

[Thursday, 30 March 1989]

**MR AINSWORTH (Roe)** [2.40 pm]: Mr Speaker, in taking this opportunity to address the Legislative Assembly for the first time I thank those members from both sides of this House who have made me so welcome, and who have offered encouragement to me as a new member. My thanks must also be extended to the people of the Roe electorate for giving me the honour and responsibility of representing their interests in Parliament. I am most conscious of the fine record of representation which is enjoyed by the members for Stirling, Eyre and Merredin who so ably serviced the needs of their former electorates, parts of which now make up the seat of Roe. It will be my aim to give service of equal quality to all parts of the electorate, no matter how remote from my home.

In dealing with remoteness, Mr Speaker, it is perhaps opportune to consider the characteristics of the Roe electorate, some of its history and its present and future needs. The Roe electorate is situated in the south east of the State and stretches from Gnowangerup, Lake Grace and Kulin in the west, to Esperance and beyond in the east. It takes in more than 500 kilometres of the south coast and extends inland about 200 kilometres. It is a predominantly rural electorate with fishing, mining and tourism being the other main industries. A large percentage of the farmland has been developed only during the last 30 years, and some of the eastern end as recently as the last 10 years. Because of this there is still a marvellous pioneering spirit among the people and a willingness to work together to provide the facilities so vital for remote communities, yet taken for granted by their urban counterparts.

Included in the Roe electorate are some of the State's largest national parks which, along with the magnificent coastal scenery from Bremer Bay to Esperance, provide part of the great tourist potential for the area. Agricultural production in the Roe electorate has generally been of the more traditional type, ranging from sheep or cattle farms along the coast to wheat and sheep mixed farming inland. In recent years grain legumes have played a bigger part in cropping rotations, and oilseed crops have been tried with mixed success. The fragile nature of some soil types, and the increasing problem of salt encroachment, has seen a reassessment of farming practices in the region.

Land conservation groups have been established over a wide area, and a new integrated approach to land conservation will be launched at Jerramungup in the next few weeks. A new interest in alternative land use is also evident. This includes agroforestry, as well as new fodder crops such as tagasaste. These are all designed to utilise ground water, thus halting a rising water table which has caused salt encroachment, and also to act as windbreaks, thus minimising erosion. The future of our agricultural land is of vital concern to the entire community of this State, and I trust that members of this House will give adequate consideration to funding programs to help halt land degradation. It is essential that the source of so much of this State's wealth - its land - is protected for future generations.

As well as the physical side of agricultural production there is the equally important marketing side. A great deal of the stability enjoyed by the industry, despite seasonal fluctuations, has been because of the organised approach to marketing. The details vary from commodity to commodity but generally the concept of orderly marketing has served the producer well. This is not to say that the system is without flaws, and an ongoing policy of review and improvement is essential. Where flaws are discovered, however, it is not wise to abolish the whole marketing framework just to correct some small deficiencies. That is precisely what is being proposed by the Federal Government regarding wheat marketing. There is no doubt in my mind that a less radical approach would achieve the same aim without jeopardising the entire industry structure. It behoves all members of this House to vigorously oppose the Kerin plan.

Anything which weakens the agricultural industry is detrimental to the whole country. It is worth reflecting on the words of Sir Charles Court in his own maiden speech in 1953 when he said -

We . . . have a lot to thank the primary producer for as far as our present financial position is concerned. Already the writing is on the wall in respect of overseas prices for exported primary products and imported manufactured goods. All the evidence of competition and demands of the nations for reciprocal trade are apparent.

Clearly this situation has not changed greatly, and the strength of a single seller like the Australian Wheat Board competing for overseas markets is of more benefit to producers than a fragmented system. Likewise, there is pressure to abolish acquisition of lamb in this State. I believe there is room

within the powers of the WA Meat Commission for sufficient change - for example, a permit system for export of lamb to Eastern States markets - without abolishing the rest of the system to appease its detractors.

The fishing industry has also followed traditional methods until quite recently. In 1984, with the introduction of quotas, the tuna industry was facing a downturn in the number of boats working and prices were low. As part of the local enterprise initiative scheme Esperance tuna fishermen investigated the prospects for a higher priced market - the Japanese sashimi market - and as a result of this exercise are now able to receive up to \$30 per kilo for tuna as opposed to the 50c - 80c per kilo previously obtained for canning tuna. I see a good future for the fishing industry along the south coast, but it will depend on three things: The ability of the industry to obtain fair quotas where quotas are necessary; the ability to develop new markets and value added fish products; and the provision of adequate facilities. Much of the product and market development will be wasted if the catch cannot be unloaded and transported quickly to the processing plant. I believe there is a role for this Parliament in ensuring that reasonable assistance is given to the fishing industry to enable it to reach its full potential as a profitable, sustainable industry.

Tourism, as I mentioned earlier, is another area of great potential for further expansion in my electorate. The natural attractions are there in abundance. However, the infrastructure and services provided for tourists need some consideration. Tourist attractions such as the Esperance tanker jetty must be adequately funded to ensure their preservation. Bureaucratic red tape can and does hinder the provision of services to tourists. I believe a review of legislation governing fuel outlet opening times, plus working conditions and overtime in the catering and retail trading industry, are two examples of potential areas of improvement which would benefit the industry. Similarly, Main Roads Department rulings which disallow alternative tourist route signposting if the route is significantly longer, or of lower status, than a main route should be abolished. The responsible removal of constraints on the tourist industry, coupled with even greater promotion, would be of immense benefit to the State as a whole.

The vital ingredient in these three industries, as in all others, is the people, and it is to the needs of the people that I now turn. The Roe electorate is a productive one and has the potential for greater production. However, this will only happen if the services provided to all parts of the electorate are of adequate standard. There is a clear need to improve medical services in many places. Lack of a doctor is always of concern and many towns in Roe have been without a doctor until recent months. Some fear the loss of the doctor they have may not be followed by a quick replacement. A practical incentive scheme to attract doctors to country areas is needed. More status needs to be given to the role of general practitioners, with instruction at medical school in the special role of country GPs. Encouragement is also needed to attract more country medical students. The medical needs of country women are often overlooked. The provision of a mobile cancer screening service for remote areas, staffed by women, would be of enormous benefit.

Country hospitals in Roe also require attention. The current impasse with the Gnowangerup Hospital is causing great concern in the community, and steps to finally resolve the situation must be taken quickly. In other hospitals upgrading work is a high priority. Lake Grace hospital is in need of extra outpatient space, toilet facilities and the replacement of some existing fittings.

The needs of the elderly are of increasing concern in towns such as Esperance, where an expanding retirement age population is placing great pressure on permanent care facilities at the hospital. Alternative accommodation is urgently required to alleviate such problems.

Education opportunities are vital to the entire rural community. These range from preprimary facilities - which are particularly important in communities where children do not have the same opportunity for social interaction as their city counterparts - to secondary and tertiary education. The introduction of the unit curriculum system has caused problems in smaller country high schools, where the range of options has necessarily been limited. I believe a review of this system is required urgently.

Similarly, the changes to the Isolated Children Allowance and the Austudy schemes brought in recently have been detrimental to country students, and, while these are Federal issues, it is important that members of this House lobby their federal colleagues to help overcome the shortcomings of the current arrangements.

The previously scheduled upgrading of primary schools, the high school and high school hostel facilities has been postponed in Esperance. I believe this Government should honour its commitments to these projects by making funds available for their completion this year. This Government must act also on the recommendations of the inquiry into the Country High Schools Hostel Authority to help improve the administration and operation of hostel accommodation.

Because of the size and isolation of my electorate, road transport is vital. The condition of many rural roads has deteriorated and the State fuel taxes raised in country areas have not all gone back to road funding. I believe it is essential that road conditions in country areas are improved by applying all State fuel taxes raised in the country to country road maintenance and construction.

Water supply is another vital concern to all people and the provision of better quality and quantities is essential. Recent problems with Ravensthorpe water quality highlight the need for forward planning and I commend the Minister for Water Resources for his personal assurance to me that the problem in Ravensthorpe will be rectified quickly and permanently. Consideration by the WA Water Authority needs to be given to the maintenance of existing covered dams for livestock water supply before an arbitrary decision is made to discontinue such a service. These dams in the Grass Patch-Salmon Gums area and other parts of the State should be maintained selectively as at present.

I am the second member of the Legislative Assembly to come from Salmon Gums. The first was the late Emil Nulsen who began his career in this House in 1932. I was interested to note in his maiden speech that he promoted the improvement of facilities for his electorate of Kanowna, the major one being the building of a new breakwater at the Port of Esperance. In justifying that need he spoke of the potential of the region's agricultural production and mineral trade through the port. While Esperance now enjoys a land backed wharf with a recently deepened harbour and road conditions which are not as bad as they were in 1932, I believe the same forward thinking needs to be applied to today's planning.

The provision of a road from Lake King through Cascades to Esperance would shorten the distance for grain cartage and personal transport. At the same time, nickel and other minerals in the Forrestonia area could be transported via that road and shipped through the Esperance Port for the benefit of all port users.

The suggestion that such developments must make a profit immediately is ridiculous. If all the development proposals in this State had been treated in the same way there would be precious little development outside the metropolitan area. The needs of the people and of the industries which I have mentioned and of others that I have omitted must be met on the basis that they are an investment in the future of our State. Over 90 per cent of Western Australia's export income is still derived from outside the metropolitan area.

In conclusion, I will seek to represent fairly the needs of my electorate and those of the State. To this end I will support or reject proposals brought before this House on their merits; that is, I will judge any issue on principle rather than on the political affiliation of its proponent.

I thank members for listening to my first address in this House and trust that my time in this place will be both productive and rewarding.

[Applause.]