



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



HON DEE MARGETTS, MLC
(Member for Agricultural Region)

Legislative Council

Thursday, 19 May 2005

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CLOSE OF SESSION

Valedictory Remarks

HON DEE MARGETTS (Agricultural) [3.10 pm]: This the second time I have made a valedictory speech in Parliament, but the other one was in another place. Hon Norman Moore said today that he thought that perhaps I was better suited to that other place.

Hon Norman Moore: I meant no disrespect.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: I did not take any disrespect - not entirely - but, as I have said before, I did not see this as a consolation prize. I actually wanted to be in state Parliament, because I thought it was very important to participate, to contribute and to bring to the state legislature, if I could, some sense of where we all fit into the national and international sphere. I have really appreciated that opportunity and I have had a ball working in the Agricultural Region of Western Australia.

I want to talk a bit about what I think are the really special aspects of agriculture in WA. That is epitomised by what a former office manager of mine called rural women with grunt. I can think of a range of women in agriculture WA who have made a difference in their areas. If I name them it does not suggest that they are Greens (WA) members or Greens supporters, or even that they voted for me; I do not know, in many cases. What I can say is that in many cases these people are leading the charge of looking towards the future and where employment, sustainability, social, economic and environmental aspects can be merged. For instance, Jackie Healy, was in the mid-west working with the Mid West Development Commission, but at the same time she worked with the community promoting employment and regional development at a community level. She is now working in the Solomon Islands because she was looking for another challenge, but she is a fantastic example. I now refer to Jane Wardlaw from the Western Wise Network. She had extraordinary vision in the way she went about looking at value adding, employment creation and new ideas, instead of just focusing on how to produce more and more primary produce which ends up trending down to a lower and lower price on the international stage. How do we help create communities and employment? How do each of those new innovative ideas get shared around? That is absolutely exciting.

The next person I mention is Pauline Roberts. Many people would know the Roberts family from Dandaragan. I met Pauline before I took my seat, because the local land care district committee was having some difficulty with issues of drainage through land. I offered advice and eventually met up with Pauline and her husband Andrew. She is an extraordinary person in terms of the courage, knowledge, commitment and passion that she brings to her neck of the woods. Like many of the people I have mentioned, she gets involved with many aspects of the community, not only the community's own self-interest projects but also looking at the future of the area. If more sustainable agriculture is radical, what about unsustainable agriculture? There are extraordinary people working in and around the Agricultural Region who should be the future of the region. I remember going to one meeting dealing with the issue of water and listening to Pauline, who was extraordinarily well informed on many of the issues to do with water allocation and impact. She came out of the meeting feeling devastated, saying that the people at the meeting did not listen. Both Andrew and I told her that she did not understand: the people at the meeting would not necessarily change their minds the first time, but because she was providing the information, acting with integrity and enabling them to see a different viewpoint, over time they would listen and start changing. I believe that is happening.

There are other people who are supporting the region, such as John Longman, who I will talk about a little later. Anne Snow from Lancelin is an extraordinarily courageous woman who is not only working on issues of environmental integrity but also community impacts on the defence training area and peace and disarmament. Wendy Newman works with the Wheatbelt Development Commission, she organises field days and is a leader within that community. She looks at networking, the linking of people and doing things a little differently. I will also mention extraordinary people like Kylie Whitehead from Quairading, who ran a series of workshops on what she called putting eggs in other baskets. She thinks outside the square and does not do things in the same way all the time. She thinks about innovative ways of creating employment, not only for blokes aged 25 to 45, which unfortunately many of the development proposals tend to be aimed at, but also for young men and women and those otherwise marginalised in regional and agricultural communities.

I also refer to Mary Nenke. Many people in agriculture WA know Mary Nenke. She is probably not widely known outside agriculture WA, but she is an extraordinary powerhouse of energy and commitment, and not just for her own business; she also works with Australian Women in Agriculture and the networks to find new and innovative ways for

people to provide employment into the future and to support their local communities. Julie Newman is perhaps one of the most courageous people on this list. She stands up for the interests of the majority of farmers in Western Australia in relation to genetically modified crops. She provides passion, science, consistency, energy and extraordinary commitment. The rural community of Western Australia owes people like Julie Newman enormous amounts in terms of the impact that she has had so far and will have in the future. She is becoming the voice of probably the majority of people in the community. Many people would still look at Julie and say she is radical and out there, and she is probably not popular within her community, but she is enormously courageous. For a sheila to speak out in agriculture WA takes a lot, and especially on an issue like this. A lot of people just stay silent, which means that governments sometimes get the impression that silence is consent. I take my hat off to her again and again. Nellie Seema in Esperance has been a consistent voice in her community on so many issues. These are just some of the people, but they have helped to give me energy over the past four years.

I mentioned John Longman. I was asked to get involved with people around the Gillingarra area and the west Koojan-Gillingarra LCDC, and I also became involved with people involved in the west midlands hydrogeology project. I could not help but come across John Longman who, in his older years, is full of commonsense, down to earth and an extraordinary person who just keeps finding ways to advance land care and agricultural viability, but also protecting the ground water, the surface water and the sustainability of the region, as well as respecting the remnant bushland in the area. There are amazing people within the region. I wish those people were the majority and I wish those views were the majority, but they are not yet. However, those people are doing a fantastic job - they are absolutely vital.

Some statements have been made about national preferences leading up to the election. I have met many people from the National Party over time, especially over the past four years, and in many areas of national policy and actions on a whole range of issues there are similarities between the Greens' policies and the National Party policies - not necessary on social issues, but in terms of some regional sustainability issues. A courageous front of new views within the National Party is moving further in that direction. That does not mean to say that we will agree with the National Party on all issues. I am extremely pleased that Greens' preferences helped to elect Grant Woodhams in the Greenough region. At the same time, Greens' preferences helped to elect Shane Hill, a Labor Party member, in Geraldton. Greens' preferences in the Agricultural Region played a positive role in the last election.

When I left the Senate I made a statement that I felt I had failed in many of my prime goals. I feel a lot more sanguine at the end of my four years in the Legislative Council. As I have already said, I absolutely loved the regional work. I am particularly thrilled that some issues that were considered by many people to be totally lost and unwinnable have been tackled, including the successful fight against the expansion of the Lancelin defence training area. Although other members of the chamber were involved in that action in some ways, it was the most extraordinary thing for me to be asked to attend community meetings with a range of people and for them to ask how they could become more of an activist. These were landholders, fishermen, shopkeepers, real estate sales people - all sorts of people across the community. They asked other people and me how they could become more active. It was an extraordinary thing in a conservative community for the Greens to be asked to play that role. Politically, that was extremely gratifying.

Another issue that I will not say we have won but it is one in which we have perhaps played a very important role is the debate and dialogue on agricultural deep drainage. For that I must give a lot of thanks to Senator-elect Rachel Siewert, who worked on that project with me. Agricultural deep drainage is an issue on which people have stood in the corners for far too long. Through the process of dialogue and workshops, we have helped to get people out of those corners to communicate with each other. We helped set up a scoping process through which government departments, proponents, environmentalists and other interested people in the community can start to work. That will hopefully help to get some backbone into whatever legislation is in place. It will also work to find out what advice can be given to people on the future economic, social and community viability of some of those issues, and will provide a watch list of what people need to take into consideration.

I am hugely gratified that in conjunction with my colleagues, especially Hon Jim Scott and my terrific colleague Hon Chrissy Sharp, we have helped to provide the backbone to enable the moratorium on genetically modified organisms. I refer to the enormous work that both Chrissy Sharp and my former colleague, Jim Scott, put into a committee on this matter. Jim Scott read everything that was ever published on the Internet about genetically modified crops. The enormous depth of their commitment supported what I believe was the majority view of the community on that issue. The small parties provided in that instance, as in many other cases, the service to the community that, politically, nobody else seemed able to provide. That is enormously gratifying. The war has not yet been won, because the global life science companies will not stop yet. However, it was an enormous achievement. I have immense admiration for Hon Chrissy Sharp and Hon Jim Scott. It has been an absolutely amazing achievement so far in what many people thought was a totally unwinnable debate. They have put an enormous amount of work on the table.

The other unwinnable debate was, of course, the referendum on retail trading hours. Even the small businesses thought it was unwinnable as they were up against the corporate supermarkets. I have my amazing staff, the small business groups, individuals in small business and people in the community to thank for helping pull the argument together. People may have had political views on that issue. Sometimes we did not know what those views were. That was probably one of the most satisfying exercises in empowering the community and providing it with further

and more accurate information. I do not think it is the end of the debate at all. It was the start of a new era of community awareness of the real public interest. That is certainly one area to which I will jump when I leave this place.

I hope that in the time I have been here I have brought some grounded sense to the WA water debate. That debate is not just about how to get more water or the thinning of trees. The thinning of trees in water catchments will not add to the water supply; instead, it will reduce the level of rainfall and impact on the quality of our water. I hope that I have added to the debate on the commonsense and economic imperatives of water conservation efficiency, and also on the equity of proper pricing and the necessity for us to look after the quality of our water.

The environment of the agricultural areas of Western Australia is often spoken about. However, when people talk about the agricultural environment, they often relate it to farm productivity. When people talk about environmental funding, it is not always environmental funding that they are seeking. Unfortunately, some of the people who have created the most environmental damage in agricultural areas over the years and decades are the ones who have continually asked for the most legal concessions, the most money and the most resources, and have demanded the most in terms of exemptions. However, many other wonderful people are looking in other directions. We should better reward the people who are doing the right thing in agriculture in Western Australia. We should also place greater focus on providing management support to the people who provide ecological services on behalf of us all.

The biodiversity of the agricultural region of Western Australian is probably less sexy than the biodiversity of the tall forests, but it is enormous. I have learnt a lot, especially from my scientist partner, about the megadiversity of the region that I have grown to love over the past four years as a member of this place, and before that as a senator. That area has extraordinary diversity in its soil types and plant and animal varieties, rather than in its climate. However, that diversity is not generally appreciated. Often when people talk about the environment they think of the tall forests. However, we have extraordinary megadiversity within the banksia woodlands and proteaceous heath, which still needs a lot of work to be done and which will be put under extreme stress from further climate change.

I do not want to go too much further before thanking the people whom I should really thank. Robin and I shared an office. We had a shared office manager to start with, Rebecca. She was an enormous strength. She has returned to the eastern states. Ann Hunter was my first research officer. She helped me to get over my jitters in changing to a new legislature. Of my current staff, Bridget has done amazing work, not just as a research officer but also in terms of my passion, some would say my obsession, of integrating the issue of economic globalisation at the state level. Bridget has been fantastic in running and driving the globalisation roundtables, which have involved many people from many sectors in Western Australia. We thought we would hold one or two globalisation roundtables, but we are still having them and people want them to continue after more than three years. I thank Bridget. She had an absolutely vital role to play in the retail trading hours debate as well. There is only one Elize in the world. Elize has brought a lot of brightness to our office and has undertaken a huge amount of work with dedication. Thank you so much for everything you have done. Our office, as I said, is a shared office. We have also had amazing volunteers work for us. Anne Marie has worked for us for a long time and with such dedication to keep our resources together. I thank Judy very much for everything she has done in her own time. I also thank Marie for the work she has done in her own time; she is a fantastic lady who has given of herself. I thank everybody who has helped in volunteering. When we share an office, we inevitably share each other's staff from time to time. I therefore thank Scott and Nuala very much for their patience and assistance over time.

I thank my parliamentary colleagues. Many people have acknowledged Lynn's talent. Her contribution to the chamber will be missed. There will continue to be opportunities in the future for Lynn to make a contribution and I thank her for working for us over the time that she has.

Jim Scott gave an extraordinary commitment to detail and put in an enormous effort to learning and finding out everything he could about the issues he was totally passionate about. There is no doubt about the passion and absolute dedication that Jim brought to this chamber.

I have had enormous admiration for Giz for a long time. I do not know anybody who is quite as organised as she is in the circumstances of this chamber. The work that Giz has done and the admiration that other members of the chamber have shown for her committee work on legislation has been immense. We are very happy that she is still a member of this place carrying the flag for us.

Chrissy is amazing and I have been gobstruck by the absolute sheer work that she has done and the pressure that she has come through, especially as Chair of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs. I do not know of anyone else in this chamber who could have gone through those pressures, particularly in the debate on gene modification, and brought on the committee and the community in the way she did. In so many other issues, including the forest debate, I take my hat off to her and thank her very much for everything she has done.

I thank Robin, of course. Robin does not sleep much at all; that would be hardly surprising to members if they could see the volume of work he does. Among other things, we call him the green ferret, and for very good reason. I thank him very much -

Several members interjected.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: No, nothing like that; no ferret jokes.

I thank Robin very much for sharing his office, his time and his good humour with us. I very much thank all the parliamentary house staff, the chamber staff, the committee staff, the bar staff and the dining room staff. I especially thank the Clerks very much for everything they have done, and I thank the Hansard and Parliamentary Services staff; we could not do without them.

I want to finish by thanking my partner, Nick, for his good humour, his scientific groundness at all times and his great support now and in the future. Before I finish I want to mention, just for something different, that I intend to do a PhD in national competition policy. I am sure that at some stage, hopefully, something will be published in the future and that my words - not necessarily me - will come back to haunt members. I thank Kim for his kind words. I thank Norman for his kind words. I am glad that, after all my probably boring speeches, I managed to win Norman over; I am just sad that it happened on the last day! Thank you very much.

[Applause.]
