



Consultation processes lacking as scale of development shocks residents

In the past few weeks I have received many phone calls and emails from Ocean Reef residents, who are only now becoming aware that 1000 new homes will also be built as part of the Ocean Reef Marina development, and that the marine park will be irreversibly compromised. Readers of my newsletter will note that I have been raising these issues for the past three years.

I suggest that the confusion has arisen from the fact that the Ocean Reef Marina development was approved by two separate environmental processes – with the full Public Environmental Review (PER) applying only to the marine park part of the development.

The terrestrial side of the project was handled quietly through the Metropolitan Region Scheme amendment process, with far fewer requirements to consult with the public.

Members of the community who have been following the development since its inception have told me that they were frequently overwhelmed with the release of thousands of pages of technical data at once, and allowed very little time to read and understand it all and to make comment. Appendix H of the design and capability update, for example, quietly doubled the area for housing. This was not discussed with the community or mentioned in any public communications.

It is unacceptable that concerned residents and community members are obliged to do the work of several full time employees just to uncover details about the project. The view among my constituents is that the previous strong community support for upgraded marine facilities has been used as a basis for a much larger project.

Moreover, there were also concerns within the community that there was no fauna management plan in place for the initial clearing.

I tabled a petition opposing the development signed by 610 members of the community, opposing the Ocean Reef marina development.

Welcome.

The Government's lack of transparency in its decision making processes has very much emerged as a general theme weaving through much of this most recent sitting of Parliament. I am becoming increasingly concerned about the huge range of powers the government is granting to itself, for the duration of the pandemic.

The consequences of some of these decisions are very long-term. Ministerial and police powers are growing at an alarming rate, buried in fast-tracked legislation. Worryingly, this creep of power is not being picked up by the wider community and, importantly, by the media. While the Government must of course have the ability to continue to respond to COVID-19, it is more important than ever that transparency, accountability and fair processes be maintained – and strengthened.

We have seen the Government grant an outrageous special exemption from its new domestic gas reservation policy to the Mitsui and Co /Beach Energy / Waitsia joint venture in the mid-West – the only project to receive such an exemption. Not by coincidence, Seven Group Holdings owns the biggest share of Beach Energy – and it is owned by Kerry Stokes, who also owns the West Australian newspaper and is an ALP donor. Again, this raises huge concerns

about transparency and what else this Government is doing behind closed doors. It is sadly just one example of how our democracy is distorted by special interests with lots of money. A Government that can be bought off by the fossil-fuel industry is a Government that will never act to adequately address threats to everyday Western Australians, like climate change. It also raises concerns about how fearless and independent our local news media can possibly be.

In response to my concerns regarding transparency in decision-making, as well as undue influence, I brought forward my Electoral Amendment (Access to Ministers) Bill 2017 for debate, during Non-Government business time in the Upper House.

My Bill will ban political fundraisers such as the Government's Leaders Forum, which sells tickets for up to \$25,000, granting attendees special access to Government Ministers. The people attending these events are people with vested interests, they are big business, they are developers and they are lobbyists. As expected, despite support from my Parliamentary colleagues on the need for reform in this space, the Government chose to filibuster out the remaining time for debate, leaving us with no outcome.

In other matters which also touch on the theme of transparency, people have been

contacting me in considerable numbers with their concerns about the Ocean Reef Marina development. Residents are only now becoming aware of the scale of the development and destruction of precious bushland. People are very concerned that Government agency DevelopmentWA quietly doubled the area allocated for housing as part of the project, burying plans deep in thousands of pages of planning documents.

The Community consultation that has happened has not meaningfully communicated the change from the well-supported expansion of the boat harbour to a full marina and housing development. This raises stark concerns about transparency in the processes of Government.

Meanwhile, I have continued to progress matters across my portfolio areas. I met with a group of First Nations people in Armadale to discuss their concerns about the working of the WA Child Protection system; continued debate in Parliament on the need for better protections for seniors against elder abuse; called for a ban on conversion practices still affecting LGBTIQ Western Australians and raised the issue of excessive use of force by WA Police.

I marked Homelessness Week 2020 by calling for a bigger commitment to social housing from this Government, and spoke on a motion on the need to rid the world of nuclear weapons.



Preventative care crucial to improving WA mental health care system

I met with people with lived experience of mental health issues, as part of the Prevent. Support. Heal campaign from the Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH).

Participants shared their experiences of navigating the mental health system and their suggestions for how preventative mental health care in WA could be improved

Visit preventsupportheal.org.au to find out how you can get involved

Many more social housing homes needed to meet demand

Pre-pandemic, around 9000 Western Australians were experiencing homelessness every night. This number has now climbed to 9,100, according to new data released by Homelessness Australia and Everybody's Home, during Homelessness Week earlier in August. An estimated 3000 Western Australian children are currently homeless. The number is growing – fast – and is likely to continue to climb as extra welfare supports change at the end of September, and the stay on rental evictions finishes.

Those working on the ground in the homelessness sector are already reporting unprecedented rises in people seeking support. St Patrick's Community Support Centre has said it is seeing around 15 new people per day at its Fremantle Day Centre, and there are double the number of rough sleepers in Fremantle than previously thought.

In addition there is concern about the ever increasing number of rough sleepers in the Perth CBD. Recent data shows homelessness is a problem in all Western Australian communities, with social housing in greatest need in Canning, Brand and Forrest in the South West.

The lack of social housing and the loss of public housing properties under this Government has caused disquiet within the homelessness sector, and impacted mental health, disability, family and domestic violence and child protection



At the Shelter WA Homelessness Week 2020 launch

services.

There is huge concern that this Government has not prioritised the issue of homelessness and the need for social and community housing anywhere nearly enough.

While the government has announced plans to build 550 new homes to much media fanfare, over the last three years they have quietly removed 1,645 homes from the social housing portfolio. So even with the new builds we have less housing than when this government took office. At 31 May 2020, there were 14,328 applications on the public housing waiting list, representing 23,709 people. Of those, 1,860 were priority listed, or 3,347 people. These people still cannot get housing.

Public housing evictions are climbing, following a decrease in 2016-17. The Department of Communities does not report the number of tenancies which were not renewed, so the true number of people removed from public housing is likely to be much higher. First Nations people are estimated to make up a third

of WA's homeless, and 41% of people receiving assistance from homelessness agencies. Young people also make up a significant proportion of WA's homeless population – and WA is among the top four states for shortfalls in specialist disability accommodation.

Australian and international research shows it costs less to provide appropriate housing and support for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, than providing short-term and ongoing emergency or institutional responses.

Even if taking only a purely financial perspective, it makes the most sense to commit to building more social housing. As part of my work during Homelessness Week, I debated a motion in Parliament on this very important issue, and also published an opinion piece through WA Today.

We must rid the world of nuclear weapons

I was pleased to have the opportunity to debate in Parliament the need to rid the world of nuclear weapons, as part of a motion to mark the 75th anniversary of the US nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The horrors of 1945 should never be forgotten, and we must always remember that nuclear weapons, by their very nature, are a worldwide threat with long-lasting health and wellbeing implications for ordinary people, and for their children and grandchildren.

Most of the nearly 14,000-strong worldwide arsenal of nuclear weapons are more powerful than the bombs that were dropped on Japan. This is a distressing fact, since one or both sides of the most fraught international borders in the world are armed with these weapons. The world is watching with great concern the Kashmir nuclear flashpoint. The border between North and South Korea remains volatile. A number of the other nuclear powers continue to posture with war-games and provocative language. The deliberate withdrawal of the US from international nuclear non-proliferation

treaties is deeply concerning and it is shameful that Australia has not yet signed the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. As part of my contribution to the motion in Parliament, I asked members to raise this issue with their Federal counterparts, and to push for a nuclear-free world.

I joined the Greens 30 years ago as I was so inspired by then Senator Jo Vallentine, who was integral in establishing the nuclear disarmament party, which of course was one of the founding parties of the Greens WA.



Government overreach a concern as new COVID powers to remain permanently

We have seen a lot of powers granted to the government through emergency legislation and emergency amendments to regulations to deal with COVID-19.

While I have supported the measures required by our leading public health officials, I am becomingly increasingly concerned about the huge range of powers being granted to Government for the duration of the State of Emergency and beyond. We are now seeing almost unprecedented Ministerial power in the realm of planning and development, and police powers are growing daily.

We must endeavour to ensure that Government has the powers it needs to respond quickly and appropriately to the changing pandemic, but that transparency, accountability, and fair processes are not discarded along the way.

Cash for access to Ministers still very problematic

For years I have been working in Parliament to end the lack of transparency around cash-for-access schemes, where big business can pay up to \$25,000 to attend an event and meet the relevant Minister.

I first introduced a Bill banning this practice in 2012, and reintroduced it in 2017 as one of my first actions upon regaining a seat in Parliament.

We once again brought on debate for this Bill during one of the very few opportunities the Greens receive to set the Parliamentary agenda. While my colleagues spoke convincingly on the need for the reform in this space, the Government chose to filibuster out the remaining time and leave us with no outcome.

The Government is bringing on a Bill regarding donations and election-spending reform, but it doesn't guarantee the transparency we need in this space and is, unsurprisingly, woefully inadequate. Once the debate is finished on this reform process, I will update you on whether we manage to improve it as significantly as I hope.

It would be an excellent outcome if we were able to get some transparency around the ALP's incredibly dodgy Leader's Forum and find out who has paid to get direct access to our Ministers.

WA at a disadvantage without privacy legislation

On 11 August I asked a question in Parliament regarding privacy protections that were scheduled to be introduced as part of a public sector reform program. The government had proposed introducing new legislation to protect privacy, along with the appointment of a privacy commissioner.

I was very disappointed to learn that these proposed measures have stalled. The lack of privacy legislation in Western Australia means there are inadequate protections for people's rights to privacy. It also means WA is missing out on opportunities to participate in important national and international research programs that share data across jurisdictions.

Without privacy legislation, WA cannot grow its participation in world class medical and health research. The WA Chief Scientist has found evidence that other countries are, unfortunately but understandably, hesitant to share data with WA, placing us at a competitive disadvantage.

Research projects are increasingly required to comply with the European Union's general data protection regulation, therefore passing privacy legislation in WA is vital to ensuring we can compete with and collaborate in research on an equal footing with other countries. We must bring our privacy protection regime up to date as quickly as possible.

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No fault found in excessive use of force cases highlight need for independent police complaints process

I have been raising the issue of the excessive use of force by police officers and how that is addressed for some time now.

I was concerned to learn a WA Police internal investigation did not find that excessive force was used against a First Nations teenager arrested outside Perth Train Station in July 2018.

Shocking CCTV footage obtained by Guardian Australia shows the teenage boy surrounded by five police officers, handcuffed, and pinned to the ground by two officers, causing him to hit his head on the pavement. He is then held down with his face on the pavement for about five minutes.

Alarming, a witness to the incident was arrested for obstructing police – however, the charges against her were dropped after footage emerged showing the statement of three police officers about her behaviour to be false.

This incident demonstrates why I share in the concerns of the community about police investigating police.

The case has some disturbing parallels with that of another First Nations child,

who police charged with damaging a Department for Child Protection Family Support Office and assaulting two police officers in 2018 .

A magistrate not only dismissed the assault charges against the child, but heavily criticised the actions of police. The magistrate raised concerns that the child was assaulted by police during the arrest and that officers later attempted to pervert the course of justice.

Speaking on the two cases in Parliament (pictured above), I acknowledged that the police undertake challenging work and do usually do it with integrity. They are also granted significant powers, and cases like these understandably undermine confidence in the police force. People need to be able to trust that when police do the wrong thing, they will be investigated properly and there will be appropriate repercussions for the officers involved.

We do not currently have this assurance and we need an independent police complaints investigation process.

Government continues to drag heels on Elder Abuse report recommendations

I spoke on a motion emerging from the 'I never thought it would happen to me: When Trust is broken' report, the result of the 13-month inquiry into Elder Abuse, of which I was Deputy Chair. The government's response to that report was disappointing to say the least. There were a range of recommendations made in the committee report and the government has given little to no real commitment to addressing them. The government seems to agree in principle that we need change in this space, but keeps coming up with excuses as to why nothing more tangible can be done.

There are reports that elder abuse has increased during COVID-19 lockdowns, and was already on the increase in WA before then. It is inexcusable that the government is not doing more to address elder abuse. I have spoken with providers such as Advocare who say they feel under more pressure than ever. Yet, there has been a failure by the government to invest in initiatives such as awareness-raising community campaigns.

We desperately need to update the rules on enduring powers of attorney, yet the WA government have completely handballed responsibility for such reforms to the federal level. We also need to increase the resources government provides to police and community legal services specialising in addressing elder abuse. The report into elder abuse was tabled years ago and there is simply no excuse for the government to keep dragging its feet on implementing its recommendations.



Speaking out for Priya and her family

In March 2018, Priya Murugappan, her husband Nades and their two daughters, who were born in Australia, were removed from the community in Biloela that they loved and which loved them. They are being held indefinitely on Christmas Island. Most recently Priya was required to travel to Perth for urgent medical treatment. After receiving treatment, Priya was removed by up to ten guards. She was not told what was happening. Her phone was confiscated, leaving her unable to contact her husband, lawyers or other support people. I spoke at a rally and in Parliament about the disgraceful treatment of Priya and her family.

I am deeply concerned for Priya's two very young daughters, on whom we are inflicting the trauma of being detained. We know that this kind of detention has an incredibly detrimental life-long effect on children. The family were happy, productive and much-loved members of their Australian community. There is no reason to keep them in detention, or return them to danger in Sri Lanka.

I attended the opening of Lifeline WA's fantastic new facility at Shenton Park (left), which will house the organisation's Telephone Crisis Supporters. Lifeline provides absolutely crucial counselling services to prevent suicide, support people in crisis and reduce stigma

Solitary confinement practices impact mental health

Solitary isolation is a serious practice that can cause lasting impacts - with prolonged solitary isolation even associated with permanent negative changes to the brain. The United Nations considers solitary isolation in excess of 15

days to be torture. Last financial year separate confinement, which is the term used for solitary isolation in WA prisons, was used nearly 2,000 times in WA; up by a third from the previous year. We know that people in our prisons disproportionately experience mental health problems; just this year we have had a tragic three suspected suicides in WA prisons. Given the serious adverse impacts of

solitary confinement on people's mental health, it is outrageous how often this practice is used. I spoke in Parliament about the use of solitary confinement, and echoed concerns raised by the Inspector of Custodial Services that some departmental policies permitting confinement may not even be lawful. We urgently need a review of WA's solitary confinement practices and I will continue pushing for that.

Harmful LGBTIQ conversion practices must be banned

I spoke in Parliament to reiterate my calls to the Government to ban conversion practices in Western Australia, following the passing of laws in Queensland to outlaw this abhorrent so-called 'therapy.'

Often conducted in churches or other religious contexts under the guise of 'spiritual healing' or 'self-improvement', conversion practices attempt to fundamentally change people who are, or are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans. The practice continues in Western Australia and across the country, with at least 10 organisations publicly advertising conversion 'therapies' at 2018, according to a report from La Trobe University. The real number is likely to be much higher as ex-gay and ex-trans ideologies, counselling and pastoral activities are still being promoted in the teachings of many churches, mosques and synagogues; through print and digital media and through some Christian radio programs.

La Trobe University in 2018 found up to 10% of LGBTIQ Australians are vulnerable to the practice, and young LGBTIQ people from religious backgrounds particularly so. We know that LGBTIQ young people experience poorer mental health outcomes so this is very concerning. The continued exposure of LGBTIQ young people to harmful practices including conversion therapy is a top concern to come out of an advisory group set up to advise the Western Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People in his work.

Among a long list of lasting psychological impacts, attempts to 'pray away the gay' are ineffective and cause deep confusion, distress and self-hatred. Conversion practices are largely carried out by unlicensed counsellors or spiritual leaders, often with no formal training or understanding of mental health best practice. People's lives are being ruined by the charlatans who work in this space. That conversion practices are ongoing in WA also highlights the broader issue of the need for regulation of counsellors and psychotherapists. I first raised concerns about this issue with the then-Government's ten years ago. Despite committing to a ban in 2018, the WA Government is yet to act. It must demonstrate its commitment to protecting some of the most vulnerable members of our community and ban conversion practices now. Any suggestion that people need to fix or cure their sexuality is hurtful, cruel and simply wrong. That message undermines all the excellent work that is happening around inclusivity and the celebration of diversity within our community.

I will always support the
Wear it Purple Day aims
of fostering supportive,
safe, empowering and
inclusive environments
for rainbow young
people



Schools should be resourced for mental health

Following the tragic suicide death of 13-year-old Kate Savage the Minister for Mental Health announced that the Chief Psychiatrist will undertake a review into the clinical care Kate received. The issue of the intersection between school and mental health services is one that has recently been raised with me again by concerned parents and I raised in Parliament whether this review will consider the role of schools. I was pleased to learn that the broader role of schools will be considered as part of the Mental Health Commission's young people priority framework. It is essential that schools are provided with the resources and skills to support children who are struggling, and that timely, easy to navigate pathways are available for those students who need specialist mental health services.

Culturally appropriate support needed

There are more than 4,700 children living in out of home care in Western Australia. I met with a group of First Nations people in Armadale to discuss their concerns about how the Western Australian child protection system currently operates. They shared their personal experiences of many of the challenges faced by foster parents and family carers. It was heartbreaking to hear their personal stories of generations of trauma and of families separated. First Nations children are eight times as likely as non-Indigenous children to be in the child protection system. It is abundantly clear we need to stem the tide of children coming into care. This will require the Government vastly improving the ways it works with First Nations people and greater investment in providing culturally secure support to keep families together.

Chilled meat questions

After the outrageous debacle of allowing the Al Kuwait an exemption to the export ban, I asked the government to tell us what they are doing to support the chilled meat, rather than the live export trade. I am pleased to report that there is ongoing support for chilled meat exports while international travel is restricted and ongoing investment in meat processing plants in the regions. This work is essential to support the end of live exports and I am pleased to see the Government respond to calls to invest in this area.



I attended the DesignFreo Conversation 01 event along with the Mayor of Fremantle Brad Pettit, to hear the community's views on the proposed new Fremantle Traffic Bridge. It is a contentious issue, with many views on what should become of the existing bridge as it nears the end of its life, how the new bridge should look and its functionality.

Donations versus democracy

I was appalled to learn that Premier Mark McGowan gave a special exemption to the Waitsia gas project in WA's mid-west region. The Waitsia joint venture was the only gas project to be given an exemption from new rules banning the export of local WA gas overseas or interstate. This exemption comes following Kerry Stokes and companies he controls donating a total of \$157,545 to the Labor Party. This includes donations from Beach Energy Limited, one of the joint venture partners in the Waitsia gas project.

This is sadly just one example of how our democracy can be potentially distorted by special interests with lots of money. A government should never be able to be bought off by the fossil-fuel industry as that is a government that won't act adequately to address climate change because it is more interested in appeasing its corporate donors.

Get in touch.

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Volunteering

Women

Bills debated

COVID-19 Response and Economic Recovery Omnibus Bill 2020

Public Health Amendment (COVID-19 Response) Bill 2020

Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Amendment (COVID-19 Response) Bill 2020

Alison's committees

Joint Select Committee on Palliative Care in WA: Public hearings are now underway. The committee will report its findings on 19 November 2020.

Joint Standing Committee on the CCC will report on its inquiry into the Western Australian Corruption and Crime Commission's oversight of police misconduct, particularly allegations of excessive use of force, on 24 September 2020.