

Office of Hon Alison Xamon MLC

MEMBER FOR NORTH METROPOLITAN REGION



Welcome

Hello members and welcome to the second edition of my newsletter. It has been a busy couple of months, with much of it flavoured with the bitter taste of the Marriage Equality debate.

I've been very active in this space, speaking at rallies, advocating for LGBTIQ+ specific services, and reminding Parliament about the importance of protecting the mental health and wellbeing of the community.

I am sorry such a divisive debate has been forced upon all Australians – but I am looking forward to the announcement of a 'Yes' result in November.

I've been working with the community to protect some of our last remaining urban bushland at Lemnos Street in Shenton Park. For too long, governments have ignored planning policies which aim to protect our precious few remaining bushlands, including Bush Forever guidelines.

As always, I have been very busy in Parliament speaking on bills, introducing my own and using the Parliamentary processes to hold the Government to account.

I was particularly outraged in August about the Government's decision to allow access to their ministers for cash. This is an absolutely disgraceful use of government and makes a mockery of our democratic system. Western Australians deserve better from leadership.

The results of my North Metro survey are in, with some of you expressing concerns about climate change, mental health service provision, care for seniors, and law and order.

If you haven't had the chance, there is still time to have your say by visiting bit.ly/NorthMetroSurvey or by posting off the form included in issue 1 of my newsletter.

NEWSLETTER

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BILL SEEKS TO STOP ACCESS TO MINISTERS FOR CASH

Along with others, I was outraged in August to discover the Government has been providing access to its Ministers for cash as part of ALP fundraising. This is particularly concerning as the ALP in opposition had echoed concerns raised by the Greens about the Barnett Government's Leadership Forums, which did the exact same thing.

Ministers have legislated authority to grant permits, approvals, licenses, land rezoning grants, loans, ex gratia dispensations, and a wide range of other

legal and administrative mechanisms of benefit to individuals and companies. Irrespective of intentions, party fundraisers which promote or imply special access to ministers suggests that attendees may have some influence over the ministerial decision making processes.

It is a disgraceful use of government and raises serious issues of integrity. Lobby groups and businesspeople do not pay thousands of dollars to chat about the weather.

In a bid to stamp out this practice, I introduced my Electoral Amendment (Access to Ministers) Bill 2017, which seeks to prevent gatherings, meetings or events aimed at raising funds for a political party on the basis that attendees will gain access to Government Ministers.

The Bill improves the capacity of ministers to exercise their powers fairly and in the best interests of the entire community. It is in the interests of every Western Australian that we protect Ministers' right to do so and outlaw cash for access to Ministers once and for all.

Government must adhere to policies and protect Shenton Park bushland

In mid-September, I called on the Government to adhere to its own policies and protect a patch of bushland under threat from development at Shenton Park.

The bushland at the Shenton Park Rehabilitation Hospital site at Lemnos Street forms an important ecological link between the Shenton Park and Underwood Avenue Bush Forever sites. These link Kings Park and Bold Park – two of our most iconic green spaces.

I reminded the Parliament that the Lemnos Street bushland contained significant portions of Banksia woodland, which was named a Threatened Ecological Community

under the Federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act in 2016. Banksia woodlands are important feeding grounds for vulnerable black cockatoos, which are known to roost at nearby UWA sports grounds and Perry Lakes.

Many planning documents recognise the importance of maintaining and enhancing exactly this type of local bushland. It is specifically spelled out in State Planning Policy 2.8, which states that proposals or decision-making should “proactively seek to safeguard, enhance, and establish ecological linkages between Bush forever areas.”

I have been working closely with the Bush Not Bricks group and I share the community’s concerns that no attempt has been made to design the Montario Quarter in line with policies, strategies, and frameworks around bushland. I also tabled a petition signed by some 300 residents calling on the government to refrain from clearing at the site.



Alison receives the petition from Heidi Hardisty and Lyn Jennings from Bush Not Bricks outside Parliament. Photo: Arran Morton

State Budget

As we prepare to go to print, I’m also preparing to deliver my budget reply speech to Parliament. I shared in the disability sector’s disappointment that the budget did not give any indication of the future for the NDIS in WA, as was anticipated. People have waited long enough for certainty.

I remain concerned about cuts to the public service. The government’s cutting 3,000 FTE positions will effectively kill off the public service. The move directly contradicts the ALP’s election promise of new jobs.

And while the Government’s announcement that it will freeze TAFE fees at their current levels is welcome, it is still not good enough and shows a lack of foresight in addressing the skills shortage we are quickly heading for. We need to invest in TAFE and training now.

Moreover, our prisons remain over-crowded and the budget was lacklustre on any solid plan to keep people out of prisons.

Select Committee to explore Elder Abuse

I was pleased to accept the appointment of Deputy Chair of a newly established Parliamentary Select Committee into the issue of Elder Abuse. The motion to establish the Committee, initiated by Hon Nick Goiran, received unanimous support from the Legislative Council.

As part of my remarks on the motion, I spoke of preliminary research which shows the impact elder abuse has on mental illness in older adults. One of the key issues I would like to look at as part of the Committee’s scope is the issue of the impact of elder abuse on mental health, and the disturbing prevalence of suicide amongst Older Australians.

While depression is common throughout the population, older people are more likely to experience contributing factors such as physical or economic dependency, mental and physical health problems; living with grief; loneliness; and carers’ stress. Between 10 and 15 per cent of older people experience depression – and it is heart-breaking to think that number is estimated to be about 35 per cent in aged care facilities.

I anticipate the Committee could potentially look at a broad range of issues affecting Older Australians, including pressure around inheritance issues, access to housing, and disability.

The Select Committee into Elder Abuse will determine an appropriate definition of elder abuse, identify its prevalence, and identify the forms of elder abuse and risk factors.

It will also assess and review the legislative policy frameworks, service delivery, and agency responses and determine the capacity of WA Police to identify and respond to allegations of elder abuse and identify initiatives to empower older persons to better protect themselves.

The prevalence and impacts of abuse at the hands of family members and others needs to be explored further. I look forward to participating in the committee over the next 12 months.

Mental wellbeing a concern in Marriage Equality debate

As you can imagine, there has been much going on within my role as spokesperson for Sexuality and Gender Diversity.

I am particularly concerned for the mental health of members of the LGBTIQ+ community as we move towards the closing date for responses to the Federal Government's farcical, monumental-waste-of-\$122 million Postal Survey on Marriage Equality.

I am alarmed at how many LGBTIQ+ people have indicated how badly the campaign is affecting them.

I spoke in Parliament in August on the importance of continuing to fund LGBTIQ+ specific community services in the long-term – and particularly at this time. And yet, Living Proud remains in a precarious position.

The \$30,000 provided to the organisation in August falls woefully short of the \$80,000 which was pulled from the organisation by the McGowan Government in June. It has had to wind back its activity, including some of its work with telephone and web counselling service, QLife.

I was pleased to be invited to speak on behalf of The Greens WA at the Equal Love WA snap rally in Murray Street Mall on 26 August – and also at the Equality Campaign's #WASaysYES rally in Wellington Square on 17 September. I also made a late-night appearance at Connections Nightclub.

All Australians deserve to be treated equally under the law and as the law stands this is not the case. I believe really strongly the majority of Australians believe in a fair go for all. I am personally very sorry that my LGBTIQ+ friends and the community have been subjected to this divisive debate.

Alison speaks to crowds at the #WASaysYES rally. Photo: Jacqueline Van Grootel



Much still to do in homelessness space

As part of debate on a motion to support efforts from government and non-government sectors to support work in the field of homelessness, I drew members' attention to the link between homelessness and mental health, alcohol, and drug issues.

It is essential that any discussion about homelessness also looks at the intersection with these issues.

Between 48 and 82 per cent of homeless young people have a diagnosable mental illness, while between one quarter and one half of homeless adults have severe and chronic mental illness. The ten-year mental health services plan estimates that by 2025, between 1474 and 1867 Western Australians who have mental health, alcohol or drug issues will be homeless.

To address this problem, it is important that people who have mental health issues have access to housing that is appropriate for their situation. They must also have access to support services.

As things stand now, access to safe housing is limited, resulting in a congested short and medium term accommodation system and great cost to the state.

Other groups facing high risks of homelessness include people with disability and people who are released from prison. It is important that government recognise these groups as vulnerable populations who require specific support services.

The benefits of secure, safe, affordable housing are well understood and include significant reductions in hospitalisation, which is a huge cost to the community, and recidivism. Access to housing provides improved social and economic participation and encourages people to get back into the employment market. We need a whole of government approach to ensure this is provided, along with connections to community services that ensure people receive wrap-around services.

Investment in TAFE crucial to addressing looming skills shortage

A well supported and accessible TAFE system is critical to both a functioning economy but also to ensuring the best opportunities for employment. I spoke extensively during my last term about concerns for our TAFE system and unfortunately many of my fears have been realised.

According to the State School Teachers Union of WA, our TAFE system has experienced a 300% increase in fees, resulting in a 24.5% drop in people going to TAFE in the three years to 2016. That is a reduction of 30,000 enrolments in courses for industry qualifications, including certificates III in Auslan, business administration, pathology, and acute care and certificate IV in disability, laboratory techniques, building and construction, and education support. These industries lay the foundation for a strong economy – but also for a caring and prosperous community.

Disappointingly, since 2014, enrolment of students from minority groups has also declined.

- Aboriginal student numbers have declined by 10%
- Students with a disability have declined by 9%
- Students over thirty are down by 13%
- Women in traineeships has declined 28%;
- Women in apprenticeships declined by 11%

Fee increases have put TAFE out of reach for many. Between 2013 and 2016, a diploma of electrical engineering increased from \$2,203 to \$12,712, for example. TAFE courses are being cut and not offered close to where students live. This is not okay.

There have been two years of massive job losses. More than ever, people need affordable, quality technical and further education. I am strongly of the view that a publically owned and properly funded TAFE system plays an essential role in ensuring adequate employment opportunities for all Western Australians.

Public service essential for WA

Our public sector has suffered the cumulative effect of years of efficiency dividends, savings measures, and recruitment freezes. Now they are being forced to bear the brunt of spending cuts in this year's budget, with 3,000 public servant positions to be cut through voluntary redundancies.

These cuts will impact frontline services and vulnerable people. This move is short sighted, and lacks long term strategic planning.

These cuts come in the midst of sweeping and poorly communicated Machinery of Government (or MOG) changes. They add to the uncertainty that surrounds these changes as they are rolled out with little consultation or planning.

Forty percent of agencies were abolished in the first round of MOG changes. I will continue to advocate for public sector workers to be consulted and engaged in ongoing MOG changes.

State Records Office needed to ensure integrity of government

During the most recent sitting of Parliament, I drew the Legislative Council's attention to the importance of maintaining a strong and independent State Records Office. The need for such an office was identified as part of the 1992 WA Inc Royal Commission. A State Records Office was considered vital to ensuring integrity in government.

However, 25 years on – and 17 years after the passing of the State Records Act 2000, we still do not have a fully functioning State Records Office.

Among the many challenges it is facing, the State Records Office has to date been unable to implement compliance monitoring, and unable to meet all requests from government departments to provide records management training.

It has also been unable to accept six million documents from state government agencies. Ultimately, since it started operating in 2001, it has never been able to accept hard copy archives.

No conservation services are available to support the ongoing protection of fragile items and there is a lack of a digital archive to hold "born digital" records.

This is a serious problem – and very worrying as it means that a fundamental aspect of ensuring integrity in government is not working as it should. State records are

effectively the memory of our government and the public needs to be able to access those records.

We need to be looking closely at the physical space and funding allocated to the State Records Office, both of which must be substantially increased to reflect its importance.



Health crisis in spotlight on FASD Day

To mark, International Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Awareness Day on 9 September, I encouraged members to turn their minds to how we can better deal with the crisis of FASD in Western Australia.

The term used for the wide range of negative effects and birth defects which can occur as a result of drinking alcohol during pregnancy, FASD is referred to as the 'invisible disability' because it often goes undetected.

Children and adults who have FASD live with significant cognitive, health and learning difficulties, including problems with memory and attention, cause and effect and reasoning, impulsivity, receptive language and adaptive functioning.

FASD is one of our most significant social and public health issues yet it is still not recognised as a disability in its own right. The Disability sector is concerned assessment criteria for support overly focuses on intellectual impairment and does not accurately judge functional impairment. This means people with FASD who need support are missing out.

Young people at Banksia Hill Detention Centre are a compelling example of what happens when we do not have an effective, overarching strategy to address FASD. Early results from the Telethon Institute Banksia Hill project show 30-40 per cent of young people there have FASD. Being sentenced to a period in detention at 13, 14 or 15 demonstrates that something has gone terribly wrong. We are failing these children.

There needs to be a co-ordinated, multi-faceted response and we need to make sure it is not quarantined in the Health space. A whole of Government FASD plan needs to be developed.

Government must do more to ensure safety of workers

I have been asking some questions on notice about the number of workplace deaths and also the activities of Worksafe. For the 2016-17 reporting period, there were 11 confirmed work-related traumatic injury fatalities. Worksafe is still investigating 16 others. That is a lot of people who have been killed and a lot of families left absolutely devastated.

I have been quite critical for a long time about the activities of Worksafe. For too long, there has been a systemic problem with Worksafe in that inspector positions are not paid enough to attract people to the role who have the level of expertise needed. Funds need to be released to address this issue.

There is a lot more that the Government could be doing to ensure our workplaces are safe and that people are able to go home safely. We need an overall review of occupational health and safety laws and we most certainly need to look at improving them. I put forward these points as part of another debate on workplace safety.

Families of deaf children need more options, quicker

I spoke on a motion calling on the Government to look at the services available to deaf and hard-of-hearing children and their families.

One in six Australians live with some degree of hearing loss and the numbers are expected to increase. Newborn screening is critical and while we have some of the best practice here in WA, they are not perfect. And while there are some great medical services provided right from the start, we are not doing enough to provide support for the social and cultural aspects of deafness, including the learning of Auslan as early as possible.

While there are already some fantastic cultural programs available for deaf and hard-of-hearing children, they need to be adequately funded and services made available as part of any diagnosis. It is essential that we engage with the deaf community.

Casual workers in precarious position

The Greens recognise that there will always be a place for casualisation in the workforce to deal with the ebbs and flows of business opportunities and people's lifestyles, however, the levels of casualisation we are seeing at the moment are concerning.

Casual employment grew by 70% between 1984 and 1998. Casual and independent contractors now make up 30% of the total workforce. There have been consistently more female than male casuals, although the number of male casuals is starting to catch up.

Casual workers generally operate under quite precarious work conditions. They are more likely to live week to week, lack leave entitlements and superannuation coverage, and can face difficulties with finding childcare. It is very difficult for casual workers to access car or home loans.

These workers know that if they raise concerns about their employment, they could be the first to go. They are also more vulnerable to discriminatory work processes including sexual harassment and bullying.

There are changes to our laws that could be made to help people apply for their casual employment to become permanent. We need to be looking more closely at this issue.

I raised my concerns as part of Parliamentary debate on the issue.

Unions WA endorses my bill

In the time since it was introduced to Parliament in June, Unions WA has indicated its support for my Industrial Manslaughter bill. The Criminal Code Amendment (Industrial Manslaughter) Bill 2017 makes it possible to prosecute a company for manslaughter when directors make decisions which they knew could, and then does, result in a death.

Crisis in Myanmar

It is truly devastating that the Rohingya people are being run out of Myanmar by their own government and military. More than 500,000 people have fled their homes to Bangladesh since 25 August. There have been at least two confirmed massacres and it is unknown how many have died.

I spoke at a demonstration on the steps of Parliament on 16 September, in solidarity with the persecuted minority.



Alison is interviewed at the Rohingya rally

Transgender youth need support

[Content Warning: Suicide, self-harm] Transgender youth face heart-breaking difficulties. The Telethon Kids Institute's Trans Pathways study found that 91% of young people who identify as being transgender or gender diverse wanted to self-harm, 80% were self-harming and 48% had attempted suicide.

These horrifying experiences are often exacerbated by the stigma and discrimination they face. The research suggests protective factors include the presence of a supportive family, peers, and peer organisations such as Living Proud.

Attitude-changing initiatives like Safe Schools also play an important role. We must do more to protect vulnerable young people.

Need great for redress scheme

In the 38th State Parliament, the Liberal-National Government established a redress scheme for people who suffered abuse as children in state care. I spoke on many occasions about getting this Redress process right and advocated strongly for ongoing support services for people with lived experience of abuse. Sadly, the State Government did not get it right. For too many, the process itself was traumatising.

The Commonwealth has now signalled it intends to establish a national scheme and wants states to opt in. I have asked questions about the Government's intentions for Redress and funding to meet the ongoing needs of abuse survivors. It is vital that we get the Commonwealth scheme right. I will continue to work with my colleague in the Senate Rachel Siewert on this very important issue.

Bills spoken on

Electoral Amendment (Access to Ministers) Bill 2017

Child Support (Adoption of Laws) Amendment Bill 2017

Misuse of Drugs Amendment (Methylamphetamine Offences) Bill 2017

Sentence Administration Amendment Bill 2017

Statutes (Minor Amendments) Bill 2017

PORTFOLIOS

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Multicultural Affairs
Pay Equity
Public Sector
Seniors and Aging
Sexuality and Gender Diversity
Suicide Prevention
Training
Volunteering
Women
Worker Safety
Youth

Survey results

Thank you to members who took the time to complete my North Metro survey, which appeared in my previous newsletter and online.

One of the key concerns that came through in almost all of the responses I received was about the provision of mental health services. You were worried about services for the community – and also for current and former prisoners.

Some of you were concerned about the provision of care for our seniors, in particular the staff to patient ratio in residential care facilities and the lack of care facilities specifically for people with dementia.

Other issues which matter to North Metro members included the State's lack of action on climate change, the accessibility of TAFE and other training, illicit drug use and the availability of police to respond to meth-related issues and the need for political donations reform.

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