate officer; she has worked for ministerial departments, both federal and state. She certainly helped me to get up and running, and I am eternally grateful to her. Lucy Radzikowska has been with us for this term of Parliament. She is a brilliant research officer. She actually reads legislation and *Hansard* for fun! If I ever needed anything, I had it in a hot second. Her intellectual capacity is beyond reproach. I thank Lucy very much for her service. Tim Williams came to work with us at the beginning of the fortieth Parliament as a young journalist. He has been an assistant research officer. He has handled a lot of media for us, prepared a lot of speeches and done a lot of research as well. As a young man, he has grown to be a very, very capable research officer. What weighs heavily on all members of Parliament who were not re-elected is their responsibility to their staff and that they are now unemployed and will have to look elsewhere for employment. That weighs heavily on me, but the quality of those people means that it will not be too long before someone picks them up.

I would also like to thank some of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party executive, in particular Ray Hull and Mark McCall, who have been there from the very beginning and are still on the executive. Ray was chairman for a period of time and Mark McCall has been our treasurer for the party's existence. I thank Stuart Ostle, our current chairman; Stef Colaguri; Clinton Thomas; Ron Lean; Trevor Ruewaldt; Fiona White-Hartig; and Joe Gerek. They are all dedicated people on our state executive.

I would also like to thank all members and the Clerks for their fellowship over the years. I have really appreciated that support across the divide. I wish all re-elected and newly elected members all strength in continuing to keep the other place to account, and in reviewing and improving legislation, as this house has a duty to do. Madam President, lastly, I wish all those members who did not contest or who were unsuccessful at the election all the very best for the future.

[Applause.]