



Legislative Council

30/10/2002

Murray-Darling Basin Amendment Bill Hansard - Extract

Reverend the Hon. Dr GORDON MOYES [3.34 p.m.] (Inaugural speech): I support this bill. I thank you, Madam President, the attendant staff and other honourable members for the way I have been so courteously received in this House, for the facilities that were granted to me to understand some of the customs and conventions of the House and for making me feel at home fairly quickly in what is a junior term of office. I thank you also for the opportunity of speaking at this time and, in obedience to the convention of the House, I advise that I will leave any remarks on the bill to the Committee stage.

I sought some advice on what I should speak about in this initial speech. For example, I went to several former members of the Legislative Council and asked them for their advice. Over the years the friendships of people like the Hon. John Johnson and the Hon. Ron Dyer have meant a great deal to me, and they have helped me at different times. One person who will go nameless said to me, "Just speak about God and speak about 20 minutes," which seemed to me to be reasonable advice. Every Thursday I preach in a lunchtime service at Wesley Mission. Irish John, who is on the door at the mission, gives me unsolicited advice about all sorts of matters. He told me that I would be making my maiden speech. I told him that "maiden" was not a particularly politically correct term these days, but his Irishness overwhelmed him and he said, "Just tell them, 'I stand before you to tell you I stand behind you and I will take, as all of you do, a long time to tell you about things about which I know nothing.'" I felt it was not very appropriate to take his advice so I went to the Hon. Michael Egan. He said, "Latch on to a bill—it doesn't matter which one it is. Tell us something about your life, about your vision and about your family and, whatever you do, just don't take too long." His advice came with that sort of dread warning—like a health warning on a packet of cigarettes—and I trembled at the thought of it.

First of all, I pay tribute to those who have done so much to enable me to become a member of this House. I particularly mention my wife, Beverley, who is with us today in the President's gallery. Beverley and I first met when we were 13 years of age. We fell in love, decided then to be married and eight years later we were married. We have been married happily for 42 years. We have four children with four spouses, 10 grandchildren, I think about five chooks and a few other adornments around the family house. Not only have we had an enjoyable marriage; we have also worked together on everything over all the years. I pay a personal tribute to Beverley.

Also present in the gallery are some members and staff of Wesley Mission who have worked with me over the past 24 years. I pay tribute to the way they have supported and served along with me over all those years. I want to say a special word of tribute to a former member of this House, the Hon. Elaine Nile. She served here for 14 years very faithfully, and, like all honourable members, I was sorry quite some time ago to see the problems of failing health being of concern for her. We wish her well in her full recovery. I am grateful that she saw fit to ask whether I would consider sitting in her place on what was known at the time as the love seat but which will cease to be known in such terms hereafter.

I also mention a word of appreciation for Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile. I have known Fred for 30 years and I have admired his tenacity, his ability to stand and stick up for what is right, and his dour persistence in a number of issues in which he believes are biblical truths and Christian values. I have appreciated him up close and at a distance. I could find no more wonderful mentor for my time in this House. As you know, I was not willing or keen to make my first speech early; I wanted to sit and listen and learn. Fred has been a great mentor to me in helping me feel at home here in the House.

My life has been a very simple one. My wife and I were born almost adjacent to each other in the same week and in the same community of Box Hill in Victoria. We did not get to know each other in the baby health centre, otherwise I would have proposed then. But we grew up in the same community and, as I explained, we have been together ever since. When I was a teenager I was greatly helped and blessed by some people who attended a church that my parents never attended. When I was eight years of age my father died as an alcoholic. He literally dropped dead in the street, leaving behind four young children, of whom I was the eldest. Through the influence of

these kindly people from a neighbourhood church I eventually became interested in the church. As a teenager I became committed to following the way of Jesus Christ, and I have endeavoured to do so with whatever strength and capacity I have had since that period of time.

Right from the earliest days I was challenged by a schoolteacher, a principal. When I had completed some gift of remarkable leadership in the life of the school which the principal did not understand in that particular light, he said to me that I had to make up my mind to either be part of the problem of this society or part of the answer. He indicated that I was not to leave the front of his desk, to which I had been called, until I had given him an answer. That man's name was W. M. (Bill) Woodfull, who was the captain of the Australian Test cricket team during the "bodyline" series. He was a great leader of men. I remember standing before him in tears as a schoolboy and making the decision that I preferred to be part of the answer than a continuing part of the problem. Consequently, my wife and I, as teenage sweethearts, volunteered immediately and we started to serve in the inner slum areas of Melbourne—in North Melbourne, Kensington and Flemington.

While I went on to university and theological college studies, we worked among the hopeless and despairing of the slum areas. I became the youngest parole officer and the youngest probation officer in Victoria's history. At one stage I had about 104 murderers and car thieves on my little agenda. With my girlfriend, my fiancée and eventually my wife, I spent eight years trying to help these people through the difficulties that they had encountered in their lives. It was from these beginnings in the slums of Melbourne that we developed a life pattern of working with people who have particular needs and concerns in society.

That flowed on to what was a very remarkable event in our life; an event that changed our life completely. It was the day that John F. Kennedy was shot. Traditionally people say they remember where they were at the time of that tragic event. I remember where I was very clearly. I was in the United States Consulate, here in Australia, where we were about to have our visas stamped. I had been appointed to do postgraduate study in the United States of America. When the shots rang out in Dallas, Texas, the doors at the consulate were shut and the United States Embassy went into very high activity. People were thrown out the doors and papers went everywhere, and with them went our visas, our work permits, our passports, our chest x-rays and a whole lot of other stuff. The result was that the boat upon which we were to travel, together with all our clothes, personal possessions and belongings, sailed to America—but we did not.

In order to survive I went to a small country church where I used my background in psychology and ministry to become chaplain in a very large mental institution and my experience as a probation and parole officer to work in the psychiatric ward for the criminally insane. In case any of you here has any doubts, I do have a certificate of sanity—which is probably more than you have. That experience in a small country church became a turning point in our life. I then went to a suburban ministry for 13 years. During that period I saw the development of very large-scale works to do with retirement villages—the first of their type built in Victoria—and other multimillion-dollar constructions in what was then arguably the largest Protestant church in Australia. From there I was called to Sydney—that was 25 years ago in three weeks' time—to follow the remarkable Reverend Dr Sir Alan Walker.

I have had the best part of 25 years in that role working with the disadvantaged, the poor, the homeless, prisoners and the mentally sick, and managing hospitals, nursing homes, retirement villages and all of that sort of thing. They have been very, very happy years. I bring with me a lot of background in caring for the underprivileged, which I hope will help me when I come here to speak on issues that relate to the people of New South Wales.

My role has been as a preacher. But preachers are called on not only to do deeds of goodness in a community; they are called on also to proclaim the Word. So I have sought to proclaim the Word as a preacher. For the last 44 years, since being a teenager, I have preached. In the last probably 20 years I have preached on average nine times each week. I preach on television; I have five half-hour national television programs. It is a wonderful opportunity to get the message of God through to people. It is 36 years since I started preaching on television, back in the days of black and white television with four-turret cameras in BTV 6 in Ballarat, Victoria, and then on to GTV 9 in Melbourne. The last 24 years have been every week on TCN 9 in Sydney and on the Nine network around Australia. That all developed into my speaking each week on a whole range of radio stations around the nation, and that, in turn, led to me writing. If you are going to communicate, you use all the abilities and opportunities that are open to you.

We have authored something like 50 books, which have been published in Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and, most remarkably, China, where they talk in astronomical figures in terms of publication of our books. Whereas in Australia you might think a book does well if you sell 5,000 or 10,000 copies, in China we are selling 500,000 copies. Honourable members might be interested to hear that when I address universities in places such as Beijing, because of the number of books we

have sold in China and because of the government oppression of religion in China I am regarded as a radical who is likely to turn the world upside down! We have been chased by religious police and political police. Part of my group has been arrested. One of my party was arrested when we were smuggling *Bibles* into China. My wife and I were more successful. It is quite remarkable that a middle-aged or older, plumpish, conservative, Anglo-Saxon should be hailed by student groups as a radical and a revolutionary, holding clandestine midnight meetings and working with the underground church. It really does good for the whole system.

All that led to the Internet, and our webmaster is also present in the gallery. The remarkable thing about the Internet—it just absolutely amazes me—is its power to connect with the world. We now have something like 4,000 addresses and editorials on the Internet that are read or downloaded by literally thousands of people around the world each week. I am absolutely amazed at the power of the Internet to get through to communities.

Some years ago I felt there was a need to produce films—not Cecil B. De Moya films but documentaries based on some of the strengths I developed through the study of history and archaeology. The film company that we set up has been remarkably successful. We have produced about 50 documentary films, which were made predominantly in the Middle East and dealt with archaeology, history, the development of the early church and Christian beliefs. We have recently made films in China; they have been released internationally. It is awe-inspiring to travel in America, where a series of programs has been broadcast on public television, and to be recognised in airports by people who tell us they have watched our films.

I am not an academic or an intellectual. I have described myself in other places as a fair, average quality, second-rate mind. Given that, I need the help of researchers. I acknowledge those people who have the gifts and graces that provide us with the opportunity to communicate those truths and to present good, sound, factual material. I have been very impressed with the quality of the speeches I have heard in this House, recognising that often behind an honourable member's contribution is some very good research done by other people. I acknowledge those who have helped me in that regard over the years.

Part of the role of a minister of the gospel is to manage resources. We have built up the resources of the Wesley Mission very well. When I started at the mission we had 23 properties. Over the past five years I have opened a new building, on average, about once every two weeks. We now have 489 communities in New South Wales that have a Wesley Mission—a home, hospital, nursing home, retirement village, childcare facility, employment agency or whatever. My wife and I are visiting 62 rural centres in New South Wales to help with drought relief funding. Madam President, with your permission, at the end of this brief contribution I would normally ask for an offering, but if honourable members are interested in helping with drought relief, I can provide very practical opportunities for them to do so.

My involvement in the Wesley Mission over the years has required me to learn management skills. I have gained that education since the 1960s and 1970s with the Australian Graduate School of Management, the Australian Institute of Management at Mt Eliza, Monash University and the Graduate School of Management at the University of New South Wales. One of the blessings that has come our way is to be elected a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management and a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors because of the positions held on boards of a number of listed and unlisted companies in a variety of fields. As a result of that work, honours have come our way which not often have been deserved but which have always been appreciated. I am not an academic, but I have been honoured by a number of institutions of higher learning with degrees and positions, and I have lectured for many years at a university and a seminary in the United States. I have developed a theme that was originally unknown in that country known as "urban mission". Earlier this year I was appointed on a permanent basis as the adjunct professor of urban mission, which gives me an annual trip and an opportunity to teach doctorate students in urban mission studies.

Over the years we have been described by community-based organisations as the Citizen of the Year and, in New South Wales, Father of the Year and Public Speaker of the Year. All of those accolades are enjoyable. Recently, we became the New South Wales Entrepreneur of the Year, which for a minister and a clergyman is a most unusual accolade. Beverley and I have also been honoured by the Australian Government. Beverley was elected by the Sydney City Council as the Citizen of the Year some years ago. She is also a member of the Order of Australia. During the bicentennial year, the authority concerned nominated 20 outstanding women in Australia and Beverley was chosen as one of the 10 most significant women in this country—along with people whose names are known to all. It has been a wonderful experience as a husband to learn to walk just one pace behind when we go out together. For my part, in the mid-1980s I was made a member of the Order of Australia, and as honourable members know, at the beginning of this year I was granted Australia's highest honour as a Companion of the Order of Australia.

I appreciate the fact that we sit in this very historic place, not only because a long line of clergymen have been here before me, including Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile, but also because, going back over the years, we have had members who were bishops and archbishops, back to Reverend the Hon. John Dunmore Lang, who was a member of this House. I hope to uphold the best of the traditions of those great leaders in the church and the community.

I have sat here experiencing a sense of déjà vu because in 1964 while doing some research I chose to write on the history of what were known as the "iron churches". A small number of churches constructed in iron smelting works in the United Kingdom were shipped primarily from Birmingham, although a couple came from Manchester, to Australia during the gold rushes. Church authorities in Australia wanted demountable buildings that they could get quickly to the goldfields. I decided to trace their history and discover where they were and how they were used. One was purchased by the Methodist Home Mission Department. Because it was felt that the iron churches—which had iron roofs, walls, uprights and supports—would blunt the teeth of termites, it was sent to Palmerston, which is the former name of the city we call Darwin. That church still stands, although it is not used. Iron churches are very difficult to air-condition. After well over a century of use it is still standing.

I found another iron church in Ararat. It had also been purchased by the Methodists for use on the goldfields. On the side of these huge churches were four big wheels 5½ feet high and made out of slivers of a huge tree trunk on which they were dragged by teams of oxen around the goldfields. The last goldfield it was taken to was Dunkeld in 1863. It was then dragged to Ararat and left temporarily in a vacant paddock behind the Methodist church. It was still there when I visited in 1965, and it is probably still there today.

Another iron church was purchased by the Anglicans and on sold at a profit of £1,200 to the people of New South Wales. Of course, that church forms the framework of this Legislative Council Chamber. We show visitors the steel structures behind the Chamber, the packing case walls and so on. I feel at home. Madam President, I have noted in my short time in this place that you occasionally have trouble with the more obstreperous members and you have to call them to order. You will not have a problem with me, because from early childhood I have been told how to behave in church.