



Working to keep Green voices in WA Parliament

Welcome. It has certainly been a tumultuous period for the people of Perth with lock-downs, bushfires and an increasingly fractious election campaign.

I want to extend my heartfelt condolences to the people who have lost homes and property in the Hills fires. Whilst the rains that eventually came were welcome and our dedicated emergency service personnel and volunteers have been extraordinary, it is with frustration that the multiple warnings from scientists, and even our senior fire service leaders, that climate change is contributing to increased bushfire risks, is still not being heeded by governments both state and federal.

Early January was characterised by the push to pressure the Government to get residents of Fremantle's Tent City safely into emergency accommodation. Fremantle Mayor Brad Pettitt, Dorinda Cox and I held a community conversation in Fremantle during this time about the failure to address the homelessness crisis. It is clear the community wants to see a compassionate response from the Government - and much more funding in this space. It needs to be remembered that shelter is a fundamental human right.

Work of course continued in earnest when the 5-Day COVID lockdown was put in place on

January 31, albeit with a further move back to Zoom meetings and the compulsory wearing of masks in the office. It was bitterly disappointing to discover that on the first day of the lockdown during all the distraction the Government quietly approved two new gas projects clearly hoping it would pass unnoticed.

I have been meeting with stakeholders to discuss their asks of the Government ahead of the election and the ways in which the Greens can help to achieve those. I have also been responding to multiple election surveys from a wide range of stakeholders, which are sent to all parties to gauge our policies and assist membership bodies in deciding how to cast their vote on 13 March.

I've taken part in a number of election

forums, including for Shelter WA, the Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH), Western Australian Council of State School Organisations (WACSSO), WA Council of Social Services (WACOSS) and Ethnic Communities Council of WA (ECCWA).

I also hosted a Disability Forum with Senator Jordon Steele-John, hosted an LGBTIQ+ forum along with our next generation of LGBTIQ activists.

Moreover, we have had some fantastic Greens events in between lockdowns and restrictions. I'd like to thank all members and supporters who have contributed to those, and who continue to work hard to ensure we continue to have Green voices in Parliament and to hold Government to account.



Above: At the ballot draw ahead of polling day



January 26 is a problematic date

I again marched on January 26 in support of the campaign to change the date of Australia Day. The march followed the fantastic Greens-organised Invasion Day Yarning Circle at Yagan Square Amphitheatre, hosted by Dorinda Cox, Tamara Alderice, Clint Uink and Daniel Garlett.

January 26 has been marked as a day of mourning in First Nations communities as far back as 1938 signifying for First Nations peoples the beginning of a dark time of massacres, rapes and land theft. We must continue to bring these serious issues to the fore, continue to have the difficult conversations about this problematic date and continue, alongside First Nations people to campaign to #changethedate.

Urgent need to reduce First Nations incarceration rate

In the shadow of the discussion around January 26, I reminded the Government that the ongoing injustices facing First Nations people in Western Australia, including the horrific over-incarceration rate, must not be forgotten.

First Nations Western Australians make up 40% of people in prisons, despite only accounting for 3% of the state's overall population. Almost half - 47% - of women in WA prisons are Aboriginal. They are the fastest growing prison population and many are survivors of family and domestic violence, sexual abuse and ongoing serious disadvantage. Once a First Nations person is in prison they are, through a range of systemic failings and

discrimination, ten times more likely to die in custody than non-indigenous people. First Nations children and young people are ten times more likely to be detained rather than cautioned, and make up 69% of children in youth justice detention.

While there has been some progress in reducing First Nations incarceration in WA, important recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 30 years ago have yet to be implemented. The Government must double down on its effort in this area and look at a range of evidence-based measures, as well as work in collaboration with First Nations leaders, to find solutions.

Above: I was very pleased to be joined by Greens Federal and State MPs past, current and future at the Invasion Day Yarning Circle event at Yagan Square on January 26.

Greens will never support a 5km road to nowhere through the Beelihar Wetlands

In response to a re-commitment from the Liberal leader to build Roe 8 and 9 if his party is elected to Government, Brad Pettitt and I reiterated our position that we would never support a 5km road to nowhere through the Beelihar Wetlands. It was a grassroots community campaign from the Greens, Rethink the link, Save Beelihar Wetlands and others over many years which led to the temporary saving of the precious Beelihar Wetlands in

2017, a campaign that the ALP came to late in the piece. The image of Barnett Government-ordered contractors demolishing bush in the very last days before the election they knew they would lose is still fresh in the minds of many. It is intensely disappointing that despite all the struggles of 2017, Roe 8 and 9 remain on the books and Beelihar remains under threat.

We must re-balance the WA mental healthcare system

The Prevent Support Heal campaign from Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH) has ramped up in the lead-up to the election, with supporters - rightly - pointing out the Government's failure to adequately fund the sector, in particular to ensure the availability of prevention and support services meets ever-growing demand. The disappointment from the sector and people with lived experience was compounded on February 12 when the Government announced a \$360 million investment in mental health - but failed to allocate funds for preventative services that we know stop people from reaching the point where they need to be admitted to hospital.

The Greens are absolutely committed to re-balancing the mental health system, away from a predominantly reactive, acute, hospital-based system towards a strong focus on prevention, early intervention and community based care and this has been our policy for a very long time. This means increasing funding for prevention to \$50 million and in community-managed mental health services to \$220 million annually, in line with the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025. We acknowledge the particular gaps in services and supports for children and young people and are committed to addressing these gaps, including through ensuring seamless support between mental health services and schools.

Conversion practices still hurting Western Australians

Despite the Minister for Health repeatedly stating its opposition to gay conversion practices, including before the state Government was elected in 2017, the McGowan Government has to date refused to introduce any legislation to ban the harmful and discredited practice. WA is, once again, well behind the game with legislation now in place in ACT, Victoria and Queensland (although the new laws in the latter have been widely criticised for their failure to specifically outlaw conversion practices which take place in religious settings.) Meanwhile, conversion practices are still hurting Western Australians. We know that there is strong support from the WA LGBTIQ community to ban conversion practices in Western Australia. A Pre-Election survey from Rainbow Futures WA has shown 91.4% of respondents want an end to conversion practices and ongoing support for survivors. Mental health professionals have also been calling for these practices to be outlawed.



In late February, I took part both the WAAMH Pre-Election Forum and, a few days later, in a Prevent Support Heal online rally streamed from the WAAMH offices in the city (screenshot above).

Below: Speaking at the WACOSS Pre-election Forum on our plans for the community sector





Greens Education Spokesperson,
Hon Alison Xamon



I participated in a WACCSO Pre Election forum to discuss the urgent need for more funding to ensure schools can meet the specific needs of students with disability, mental health issues and other learning differences.

Funding needed to ensure education system meets needs of ALL students

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises the right of people with disability across the world to access education without discrimination. And yet, I am being contacted by parents from across WA who have children with a physical disability, a cognitive or intellectual disability, a learning difference or a mental health issue, who are being forced into exhausting advocacy for their children because the education system simply does not meet their needs. Teachers are on the frontline in trying to navigate the right supports for their students. But the more we know about the appropriate supports and interventions which could be implemented to assist students who are struggling, the less money there is available to ensure that they are. We know that intensive support is needed in schools across WA, but the funding is just not there. The situation for First Nations students is even more critical.

The State School Teachers Union of WA is calling for additional resources to assist teachers in dealing with behavioural problems, violence and mental health issues. The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations (WACCSO) is calling on the State Government to support the coordination of mental health, counselling, and general health service delivery from school premises. A lack of appropriate support at school and a failure to meet their individual needs damages a child's education, and may affect them for the rest of their lives.

Keep corporate donations out of politics

Over the last two months we have seen the Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC) and the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) release their transparency reports for the 2019-20 financial year. The combination of various sets of rules for donors, political parties, associated entities and political campaigners means that it usually takes the best part of a year of hard work by Greens offices to understand in detail what the data tells us – hardly world's best practice in transparency!

But even with the confusion, Woodside clearly were the third biggest donor of the year, with Clive Palmer's annual donation

to himself being the biggest. This comes at a time when environmental consideration of Woodside's next slate of huge, climate-wrecking projects is being undertaken. It is beyond urgent to get the big, for-profit corporations' money out of politics as soon as possible. We can't allow Governments to keep prioritising the profits of big business over the future of us all.

Standing up to Crown

The NSW Government tabled the Bergin Report into Crown casinos in February. The report found that Crown should not be permitted to hold a casino licence in NSW – and this finding was partially based on some of the activity that has been taking place at the Perth Crown Casino, where

there are genuine concerns that money laundering for international crime syndicates is taking place.

The Crown group (not including the wider Packer empire) puts more than half of its political donations directly into the WA branches of the Liberal, Labor and Nationals parties. Given the serious allegations against Crown, their status as the Government-backed monopoly casino and the Government's responsibility to regulate them, I have called on the other WA political parties to do the right thing and to not only stop accepting donations from Crown, but to donate the money on to the many struggling charities dealing with the problem of gambling addiction.

Homelessness Crisis: Everybody deserves a decent and stable home

I shared the dismay of many in the community to see a third tent city pop up in Fremantle over the Christmas break. It came within a year of the establishment of a tent city at East Perth, which I previously visited, and not long after people who are homeless were forced to camp in bushes in the Premier's own electorate of Rockingham. The Fremantle tent city highlighted - again - the desperate urgency for more crisis accommodation, and more social housing homes. As of 31 August 2020, according to my questions in Parliament, there were 24,921 people on the public housing waiting list, including 2,844 applications which include a person with a disability.

Despite the growing wait-list and an average wait of more than two years for a home, housing stock has reduced by 1186 units since the McGowan Government came to power in 2017. It is simply not good enough, particularly in a state with a \$3 billion budget surplus. Many of the 100 people living at the Fremantle tent city over the festive period have a range of complex needs and require supports.



The Government was silent on the issue of the tent city for 25 days, despite its location directly across from the Electorate Office of the Minister for Community Services. Instead of coming up with a plan to help the campers access the wrap around services that they needed, the Government attacked the people working on the ground and endeavoured to demonise those sleeping rough.

The Greens have, throughout January, been calling for the immediate release of funds to provide rough sleepers with crisis accommodation, until a more permanent housing solution can be found. I co-hosted a community discussion about the growing homelessness crisis in Fremantle - and across WA - with Fremantle Mayor Dr Brad Pettitt, and Dorinda Cox, on January 21.



Visiting Tent City in Fremantle (top); hosting a community discussion about the homelessness crisis (middle); and speaking at the Shelter WA Pre Election forum on February 17 about the critical need for more social housing to meet demand

Concerns about grants processes

I was very concerned by the Auditor General's (AG) report into Grants Administration, which identified a lack of rules, requirements or guidelines to assess and fund grants across public agencies, including election commitment grants. Worryingly, only two out of eight public agencies audited had good grant administration practices in place. While there might be a belief that grants are associated only with small amounts of money awarded to assist with community events or projects, the AG tested some 10% worth of the \$300 million worth of grants awarded over two financial years. This is public money and the public rightly expects that this money be spent for the public good - and, importantly, that processes are transparent and there is a level of accountability for how the money is spent.

The Auditor General and Standing Committee both made recommendations to ensure funding decisions are open and equitable; that value for money outcomes are achieved; and that there are consistent processes around the administration of election commitments. It is essential the WA Government acts upon these recommendations as a matter of urgency and establishes a robust framework for the allocation and administration of grant money across the whole of Government.

Third party right of appeal needed in Planning

I anticipated, when we were debating the COVID provisions of the Planning Bill in the middle of last year, that we would soon be seeing development applications all over Perth that do not meet the restrictions of the applicable Local Planning Schemes. I was right.

In all parts of the electorate we are seeing development applications that blatantly ignore height restrictions, plot ratios and setbacks – sometimes all three together. And we are seeing those developments approved, in the face of recommendations to refuse approval from the relevant Design Review Panel and the Local Government.

Prior to the end of Parliamentary sitting last year, I noted that the community is turning strongly to Parliamentary petitions to deal with planning matters, and that a far more appropriate avenue would be to establish third party rights of appeal in planning. Until that is done, Liberal and Labor must cease accepting funds from developers.

Working together to ensure NDIS works

Senator Jordon Steele-John and I co-hosted a forum on the NDIS. Jordon outlined the numerous concerns arising federally, not only the ongoing difficulties many are encountering with the system, but also the deep concerns around the proposed Independent Assessments to be undertaken later this year. I spoke about the issues that still exist at the state level. There have been significant hiccoughs with the transfer of data from the old state system, as well as the ongoing concerns about thin markets, sustainable funding models for services and the need for comprehensive personal and systemic advocacy. Both Jordon and I remain deeply committed to working together at both the state and federal levels to get this reform right and working for people as it was intended.



Regis Nedlands: fix broken aged care system

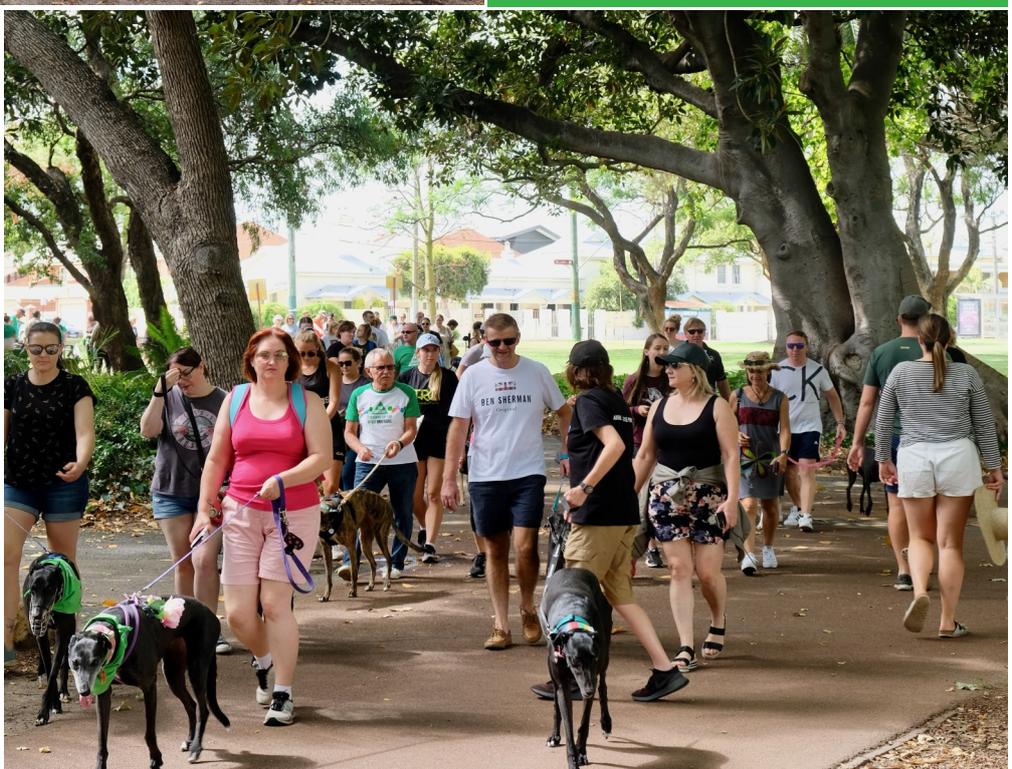
I was shocked and saddened to hear of the death of two seniors, following allegations of abuse of elderly residents at Regis Aged Care Nedlands. This is yet another tragic example of the changes that are desperately needed to fix the broken aged care system in Western Australia and across the country. Appalling data released by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety in the days before Christmas showed that 39.2% of aged care residents across Australia had experienced some form of physical abuse. I echoed the calls of my Federal Greens Counterpart Senator Rachel Siewert for a massive and urgent injection of funding into aged care to fix the workforce issues, ensure there is a minimum of one registered nurse rostered on 24/7 at aged care facilities, increase the hours of care provided to each resident and significantly boost the number of home care packages.



Greens for Greys at Hyde Park

More than 50 dogs and their humans came together to walk for a cause on 10 January as I co-hosted, along with Free the Hounds, an event at Hyde Park calling for a ban on greyhound racing in WA by 2025. I maintain the industry does not have the social licence to excuse the deaths of dogs on the track with more than 100 dogs dying on WA race tracks in 2019-20 - with WA's Cannington track recording more deaths in 2020 than at any other Australian facility.

There is nothing entertaining about the abuse and exploitation of animals and no reform which can end the suffering and make racing tracks completely safe for greyhounds. I was pleased to see growing support for an end to this horrific industry and laid out my intention to continue to push for a phased ban.



WA Charter of Rights needed

Australia is the only western democracy that does not protect the basic rights and freedoms of its people in either legislation or the constitution. All countries with legal and political systems similar to Australia, including New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom, have a Bill or Charter of Human Rights. But although there is an ongoing discussion, championed unsurprisingly by the Australian Human Rights Commission, it is unlikely this will happen anytime soon. Meanwhile, Queensland, the ACT and Victoria have acted at state level, adopting their own state-based Charters.

Western Australians must be afforded similar protections. A Charter of Rights could serve as an important tool in having essential needs met, as is currently the case in jurisdictions like Victoria, the ACT and the UK. It could help ensure all Western Australian children have access to a quality education, no matter where they live. That all people have access to healthcare, no matter their income. And that our personal privacies are protected from infringement by Governments, individuals or corporations. The Charter could be used specifically to address any rights-based issues including for

example the mistreatment of children and young people in our prison system, elder abuse, modern slavery, access to education for children with disability, and to better address that vexed issue of people with intellectual disability facing indefinite imprisonment. With the myriad of challenges we are currently facing including COVID-19, climate change, homelessness, infringements on press freedoms - it is more important than ever that power is transferred back to the people and that we have a mechanism to hold Government to account and which sets clear obligations as to how we expect the state to behave.



It was an election launch with a difference this time around as I joined current and (fingers crossed) future MPs on the steps of Parliament House on February 8. The compulsory wearing of masks could not hold us back from talking to assembled media about our key issues (left) at the WA State Election Launch Party (above) and with some of our wonderful team (below)

Get in touch.

HON. ALISON XAMON MLC
2/3 OXFORD CLOSE
WEST LEEDERVILLE 6007

P. (08) 9388 3955

E. xamonoffice@mp.wa.gov.au

 Alison Xamon MLC
 @alisonxamon
 @alisonxamon

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Authorised by A. Xamon, 2/3 Oxford Close, West Leederville 6007



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