



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Mr Michael Barnett, MLA**

**(Member for Rockingham)**

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply: Fifth Day

Wednesday, 7 August 1974

*Reprinted from Hansard*

# Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 7 August 1974

## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY: FIFTH DAY

### *Motion*

**MR BARNETT** (Rockingham) [8.34 p.m.]: I wish to take this opportunity to thank the people of Rockingham for expressing sufficient confidence in me to send me here as their representative. Because this is my first speech in the House I stand here with considerable fear and trepidation—which I believe has been the case with other members who have made maiden speeches here. When I mentioned my fears to a colleague he said—without in any way being derogatory to the Premier—

There have been many great people in this Parliament and some small ones too, some of them have even been called, “Sir”; but I never met one of them so big that his feet did not touch the ground.

It seems that at least we all have something in common and we all start off on the same footing. I can assure my constituents that they have a member of Parliament who is at all times available to give his undivided attention for the benefit of the electorate.

I would like to take the opportunity to extend my thanks to the staff of Parliament House without whose courtesy and help my first months here would have been considerably harder.

It is my duty to my constituents to outline briefly to the House some of the issues which currently concern the people of the Rockingham electorate. I understand that at this stage I should not be contentious in my remarks, because this is my maiden speech, and I will follow that advice.

Some 60 to 70 per cent of the residents of Rockingham are migrants, a large number of them being British migrants. Whilst I agree that these people have made a wise choice in coming to this great country of ours they, nonetheless, had far better educational facilities in the land of their birth than this State Government is apparently prepared to give them.

The Rockingham High School was built as a three-year high school but it now operates as a four-year high school. Students are forced to work in terribly overcrowded conditions; in fact, so bad is the position that those children are forced to use laboratories and the library as classrooms. I think members on the Government benches will agree that to place students in such overcrowded conditions will have nothing but detrimental effects on their studies.

Next year the Rockingham High School will become a five-year high school. Conservative estimates reveal that a minimum of 450 new students will be enrolled but a new upper school block will not be constructed.

Showing a knowledge of this problem, the former Government planned to build an upper school block during this financial year. I would like to quote from a letter sent to the principal of the high school in 1973, during the term of the Tonkin Government. The contents of the letter will verify what I have said. The letter is from the Education Department and is dated the 16th August, 1973. It reads, in part, as follows—

I refer to your letter dated 31st July and advise that the provision of additional storage facilities will be attended to during the construction of stage 4 in 1974/75.

That letter is signed by the Chief Administrative Officer of the Education Department. The contents of that letter clearly state the intention of the Tonkin Government to construct another block for the school. However, I will now read an extract from a letter written by the Minister for Education dated the 22nd May, 1974. That is nine months since the receipt of the last letter I quoted. The letter, in part, was as follows—

I wish to advise that no new works are listed for Rockingham Senior High School for the 1974–75 financial year. It has not been possible to schedule the provision of an upper school block for the school on the 1974–75 school building programme because of the limited availability of funds.

I would now like to analyse the contents of that letter. Firstly, the Minister said—

... no new works are listed for Rockingham Senior High School for the 1974–75 financial year.

I wonder what on earth happened in the intervening nine months. Why on earth has the Minister changed his mind, and changed the plans of the Education Department? One can only speculate and wonder, at this stage, if it had anything to do with the political complexion of the electorate.

The letter went on to state—

... It has not been possible to schedule the provision of an upper school block for the school on the 1974–75 school building programme because of the limited availability of funds.

I wish the Minister was present in this House. The limited availability of funds! I contacted the Federal Minister for Education because I thought this was a scandalous situation. The Minister advised me that a sum of \$8.1 million was made available by the Australian Government for the specific purpose of constructing new buildings. That sum had to be spent in the 1974–75 financial year. Not only was that sum of money made available, but it was in excess of the amount which had been made available in the past. In the light of that information I wonder whether the Minister would be prepared to change his mind.

Getting away from education, we have in Rockingham a magnificent stretch of beach bordering Warnbro Sound. Running parallel to it and immediately adjoining it is an area of sand dunes which many members probably know as “the Warnbro sand dunes.” It is very important that in the development of Rockingham urgent consideration be given to retaining these sand dunes as close as possible to their present condition. Mention has already been made of the nodes a little north of Perth. Urban development must not be permitted in the area of sand dunes at Warnbro, for two main reasons. Firstly, they are the only sand dunes of this magnitude within many miles to the north and just as many miles to the south, so merely for the purpose of conservation the sand dunes should be preserved so that the people and children of the future may appreciate what they look like.

Perhaps more importantly, it is environmentally imperative that the sand dunes be retained. Only a few miles away is an area which past Governments have developed. Oblivious to the opinions of the experts, they have bulldozed the foredunes of a section of Mandurah and built houses as close as possible to the beach. The results of this action are now being brought forcibly home by the elements. Ormsby Terrace has been washed away and the member for Murray has an electorate which is rapidly disappearing into the sea.

I hope the present Government will give serious consideration to the opinions of the experts in respect of this area of foreshore before making its decision, and I hope the decision will be one of which it can be proud, not only next year or the year after but also in the year 2000; that is the year in which it will be judged.

I would also like to draw the attention of the House to a matter which may seem to many to be quite trivial. I live 30 miles away from this House, yet a telephone call to this House costs me and/or my electors 20c for every three minutes. While I am aware that this is a Commonwealth matter and not one with which this House should concern itself, I intended to ask the Government tonight to make representations to the Government of the Commonwealth with a view to having the charges for these telephone calls reduced to a more equitable level. However, I find that very recently the Australian Government introduced legislation which would have brought the charges down to 10c a call during the day and 6c a call after six o’clock in the evening. Guess who knocked it back in the Senate?

Migration is in itself a major step. To leave one’s birth place and take up residence in another country takes a tremendous amount of fortitude. I would now like to mention the people of my electorate, many of whom have made just that giant step. Several people in Rockingham were encouraged on arrival from their country of origin to purchase their homes by taking out up to three mortgages. Many others have taken out two mortgages, and almost all of them have at least one.

It was shown in this House on Thursday last by the member for Boulder–Dundas that the increased interest rates racket being perpetrated by building societies and other financial institutions is causing extreme hardship to thousands of Western Australians, and the people in my electorate are in that situation. These facts were brought forward on Thursday but on Wednesday last the Minister for Housing, showing very little concern for the people of Western Australia, made a statement for which I have nothing but condemnation. In reply to a question by the member for Balga, asking whether the Government intended to introduce legislation to control building societies, the Minister said “No”.

I would like to read an extract from a news release on the 10th March, 1974, by the same Minister when he was Deputy Leader of the Opposition. At that stage he obviously had a different opinion because he said—

We want a Royal Commission to find out all the facts and to recommend a programme to restore without reservation the right of home ownership which Australians desire.

I conclude with these remarks. I have with me at the moment a petition, soon to be presented, from people who agree with the Minister and indicating that the people of Rockingham also want a Royal Commission. We have the situation where the members on this side of the House want a Royal Commission and the Minister for Housing wants a Royal Commission. As we have already been assured of the Minister’s support for a Royal Commission, I trust we can also rely on the support of the rest of his party.