

## **ABORIGINAL LAND (NORTHCOTE LAND) BILL**

Mrs **SETCHES** (Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands) moved for leave to bring in a Bill to authorise the granting by the Crown of certain land at Northcote to the Aborigines Advancement League Incorporated and for other purposes.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was brought in and read a first time.

## **THE CONSTITUTION ACT AMENDMENT (ELECTORAL REFORM) BILL**

Mr **WALSH** (Minister for Property and Services) moved for leave to bring in a Bill to amend the Constitution Act Amendment Act 1958 to provide for the appointment of an independent Electoral Commissioner, to regulate electoral material, to consequentially amend certain other Acts and for other purposes.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was brought in and read a first time.

## **TRANSFER OF LAND (COMPUTER REGISTER) BILL**

Mr **WALSH** (Minister for Property and Services) moved for leave to bring in a Bill to amend the Transfer of Land Act 1958 concerning the automation of the land titles register and other matters, to make consequential amendments to various Acts and for other purposes.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was brought in and read a first time.

## **GOVERNOR'S SPEECH**

### **Address-in-Reply**

The debate (adjourned from October 25) on the motion of Mr Cole (Melbourne) for the adoption of an Address-in-Reply to the Governor's Speech was resumed.

Mr **BILDSTIEN** (Mildura)—I am proud and honoured to be standing in this place today. Not for 26 years have honourable members heard a maiden speech from a member representing Mildura. From the outset, I join with honourable members who have spoken before me to congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your elevation to the chair and, likewise, the Deputy Speaker.

I am delighted to have the opportunity of making my first speech during the debate on the motion for the adoption of an Address-in-Reply to the Governor's Speech made at the opening of the 51st Parliament. My predecessor, Milton Whiting, was not afforded that opportunity; his maiden speech, made on 4 December 1962, was confined to a debate on the Mildura Irrigation Water Trusts (Amendment) Bill.

It would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to Milton Whiting's outstanding Parliamentary service. He represented the Mildura electorate with great dignity and eloquence. I am deeply privileged to be elected as his successor. His retirement at the 1 October election marked the end of an era. The National Party's primary vote fell from 58 per cent in 1985 to 38 per cent at this year's State election. That is a clear indication of the huge personal following that Milton Whiting commanded.

The Liberal Party walks tall as a result of its election victory in Mildura. Never before has the Liberal Party held this seat; in fact, it has not so much as even won a booth. For the past 30 years, the seat has been a stronghold for the National Party. In fact, it was the fifth safest seat in the State. The Liberal Party's primary vote increased from a mere 18 per cent in 1985 to 32 per cent this year, sufficient for it to take the seat after the distribution of preferences. That means that, for the first time since 1955, Mildura is represented by a local member who is part of the official Opposition and, after the next election, the government. Mr Alan Lind, a member of the Labor Party, was the last local member for Mildura to be part of a State government, and that was in 1952.

For his strong contribution, support, and encouragement, I thank my Leader, Jeff Kennett, who came to Mildura four times during the election campaign and arranged a series of visits by high profile members of Parliament, such as the Federal member for Kooyong, Andrew Peacock. Mildura is now on the threshold of a vigorous and exciting new era.

I bring to this place a number of messages from the Mildura electorate. The first relates to the breakdown of law and order in our community. In his Speech at the opening of Parliament, the Governor stated that the safety and security of the people of Victoria in their homes and on the streets was of paramount importance to the government. I am pleased to hear that because, at the moment, criminals are running rampant; the government is not controlling them, the criminals are controlling the government.

In my home city of Mildura, crime statistics are at record levels and residents are naturally up in arms. One continually hears of cases where police have acted quickly to arrest an offender only to see him walk free, smirking at the law, within days of being gaoled. I am not referring to petty crimes; I am speaking about drug growers, car thieves, and sex offenders.

What is being done to curb the crime epidemic? Recently in Mildura an habitual thief—a young man of about twenty years of age, with a list of prior convictions—stole a car and crashed it into a pole. He had been drinking and was charged with having a blood alcohol content above .05. He broke a leg in the crash and I am informed that he is openly bragging that he will get an insurance payment of approximately \$70 000 when his case goes before the courts. The pendulum must swing back in favour of the victims; at the moment, the emphasis of the judicial system favours the criminals. Somewhere, sometime, somehow is not good enough; it must start now, and it begins by putting more police officers on the street.

There is talk in my electorate of, at the very least, the establishment of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme and, at the very worst, of vigilante groups. The escalating crime wave has prompted daily front-page reports in the local press. The chief reporter for the *Sunraysia Daily*, Mr Alan Erskine, wrote on 15 October:

Each day brings new tales of bashings, smash and grabs, handbags snatched, car thefts, thefts from houses and cars, drunken parties in our beautiful gardens, wilful damage and vandalism.

He also said:

There are feuds between rival street gangs, pack bashings and rapes. The streets are filling up with derelicts and the homeless, most of them affected by alcohol.

I remind the House that I am talking about Mildura, a premier town and a tidy town, which is often described as an oasis on the desert fringe.

As its contribution to cleaning up the city, the Mildura City Council has bravely banned the consumption of alcohol on council property within the city limits. That is a drastic step, but one which is obviously working and one which people appreciate.

Last week, if one were gazing outside my electorate office window, one could count a number of drunken derelicts flaked out on the centre plantation lawns. This week they are gone. Now one can see elderly women and families enjoying their lunch and afternoon teas, which is a sight that has not been seen in a long time.

Many people in my electorate believe we have become a society where the only protection provided is for the hoodlum, the druggie, the thief, and the pervert. An acquaintance of mine, a very longstanding and highly respected former senior sergeant of police at Mildura, Mr Les Milborn, predicts that vigilante groups will ultimately be formed to maintain control of Mildura unless the government takes a firm hand to control crime and violence. He considers that not only should corporal and capital punishment be returned in extreme cases but also, for crimes involving violence, there should be a return to the use of the whip.

In a letter published in the *Sunraysia Daily*, Mr Milborn said:

Murder verdicts should be classed in three degrees. For the first degree, such as domestic or spur of the moment killing, leave any sentence for the judge.

For second degree, premeditated killing, a mandatory life sentence without any remission. For the third degree—sickening, horror type murders—to be executed.

This former policeman makes his comments knowing full well the likely outcry from civil libertarians and do-gooders. To them, he says—and I should like every honourable member in this place to listen carefully:

I can only reply by wishing that their home be broken into by a pack of criminals, their women savagely raped, their valuables stolen and property destroyed . . . and if apprehended . . . the offenders refuse to give their names, submit to any tests, answer any questions, and be released after the 6-hour limitation because no evidence could be obtained—even though they were known to have committed the crimes.

By no means is his concern isolated. Police across the State are worried and they are commenting publicly.

The House will recall that after the Walsh Street killings of two policemen, a Constable Peter Kaneen wrote in the Melbourne *Sun* on 15 October:

Ordinary citizens and police alike are sick of the mollycoddling of the criminal minority. Justice must be done and seen to be done if it is to be of any deterrent at all.

Day after day people are urging this government to do something about the increasing lawlessness—and I am talking about policemen on the beat, the front-line troops.

Melbourne *Sun* columnist, Derryn Hinch, on 22 October observed that we are being robbed, burgled, and mugged with such impunity that it is now a sick joke to say that a man's home is his castle—in fact, it is a second-hand shop. Mr Hinch says that the crime rate in the suburbs is so high that a new, dangerous air of defeatism has permeated our society, because people do not any more even bother to report many thefts.

As I said, the problem is not confined to Mildura. This is happening throughout the State. We are living in a sick society—a jungle, if you like—and it is time that law and order prevailed once again. Police numbers must be increased. More police have to be back on the beat and, when we get them there, for God's sake, let us not tie their hands behind their backs! Let us not humiliate them by letting criminals laugh in their faces by putting them back on the street within days of their arrest, and sometimes even on the same day.

The next message that I bring to this Chamber from my electorate relates to the government's commitment to declaring new national parks and wilderness areas in the Big Desert and the Sunset Country. On 19 September, just twelve days before the State election, the Land Conservation Council released a draft report containing

recommendations for an extra 800 000 hectares to be declared national parks. A handful of people, quickly realising the enormous ramifications of the report, rallied together and called a public meeting. Just three days before the election, they drew a gathering of almost 600 people.

In this, our bicentenary year, as we reflect on the past 200 years, one thing stands out in the history of the Mallee—we have always been prepared to battle the odds. We do not owe our start to the lure of gold or as a repository for convicts from a far-off land. People came to the Mallee because they genuinely wanted to; they wanted to own the land or to work it. Cooperation rather than confrontation has been the hallmark of our development. But rest assured these proposals will be fiercely challenged! We will fight those challenges with the same determination, energy, and enterprise that characterised the efforts of our forebears in the Mallee to get us where we are today. Our campaign, which will be spearheaded by the Mallee Heritage Committee, will show that graziers have the reputation of being environmentally conscious, with emphasis on protection of our native flora and fauna.

I know there are some who are extremely worried that the Premier and the government do not give a brass razoo for what country people think. One local landowner, Mr Steve McArthur, probably summed up the feelings of a great number of rural people the other night at a meeting in Mildura when he related a dream that he had had of telephoning the Premier and asking him to reconsider his election pledge. He dreamt that he dialled the Premier's home number and, sure enough, someone answered. The conversation went something like this:

Hello, Mr Cain?

Speaking.

My name is Stephen McArthur, Mr Cain.

Oh yes, never heard of you.

I'm one of all Victorians that you govern for.

Oh no, you're not. I heard the STD pips . . .

I should like to think the Premier and his new Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands will not blindly accept the Land Conservation Council's report without first considering other viewpoints.

I invite the Premier, the Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands, the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs, and every other Minister to tour the areas of the Mallee recommended for declaration as national parks. We will be able to show them areas where regeneration can occur on land that is grazed and to show them what happens to public land when grazing is ceased and the land is locked up. In a nutshell, the Land Conservation Council recommends the phasing out of grazing on public land in the Mallee and that the land be managed by the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands.

Basically, the council proposes to increase State national parks and wilderness areas from 10 per cent to nearly 38 per cent of the Mallee. The reason is to "conserve" the Mallee; but, with respect, the government cannot manage what we already have. Hattah-Kulkyne National Park is overrun by weeds and kangaroos, and the local Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands office does not have the resources to manage the area; it does not have a hope in hell of managing the proposed new areas. The land degradation at Hattah-Kulkyne makes a mockery of the Land Conservation Council recommendations. If some of the leaseholders it is proposed to toss off their land allowed their grazing areas to degenerate to the extent to which our existing parks have deteriorated, they would be told immediately to remove their stock or their leases would be terminated.

The budget of the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands for the Mildura region is about \$4.6 million. Local staff estimate that this would need to be doubled immediately should the council's proposals be accepted. The proposed increases in parkland are enormous—they are mind-boggling in anyone's language. They pose questions. Why so big? Can it be managed?

Local departmental staff concede privately that their current budget allocation is less than perfect. The region has the problem of overcoming difficulties with weeds, rabbits, and kangaroos; staffing in a remote area; supervision over such a large area; and the logistics of governing such massive areas. Parklands almost four times the size of the existing area can only magnify these problems.

Local graziers inform me that the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands is having difficulty in establishing regeneration programs in the Hattah-Kulkyne National Park; more than twenty years after livestock was removed the department has failed to establish regeneration trials on the grazing areas. It could be argued, Mr Speaker, that this demonstrates either a lack of knowledge and concern about the issue or negligent management by the government.

But it is not only the stockmen who will be affected by the present proposals; the impact on business will be severe. Retailers, manufacturers, stock agents, and cooperatives, and service industries will be hit also. So will beekeepers, brush cutters, horse riders, trail bike riders, four-wheel drive enthusiasts, fishermen, sporting shooters, field and game members, tourists, football clubs, witchetty tribes—the list goes on.

The Country Fire Authority, the State Emergency Service, the Police, the Army reserve, local councils and some local CFA members have indicated that they will not go into these parks to fight bushfires if the government accepts the proposals to close off tracks and water points. Service and welfare groups, such as the Country Women's Association, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Lions Club, and the Rotary Club, are all beginning to express concern as they realise the ramifications of the proposals.

Many names with proud traditions in local history, such as Pine Plains, Cowra, Keera, Kulnine, Ned's Corner and Glencoe, will disappear with the phasing out of grazing. They are all properties that are part of our heritage and are the remaining few of the pioneering settlements of Victoria. For example, Pine Plains has been grazed for more than 140 years.

The impact of these proposals on recreational users of this land is far-reaching and has already prompted letters to my office. Thousands of families regularly use these areas and enjoy the recreation and isolation. Under the Land Conservation Council's proposals they fear that they will be herded into controlled areas where such signs as "no camping", "fires in constructed fireplaces only", "walking only", "no vehicular traffic", and "no dogs" will be displayed. After realising the likely restrictions if the proposal is adopted, one of my constituents responded, "We might as well camp on the Rosebud foreshore."

The emphasis of the council's report on recreational use is to match one's ability against nature—on foot. Anyone who tries to conquer these proposed new parks and wilderness areas—over one million hectares—in 40 degree plus heat without a support vehicle will indeed be taking a big risk.

The best way to properly conserve this land is for the government to issue perpetual leases to allow grazing to be maintained. This will give the graziers some certainty over their future and will encourage them to invest in the protection of the environment. Much greater liaison between the graziers and the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands should take place to develop management strategies in areas where grazing is to be excluded to promote regeneration and plots for trial plantings.

I turn briefly to tourism which is now worth about \$120 million a year to the Sunraysia economy and which employs about 14 per cent of the district's total work force. Sunraysia has natural attractions, such as the river system where the Murray and Darling rivers meet, the warmer, dry climate, unique landscapes, wildlife, and wineries. Although Sunraysia is one of Australia's great destinations for tourism and leisure, country Victoria has tended to suffer at the hands of Melbourne-based promotions.

The current review of the regional tourism structure is long overdue, and I share the view that it is time areas like Mildura—although it cooperates closely with centres such as Swan Hill and Echuca—stood on their own feet. It is time for a major push for country Victoria because Victoria is a compact edition of Australia. Victoria has vast national parks, desert country, great inland lakes, the best surf, a wonderful coastline, wilderness, the superb River Murray system, and the snow. It has everything except Ayers Rock and the Great Barrier Reef, all within a day's drive of Melbourne. It is a hidden resource and a major campaign must be undertaken to tell the world how great a country is Victoria.

The development of tourism also offers a promising solution to the unemployment problem. Unemployment in Sunraysia is between 12 and 15 per cent, which is well over double the State average. Growth in tourism can only help alleviate the jobless situation. Not too many locals, nor even recent arrivals, would willingly return to metropolitan life after experiencing the wonderful climate and the wide range of recreational facilities that Sunraysia offers. We call it the weather resort. In fact, Sunraysia averages about 400 hours a year more sunshine than the Gold Coast.

In conclusion, I was pleased when the Minister for Transport gave an assurance in this place last week that country rail services will be maintained. There is speculation that the government intends to shut down the *Vinlander* passenger service between Mildura and Melbourne and replace it with buses. Not only does my electorate insist that the train service be retained, but also I strongly urge the government to improve the service.

There is continuing concern about the deterioration of rural roads. I remind you, Mr Speaker, that country Victoria does not have the same opportunities for people to use public transport. They must use private vehicles. The ongoing discrepancy in fuel prices between the city and country areas is such that at times rural motorists pay up to 20 cents a litre more than their city cousins. For example, at Ouyen, one month's fuel for the two State Emergency Service vehicles often exceeds the total annual subsidy that the unit receives from the government.

As one who does a lot of driving, I strongly support an increase in the speed limit on some country highways to 110 kilometres an hour, particularly from Mildura to Bendigo on the Calder Highway.

In conclusion, I reaffirm my loyalty to the people of the Mildura electorate and assure them that I will always be striving to improve their lot. I thank the Mildura branch of the Liberal Party for its dedication and support in adding the seat to the Liberal fold.

**Mr W. D. McGRATH (Lowan)**—I congratulate the honourable member for Mildura on his maiden speech and wish him well in his political career. That particular seat was held by Mr Whiting for many years, during which he served the National Party in an excellent manner.

Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. I am sure you will provide a fair and equitable control over this House. Difficulties exist for the Speaker but in time more and more respect will be paid to