



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



HON MURRAY MONTGOMERY, MLC
(Member for South West Region)

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply — Motion

Wednesday, 2 May 2001

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

HON MURRAY MONTGOMERY (South West) [8.44 pm]: Mr President, in standing before the House and supporting the motion moved by Hon Ken Travers, I take the opportunity to speak on several issues and make some final personal comments in this place. I thank those who have allowed me to do this, particularly because I believed it was something I would not be able to do because most departing members made their farewell speeches last November. I recollect that when I came into this place some 12 years ago the House sat for three weeks in April prior to new members coming in. That allowed some members who were leaving this place to make final speeches, and I can remember one or two of them.

I congratulate the Governor on his address to the Parliament. It was a pleasure to meet him and to see how he has taken on the role of Governor in a very fair-handed way.

During the past 12 years I have been proud to serve the people of the south west as their elected member. I have calculated that over my working life, those 12 years represent about 25 per cent, which is a reasonable chunk of one's working life, particularly when I consider what else I have done and where else I have worked. I have to say that 50 per cent of it was farming in my own right, and working for other people for the other 25 per cent, which included a number of jobs related to agriculture.

I have been considering some of the highlights of my past 12 years and reflecting on my time as a member of Parliament. I have seen how the South West Region has grown and developed in that time and how vibrant are the communities that I and other members of the south west represent. The region, as well as the State, is well placed to tackle some of the challenges of this millennium into which we have now moved. I believe there are many attitudes in the community of embracing innovation, and they will determine the responses to the inevitable changes that will take place. As the south west grows, more and more people are attracted to the lifestyle there.

During my and my colleagues' time as members of the Legislative Council, two new cities, Mandurah and Albany, have been created in the region. It will not be long before the Shire of Busselton reaches that milestone. The Shire of Busselton has experienced dramatic growth that has outstripped most local governments in Australia. In fact, this year, for the fourth year in a row, Busselton is the fastest-growing area in Australia. When one considers what the south west represents, and how it has developed, it certainly has a host of first-class sporting and recreational facilities beyond those of Walpole and Denmark. It has the Treetop Walk. Denmark claims it as in its shire, which it is, and Walpole wishes to claim it because it is the closest town. It is a fabulous and attractive facility for people to visit and I believe in its first 12 to 18 months it had 200 000 visitors. Obviously that number is constantly increasing.

The Albany Golf Club has just completed a new clubhouse that has dramatically enhanced the club as a sporting attraction. The previous Government can take some credit for having assisted that development. In highlighting the establishment of these facilities and developments in recreation and sport, I am not suggesting that they were achieved without problems which were created and identified by the Government and which it has had to overcome.

In that context, I mention the thorny issue of dairy industry deregulation and the ramifications that were almost impossible to predict. Many producers in our electorate are questioning their future in that industry as a result of the restructuring. Despite these challenges, the coalition Government was always committed to doing the utmost for the people of rural and regional Western Australia. We should be proud of those achievements. Within the coalition Government, the National Party always sought to advance the interests of those living in country Western Australia. In more recent times, coalition ministers with responsibility for the agriculture, regional development and transport portfolios worked tirelessly to ensure that our resources were allocated equitably across the State.

I will expand this discussion to include six areas in which I was involved while serving my electorate. I have contributed to the development of the south west during my time in this place. In my maiden speech I stated that I have always believed that education is vital in country areas, particularly in the south west. I spoke of the need for a tertiary campus in Albany. Since then, an Edith Cowan University campus has been constructed in Bunbury, and in the past 18 months a University of Western Australia facility has been constructed in Albany. The establishment of those institutions will result in benefits to the entire community and the regions that those campuses serve.

Obviously, those facilities are being brought closer to country people. Even though there are some difficulties, the education and training of rural youth must continue to be of high priority.

One of the highlights I saw was the resurrection of the Denmark campus of the Western Australian College of Agriculture as it was about to be closed. I give credit to the then Minister for Education for the important role he played. The current Premier, Dr Geoff Gallop, in his role as Minister for Education in that earlier term of government, saw the long-term viability of the Denmark campus, and he gave the college a second chance. From that position of near-closure, he ensured the appointment of a young principal, Andrew Castle, who went on to become the principal at Narrogin. Since that time, the college has gone from strength to strength. The interesting part about it was how it was achieved. Funds of about \$10 000 were set aside to establish a piggery. He went to the College of Agriculture advisory committee and said, "I have \$10 000. We can spend it on the pigs and have no college, or we can use it to advertise that the college exists." It was spent on a television campaign and within the six-week period in which the campaign ran, the college had more students than it could poke a stick at. It sent a lot of the students to other colleges.

Hon Barry House: That is called pork-barrelling!

Hon MURRAY MONTGOMERY: In the truest sense of the word, I am sure. That was the innovation Andrew Castle brought to the college. Obviously, as anybody who has been to Denmark in the past few months will have seen, its education facilities have grown and been enhanced. With the recent capital works program that was initiated by the previous minister and now Leader of the Opposition, Hon Colin Barnett, the students of the Western Australian College of Agriculture at Denmark now have some of the best technological and accommodation facilities that are required to assist agricultural education.

I turn now to the Harvey campus. It is shifting its facilities to the Wokalup research station, which will be its new campus. Agricultural education is going down the right path and showing young people who wish to take up a role within agricultural facilities the capability for agricultural education to move forward. As people know, the reason for the shift at Harvey is the Stirling-Harvey redevelopment scheme undertaken by the Water Corporation. During the recess I took the opportunity of attending a conference in Victoria. It was a regional food, wine and tourism seminar, workshop or conference - it depends what one wants to call it. Its objective was to look at those opportunities presented to our State and Australia. Representatives from every State in Australia and New Zealand attended. Although the links between food, wine and tourism may be obvious, the need to promote the industry and educate not only the industry but also the general public became very evident. Food plays an important part in all our lives. However, the combination of wine, in which I have an interest -

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: So do I!

Hon MURRAY MONTGOMERY: The more interest Hon Derrick Tomlinson shows in it the better. Just as long as he partakes of the right label, it is okay by me.

It was very evident, because of the number of restaurants opening in the south west, that this seminar was very appropriate; so much so that the keynote speaker, a restaurateur from California, saw the need for Australia to market itself regionally as a complete tourism experience, encompassing our superb food - obviously a green and clean food - wine, and of course the environment in which we live.

However, we were cautioned by one of the other speakers. He showed how his operations in food and wine tourism needed more skills than possibly he and his management had. He related to the conference that his average restaurant patronage for a week was 1 000-plus people. However, over a trading year he ran at a loss. The only thing that propped him up was his cellar sales. Having gone, after the conference, to look at the area he came from, I can understand why people would probably be a little reluctant. It had an idyllic setting. It overlooked a lake with various wildlife and birds. The problem from my point of view was that when people went to the restaurant, they walked passed the wine tank farm, which was obviously strewn with various parts of grapes and everything else that lay around on the concrete floor. Also, the water tank farm, which was seated on a concrete pad, ran across the paths which people walked upon. The area was wet, mucky and slushy. People walking through that area were already turned off before they got to the restaurant.

I saw as part of the problem the risk of disease transfer. People could fly in from another State or overseas into Melbourne, go down to the Mornington Peninsula and walk past the tank farm where two people at arm's length could touch the tanks on one side and the vines on the other. I draw to the minister's attention that that is something about which we must be ever vigilant, for not only wine grapes but also all parts of agriculture in which disease can spread so quickly. Once it is here it is here forever. Towards the end of the conference of between 150 and 200 delegates, a unanimous resolution was passed that a steering committee be set up to draw the industries together so that they would have a strong voice to govern and to see how small food, wine and tourism ventures in the regional communities around Australia - not metropolitan communities - could promote themselves to the rest of the world. One of the speakers stated that it needs to be driven by the private sector from the small end of town to focus on regional areas, rather than by the Government and the larger end of the industry.

This committee is working on a proposal - and Western Australia has a representative on that committee, along with every other State, as well as the Northern Territory and New Zealand - that may assist regional organisations in the food and wine areas, such as Margaret River and the great southern. I congratulate the marketing organisations that have been set up in those areas, particularly as they relate to the food, wine and tourism industries.

The wine industry continues to grow at a phenomenal rate. Western Australian exports have increased by 50 per cent for the 12-month period to the end of June 2000 when compared with the previous 12 months. We export a quality product, and the average net value to the Western Australian wine exporters during the same period was \$10.56 a litre compared with a national average of \$4.70 a litre. That shows the value of our premium product. The prospects of increasing exports to our major markets in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Japan and Singapore are good, with the estimated Western Australian crush for vintage 2000 at 39 000 tonnes, which is expected to increase to 60 000 tonnes by 2005.

The recent announcement by wine producer Evans and Tate of its plans to establish a large vineyard in Manjimup indicates the importance of viticulture to the south west in the long term. It is providing an important alternative industry for those areas that have suffered a decline in the fortunes of traditional activities, particularly those industries based around timber.

Horticulture is obviously another important industry in the electorate with a positive future. One of the success stories of recent times - and I note that, when a product is developed, sometimes the time frame for development can be in decades - was the creation of the Pink Lady apple. The trials for developing this apple indicate how much benefit it has been to the south west. Valuable royalties have been returned to Western Australia as a result, because it is now licensed around the world, and this provides funds which may lead us to develop further apple varieties. That industry is a precious commodity and must be protected at all costs. As I indicated to the Leader of the House earlier, I applaud the decision of Hon Warren Truss, the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, to protect the fruit industry in Australia by not allowing New Zealand apples into Australia because of the possible introduction of a disease such as fire blight. The establishment of the Manjimup Horticultural Research Institute which was opened by the then Minister for Primary Industry, Monty House, will ensure that successes similar to that of the Pink Lady apple can be developed for the benefit of all Western Australians. The current research activities focus on developing an internationally competitive Western Australian potato industry, with particular emphasis on seed exports. Also in that area is the development of cauliflowers for export and other fruit breeding.

Further south is that other important infrastructure development which took place at the Fletcher International Export Pty Ltd (NSW) abattoir. Fletcher's abattoir provides a market for mutton producers right around Western Australia, and that has provided the impetus for many other local jobs. That obviously has boosted the economy of the great southern region.

I was interested in the comment the Leader of the House made about the decimation of the south coast pilchard industry that took place a few years ago. As a result of disease coming into that fishery along the south coast of Australia, most of the fishing boats in that industry moved out of the industry. The industry virtually collapsed. It will be interesting to see whether that fishery is reborn to allow those boats that had left the industry to come back or whether only a few come back along the coast, particularly at Albany and Bremer Bay, when that resource is being used again. The fishing industry at Esperance has been cranked up over a period of time. The interesting part is that the fish are used for recreational fishing around Australia. Mulies from the south coast have found their way into the Northern Territory, Queensland and all along the east coast. I note that the salmon season this year has been very successful. It has been interesting to find that the salmon have been full of pilchards as a food source, which I hope indicates a resurgence of that industry. The tuna industry has had a major plateauing effect on those areas that have been involved in the pilchard industry. Tuna has allowed people to diversify. It has highlighted the fact that the Albany port needs a boat marina to allow for the bigger boats; that is, up to 140 feet. Prior to the election, the previous Minister for Transport, Hon Murray Criddle, was considering a proposal for a marina in the Albany port. The new Government must seriously consider that proposal, and I trust we will see it developed over the next year or so.

When I came into this House, I indicated that I believed that conservation and its relationship to the environment was of a great deal of importance. I indicated the attitude should be not of preservation but rather of conservation of the environment. I still hold that view and see no reasons to change it. If we preserved everything, we would end up with nothing, or the environment itself would determine how much is retained. I am proud of the National Party's record on the environment, particularly on the logging debate. The Nationals have always sought to bring a balanced approach to this issue, and our aim has been to promote and develop a sustainable timber industry. Prior to my entering Parliament, Gordon McLean, who owned sawmills at Denmark, identified the need for a plantation timber industry. It was a number of years before that suggestion was taken up. It was unfortunate that he could not secure the necessary financial backing. During my time in this place we have seen the development of a plantation

timber industry. It will be interesting to watch the harvesting of those plantations and to see the first shipment leave Albany later this year as the development of the port and the woodchipping facility at Down Road takes place. I believe we will soon see the importance of developing other parts of that area, including the roads. That issue will need to be addressed by this Government, particularly as the roads from Mt Barker through to Manjimup and Boyup Brook will be the main feeder roads for the industry.

Another important issue relating to the environment is the management of our water supply. Our country is reliant on a reliable water supply for many things, including food production. We must guard our water resources at all costs. The problems that have been demonstrated in the Murray-Darling basin, where the water resource has been allocated by up to 600 per cent, will result in the long-term degradation of not only the land but also the water within that basin. The previous coalition Government in Western Australia acted responsibly by introducing water reform to ensure reasonable guidelines were in place for the use of our State's water resource. It is now up to the new Government to ensure that Western Australia does not go down the path of allocating the water resource to such an extent that it will cause degradation.

With regard to the environment, it was disappointing that earlier this year or late last year fires occurred on the south coast. However, congratulations need to be handed out to those volunteers who came from Perth and the surrounding regions to fight those fires, particularly given the devastation that occurred around Mt Barker, in the Two Peoples Bay area at the water pumping facility for Albany, and at the Mindijup silica sands facility. An amount of plantation timber was burnt. In the Robinson estate close to Albany, and also in the fire at Kalgan, three or four houses and a number of other buildings were destroyed. I can relate to one of those houses that was destroyed, because it was owned by Mr and Mrs Ernie Williams. It was sad enough to see the loss of that building, but they also lost the property around it, which included a stone fruit orchard that Ernie had made his life after retiring from school teaching. I have known Ernie all of my life, and sad as that was then, it was even more sad to hear that Ernie passed away last week after having fought illness for a number of years. That fire demonstrated the need for country Australia to have better access to communications and technology. That access should not be restricted, and we need to fill those gaps in country Western Australia. A federal parliamentary committee visited Walpole recently. That committee was chaired by Paul Neville, the member for Hinkler - a Queenslander - and it examined the problems that are associated with communications in that area of the south coast. Walpole has little television coverage unless people have a satellite dish. Mobile phones do not work there -

Hon Bob Thomas: They have CDMA.

Hon MURRAY MONTGOMERY: Yes; they pick it up from Denmark.

Hon Bob Thomas: The South West Development Commission gave them a grant, and they now have a tower on North Walpole Road.

Hon MURRAY MONTGOMERY: Yes, that is true. However, the radio reception throughout that area is very poor, which is the point I was trying to make. I thank Hon Bob Thomas for that comment about telecommunications.

I am pleased that the Federal Government has now broadened its view on SBS television for country Western Australia. It is interesting that Albany got SBS a few years ago when people such as John Cecil, the ABC regional manager, and local community members John Walters and Dudley Dreyer put in their efforts to get SBS to Albany ahead of the current push to get SBS into those communities around Australia that do not have it at this stage.

Although some comments have been made opposing the construction of a wind turbine farm in Albany for the generation of electricity, it has generally been accepted by the community. I understand that the 12 18-kilowatt wind turbines will be connected to Albany's grid system in July-August this year. They will provide between 75 and 80 per cent of Albany's electricity on those days when the wind blows. The area that has been looked at is one of the best sites in Australia - certainly it is the best in Western Australia. It is good to see how that will be developed in ensuing years as an additional source of electricity.

One of the disappointments in my time in this place is that the Muir Highway has yet to be widened and developed as an important link between the great southern and the south west. However, I trust that the current Government will not shy away from the fact that the allocation of funds for that road program should continue, because that road will be required for the timber industry. Because of the demands that freight transport and tourism will create, another area of development that may be required in the future is the further widening of the Albany Highway between Armadale and Albany.

I congratulate Skywest Airlines Pty Ltd for bringing larger aircraft into the State. Those aircraft are flying around the State, including into Albany. I was pleased to assist in the inquiry that took place, which ensured that the services to the regions were not reduced. At the time, it was questionable whether it would remain viable for aircraft to fly into Albany and Esperance. It has remained viable, and the services into those areas are extremely well patronised at this time.

I was extremely pleased that the Anzac Day ceremony in Albany was televised to the nation. Albany is the place where the Anzac tradition started. The convoy of Australian and New Zealand forces met in Albany before it left for Gallipoli. It was interesting to see how the committee that was formed two or three years ago conducted itself. I extend my congratulations to the Returned Services League president in Albany, Digger Cleak, for the commendable effort he put in to ensure that the Anzac Day commemorations went off without a hitch. There was a huge crowd on the foreshore at Albany, including the Governor, and that in itself is a commendable effort.

I believe that the south west is one of those exciting areas to live in. It is an area which will continue to develop and grow. We have some challenges ahead, and the Labor Party must take up those challenges. I can only urge the Government not to reduce the representation of country people, but rather to encourage the metropolitan area to move to the country, to prevent Perth from becoming overpopulated.

I will now make some brief comments about the committees that I have worked on here. I found it very rewarding to chair the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations during the first term of the previous Government, and I am interested to see how it has developed and moved on since I was on it. My first committee of this House was government agencies, as it was called then, which was my induction into committee work. If I recollect rightly, Hon Tom Stephens was the chairman of that committee and Hon Norman Moore was a member as well. At one point Hon Norman Moore became the chairman of that committee. I then served on the Joint Standing Committee on the Anti-Corruption Commission. That had some interesting activities, on which we have reported at length to this House.

Other committees that I chaired outside of this House, as ministerial committees, included one that looked at the problem of footrot in this State, and how we could get people out of quarantine. Another committee I thoroughly enjoyed was an inquiry into industrial hemp. I understand moves are afoot to have hemp regulated as a crop, and for *Cannabis sativa* to be given approval for use for industrial purposes. I was interested, when I was in the eastern States, to be told of a person who is growing hemp for seed to feed to mutton-birds so that they can be placed on dinner tables around the world. Hemp seed has a particular enzyme that allows the fattening of mutton-birds to the right fat thickness and tenderness. The other committee on which I served was a select committee of this House, chaired by Hon Bill Stretch, on the subject of dieback in the forests. I found it very interesting working with the people who served on that committee, including Hon Bob Thomas, and handing a report to this place.

I place on the record my thanks to my wife, Pam, for all she has done in supporting me, and for all the driving she has done during the time I have been a member of Parliament. I thank my daughters and son-in-law and my staff. Although my staff often job-shared, they all contributed. I thank Louise, Yvonne, Denise, Kerry, Kerryl and Monica. They have all contributed well towards what I have done. Thanks also go to the members. I thank the Hansard staff and the Clerks of Parliament; they have given me good advice and made my time in this place memorable. I support the motion.

[Applause.]