

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY: THIRD DAY*Motion*

Debate resumed from 11 June.

MR THOMAS (Welshpool) [3.04 p.m.]: I wish to join the other members who have participated in this debate in congratulating you, Mr Speaker, on your election to the office of Speaker. I recall your election as the member for Rockingham as one of the few bright spots for the Australian Labor Party in the 1974 election. Since then you have represented your electorate and party well within this House, and I am sure that the confidence of the House in electing you unopposed as Speaker will not be misplaced.

The **SPEAKER**: Thank you very much.

Mr THOMAS: On 8 February this year I had the privilege of being elected to represent the district of Welshpool. We won every box in that electorate, and thereby retained the confidence of every section of what is a very diverse electorate. It comprises two discontinuous residential areas. On the eastern side are the suburbs of Cloverdale and Kewdale, and portions of Redcliffe and Carlisle. On the western side are Bentley, and portions of St James, Queen's Park and Cannington. Between those discontinuous residential belts is the substantial industrial zone of industrial Kewdale and Welshpool. There is even a rural component, with low density residential areas being used largely for the raising of horses. As a result, it is a diverse electorate and there are many ways in which the concerns and deliberations of this House impact on the interests of that area.

It is possible on occasions such as this to raise only a few of them, and I wish to raise only one or two that are relevant to environmental matters which are of particular concern to me.

Environmental policy has been a matter of great concern to me for many years. I am proud to have played a significant role in forming environmental policy within the Australian Labor Party, and I believe the environmental policy of the Western Australian branch of the Labor Party is unsurpassed by that of any political party in Australia.

One of the most important concerns of the State Parliament and the Government is the conservation of natural areas. When the former colonies concurred in the transfer of powers to the Commonwealth at the formation of the federation at the beginning of this century, the

States retained the ownership of land and the responsibility for the management of land, if that passed into private ownership. Many, if not most, of the powers which the States retain to this day are derived from the fact that they are basically the owners of the land or have responsibility for the management of that land. Such powers include agriculture, planning, mines, resources development, forestry, and the like. The conservation of natural areas is one of those.

This State, like most of the areas of the world, has seen a seemingly inexorable diminution of natural areas over many years, as the pressures of urbanisation, agricultural development, transport requirements, and the like have consumed more and more land that was formerly in what could be described as a natural state. In many parts of the world that process goes back thousands of years but in this part of the world it is only very short—one and a half centuries.

For most of the history of this State it has not been thought necessary to reserve land to protect nature because of the abundance of undeveloped land relative to the requirements of development. There was plenty of bush about.

However, in the decades since World War II this process has changed, and in 1970 the then director of the Western Australian Museum, Dr David Ride, made the observation that soon the only natural areas left in the south-west or settled areas of the State would be those which were deliberately set aside for that purpose.

I would like members here today to ponder the significance of that observation. We all enjoy the benefits of the industrial, agricultural, and urban development, but if we wish to be able to see, enter, and enjoy areas of the countryside in a state substantially similar to that in which they were prior to European settlement, it is going to have to take place in areas specifically set aside and reserved for that purpose.

We in this Parliament therefore have a very great responsibility to ensure that each of the diverse types of flora and fauna in the State are contained in reserves which are adequate in size and properly protected in terms of tenure. The diligence with which we discharge this responsibility will be one of the measures by which we are judged by future generations.

I do not think there is any member in this House who has not at some time or another marvelled at, or respected greatly, the wisdom

of our predecessors in setting aside Kings Park, so close to the centre of the city, so long ago. In fact it is only a couple of hundred metres from here. Probably at that time it was not seen to be a necessary decision, and no doubt there was a lot of bush around at the time. However, that decision was made and subsequent generations have been very grateful for it.

We here today have decisions to make of a similar magnitude for areas that are somewhat more distant. It is appropriate to note that in the Governor's Speech a couple of very important announcements were made of proposals that had been set in train and are likely to come to fruition during the life of this Parliament. It was stated that the first marine parks to be declared in this State—those at Marmion and Ningaloo—would have management plans completed and declared. The reserves themselves have already been declared.

It was also indicated that management plans would be finalised for the D'Entrecasteaux National Park on the south coast. All members would be aware that this is a very significant reserve covering a large section of coastline, and it will constitute a major coastal park of benefit to the State for a long time to come. In addition, the Shannon reserve will be declared in the south-west, thereby creating a very major park in the karri forest of the south-west of the State. That has been an issue for some years, and many members will be pleased to see that it will come to fruition in the life of this Parliament.

Thirdly, the management plan for Lane-Poole Reserve will be finalised so that there will be a major reserve in the northern jarrah forests in the Murray River valley. Three very substantial reserves in the south-west of the State will be declared within the life of this Parliament. I think we should be pleased that their declaration was announced in the Governor's speech.

It is the Australian Labor Party's policy to seek standards of excellence in nature conservation to ensure that more parks will be established in other areas.

I now turn to specifics. One of the great attributes of the Perth metropolitan area is the Swan and Canning River System. The Swan River is one of the features that has made Perth one of the most beautiful cities in the world. However, the landscaping that has taken place along its foreshores and the development adjacent to the river have caused large portions of the natural foreshore to be destroyed. This in

turn has destroyed the habitat of much of the fauna, particularly the bird life.

It is fortunate that a well-preserved section of the foreshore remains along the Canning River between the Nicholson Road and Riverton bridges. Over three kilometres of this stretch of river forms the southern boundary of the electorate of Welshpool. The islands and distributaries there form the delta of the Canning River as it enters the broadwaters of the estuary.

The area is inhabited by about 85 different species of birds and 60 of those 85 species nest there. It is possible to canoe or row down a large portion of this five-kilometre length of river and imagine that one is in remote bush, not in the heart of the metropolitan area. I believe this is an asset which must be recognised and protected at this stage of our urban development. During the life of this Parliament we should see the boundaries of this reserve finalised and the several existing reserves consolidated and their vesting finalised, both for the purposes of the reserve and the body in which it will be vested. That reserve will then be retained for all time for people to enjoy their recreational activities in natural surroundings which are, for practical terms, virgin bush.

In addition to the conservation of nature, one of the most important aspects of our environment is the design of our cities, the creation of the urban habitat. In relation to its effect on the citizens, that is probably more important than nature conservation with which the environment movement is so often associated. The reason for that is that most of our citizens live in cities and spend most of their working and recreational lives in the cities. For that reason the creation of the urban habitat is probably one of the most important matters that this Parliament has to consider.

The electorate of Welshpool contains what is now a relatively inner urban area. The suburbs that my predecessor, Hon. Colin Jamieson, was elected to represent 33 years ago were the frontier of residential development at the time. Certainly there was ribbon development along some of the major roads such as the Albany Highway but the frontier was the suburbs I mentioned earlier. Since then we have seen an urban sprawl down what is known as the south-east corridor and that has created all sorts of problems for inner-urban areas. Here I am particularly referring to that area comprising the electorate of Welshpool. Many of the problems have arisen because the transport and other infrastructure that was provided when the

urban design and subdivisions took place did not envisage the sorts of pressures that would be placed on those areas.

Roads that were built years ago to carry traffic into the city are now totally inadequate because they now service not only the local area but also the other suburbs further down the corridor. The same point can no doubt be made in relation to other urban corridors. However, I feel the problems of the south-east corridor warrant particular attention because we do not have the special facilities of transport that are found in the other corridors. Even though we have an excellent rail system, that does not attract a sufficiently large proportion of the traffic. The road system is inadequate. We do not have a freeway system which is found in other corridors and there is anecdotal evidence which suggests our main arterial road, the Albany Highway is the most congested suburban road in Perth.

It must also be said that each of the alternative solutions for relieving the congestion on Albany Highway will cause some pain and cost. One of those solutions which is hotly contested by people living in the corridor would involve some impact on the reservation of the Canning River wetlands to which I referred earlier. It is undeniable, though, that something will have to be done about the traffic problem in the south-east corridor. The traffic congestion, at the moment, is beyond the pale and significantly diminishes the quality of life of people living in the corridor. I am particularly concerned today about the electors of the electorate of Welshpool who must use that road to travel to the city or to major retail centres along that road.

There are other areas of major road development which substantially service the area within the inner-urban belt to which I have referred but which diminish the quality of life in that area. One area to which I wish to draw the attention of the House and the Government is the construction of the Tonkin Highway between Redcliffe and Perth Airport. The road does not connect the two but runs between them. That area was a quiet backwater except when planes flew overhead.

The construction of the Tonkin Highway has added significantly to the noise pollution. I wish to say something about airport noise in a moment. However, I will refer initially to the road noise which is affecting the residents of Redcliffe. I was approached by the City of Belmont and also by many electors from the electorate when I was campaigning to

have something done about the noise. It seems—inquiries I have made confirm this fact—that a surprising amount of road noise from freeways, in particular, is caused by wheel noise. I have been told that a higher proportion of traffic noise from freeways is caused by wheel noise rather than by engine noise and that a significant impact on the reduction of that noise can be effected by the smooth surfacing of that road—by putting hot mix over the existing road so that wheel noise is reduced. I have made inquiries and I believe funds are unavailable in this financial year for the resurfacing of that stretch of the Tonkin Highway which abuts residential areas. I hope that those funds will be available in the forthcoming year.

In addition, planting vegetation on the road reserves would make a significant difference. Trees and shrubs would provide a noise and a visual barrier and thereby significantly improve the lifestyle of people living in the back streets of Redcliffe who already put up with a significant burden from noise pollution because they happen to live adjacent to the airport.

In relation to aircraft noise, Redcliffe, along with most of my electorate, is affected by flight paths in and out of the airport depending on which way the wind is blowing. I do not unrealistically call for the relocation of the airport. In fact, it is probably the largest single employer of constituents in my electorate. Many would be significantly inconvenienced if the airport were to be relocated. However, the fact remains that residents of the area are adversely affected by noise. Future planning should have made this consideration a very high priority. I, along with other members representing the electorates adjoining the airport, was disappointed that the Commonwealth was not able to assign an immediate priority for the construction of the parallel runway and thereby direct flight paths away from residential areas. However, I am pleased the report placed the construction of a parallel runway on the agenda and I take some comfort, in the short-term, in the fact that the newer generation of aircraft which have been licensed to operate in Australia, both domestically and from overseas, have quite significantly lower noise levels than their predecessors.

In addition, on the issue of aircraft noise, I wish to pay tribute to the local authorities and councillors who have participated in the Commonwealth's consultative procedures in the field of airport planning. A consultative body

was set up by the Commonwealth Government, in fact, by Kim Beazley MP when he was the Minister for Aviation in the first year of the Hawke Government. This was the first time that local communities had been actively consulted by the Commonwealth Government on a continuous basis in the field of airport design. For those communities living around airports, the decisions which are made—essentially by the Commonwealth—in the field of airport design are an important determinant of the quality of life in those areas.

In particular, I would like to pay tribute to Mayor Tacoma of the City of Canning who deserves credit for the persistent and determined manner in which he has advanced the interests not only of his city, but also of the region. I received a letter recently from the City of Canning indicating that it was withdrawing from the formal consultative procedures set up by the Commonwealth and asking that local politicians—I gather that the letter was a form letter—protect their constituents' interests in this respect. I have no doubt that we would all do this if for no other reason than simple electoral interest. I believe that the City of Canning may well have made a mistake in withdrawing from those procedures. How the City of Canning determines its budgetary priorities is its own concern. However, it is much easier for the different levels of Government to co-operate and to understand each other's point of view if there is ongoing consultation and if they are involved in a process of continuous negotiation on matters of mutual concern and interest. A wise man once observed that mental telepathy was a very inefficient means of communication. While this is not a case of mental telepathy, ongoing discussion is much more productive than a simple formal exchange of letters.

On an occasion such as this, I believe it is appropriate to pay tribute to my predecessor as the member for Welshpool, Hon. Colin Jamieson. I feel it is an irony that I have succeeded him in this seat as the earliest political memory I have is one of being told by my parents that they were going to vote for Mr Jamieson. At that stage I did not know who Mr Jamieson was; I suppose that I would not have even known what the Labor Party was. By reference to other events that I can place in time, I can place the event as taking place at the time of the 1959 January election when Colin Jamieson was re-elected for the seat of Beeloo. Colin Jamieson represented substantially the same area through four changes of name and

numerous redistributions. He won the seat of Canning in 1953 from the Liberal Party. It is significant to note that since then through a number of name changes—Beeloo, Belmont, and Welshpool—there has never been any doubt that it was a Labor seat and I believe that Colin Jamieson deserves credit for that.

Colin held the highest office that both the parliamentary and organisational wings of the Labor Party can offer. He was the Leader of the Opposition and president of the organisational party for 17 years. It is unfortunate that from the point of view of his career most of the 33 years that he was in this House represented for the most part the darkest years of the Labor Party when Opposition was the rule rather than the exception. I believe the fact that Colin never achieved what was obviously his most cherished ambition—that is, to become Premier of this State—was not so much a reflection on his ability as a reflection of the fact that he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. That can probably happen to anyone. I am sure all members here wish him well in his retirement and will be pleased to know that he is having an active rather than a passive retirement. He will attend the Australian Labor Party National Conference in Hobart next month as proxy delegate.

Finally, I would like to make a point which I believe is important and appropriate for members to understand. Those darkest hours for the Labor Party that I referred to are well and truly behind us. The Liberal Party has not won an election in mainland Australia since 1980; that is, for almost six years. Throughout Australia, the Australian Labor Party continues to be elected by large or increased majorities. The Labor Party is clearly perceived to be a party which is able to provide a caring but responsible Government even in very difficult times. People have rejected consistently the gimmicky, easy fixes that the Liberal Party has consistently put forward in State and Federal elections over the last few years when it has lost those elections.

I am proud to have been elected to the Western Australian Parliament and, in particular, to be a member of the Burke Government. To be a member of the Burke Government is to join the best of five very excellent Governments serving the vast bulk of the nation at State and Federal levels.

[Applause.]