# **Rick Wilson - Member for O'Connor - 9 April 2025**



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**Barry Green:** Style Council and shout to the top on Donnybrook- Balingup Community Radio. You are probably aware there's an election coming up. My guest next up is Rick Wilson, who's the member for O'Connor and the candidate for the Liberal Party in the upcoming election. G'day, Rick.

**Rick Wilson:** Yeah. G'day. Barry and G'day listeners.

**Barry Green:** So tell us a bit about Rick Wilson.

**Rick Wilson:** Oh, well, I'm a you know, if I was pressed, I'd say that I was a farmer from Katanning, but I have been a member of Parliament now since 2013. So, um, you know, some may say that I'm a politician, but my, my first love is, is farming. And, uh, but I did get into politics because of, you know, some of the issues that were impacting the rural community. And as part of that lobbying, um, as a member of a farm organisation, I did go to Canberra a few times, um, and thought that, you know, if you really want to make a difference and change the world, then, you know, Parliament House in Canberra is the place to do it. So I ran for Parliament in 2013 for the seat of O'Connor, and was elected at that point by point nine of a per cent are subsequently increased that margin to 16.5 at one stage, but with the with the large swing that happened in Western Australia, that margin was cut to 6.7, I think, after the redistribution.

**Rick Wilson:** So it's been a bit of a bumpy journey, but certainly wouldn't say that it's a safe seat, but but it's been a terrific seat to represent. It's for the people of Donnybrook and the surrounds. Um, they may be interested to know that the, the boundary of your new electorate finishes on the South Australian Northern Territory border or just north of it. Um, okay. And so I spend a lot of time out in the, in the northern goldfields, uh, wonderful places like Wiluna, Laverton, Leonora, and then right out to Waroona, which is, uh, right on the South Australian. Sorry, the Northern Territory, WA border, where the Giles weather station is. Um, it's extraordinary to get out there. Not so much in January when it's, you know, 45 degrees, but, um, but at this time of the year and they've had they've had some rains through there. It's, uh, it's an amazing place to be. But of course, then down to the to Eucla on the, the south coast, on the border and across along the border to, uh, through Windy Harbour to Nannup and, and then up through uh, Bridgetown, Donnybrook, uh, up to Collie.

**Rick Wilson:** So. So it covers a pretty big area, most of the most of the Wheatbelt, just south of the Great Eastern Highway. It was previously before the redistribution, uh, we had, um, the area right up to Mukinbudin and Cawdor and through those shires, but I lost about ten Wheatbelt shires in the redistribution and picked up Donnybrook. So, um, and you know, logistically for me that's, um, you know, that works really well. Not so much for the people of Donnybrook who can almost see the the electorate office for forest up the up the road in Bunbury. But, um, I don't make the rules in terms of redistribution. That's, um, that's the Australian Electoral Commission. Uh, I noted that the, you know, some people put in submissions saying that they wanted to stay with forest, which is completely understandable, but the commissioners decided that Donnybrook was going to be part of O'Connor. So, um, and I'm very glad and proud to, uh, you know, be here to try and, um, you know, win the people of Donnybrook over and the, the issues for agricultural areas all over Australia are very similar. And, you know, a lot of places seem to be made by the cities. But of course, cities can't exist without economically and environmentally sustainable rural communities.

**Rick Wilson:** That's absolutely right. And I'll correct you on one thing that the live sheep issue, which is um, uh, very prominent across WA and particularly across the electorate of O'Connor, I was speaking to a vet that works on a live export boat last night, and she said that of the 307 deliveries for the boat that they're going to load on the weekend. Every single one of them came from the electorate of O'Connor. So so it is that issue is very specific to O'Connor. Um, many of your listeners would be aware of the Keep the Sheep campaign, which is a sort of a really brilliant grassroots political movement. I was at the rally a couple of Fridays ago in Perth. I was at the first one in May last year. Um, it's great to see rural people, uh, standing up for themselves and their industry and their communities and fighting back because, uh, it was very much the decision to shut down the live sheep trade was very much a political decision based on some votes on the East coast, in the inner city areas of some of the big cities on the East coast. And, um, you know, people's livelihoods were sort of thrown to the wolves. And great to see them fighting back. Yeah.

**Barry Green:** And of course, sheep and cattle are an integral part of the soil building process. So, you know, people who think we can all live on mung beans. We do need these big ruminant animals in the system where you take them out, you know, you become dependent on chemical inputs.

**Rick Wilson:** That's exactly right. And what we're seeing across the wheat belt as we speak are people are getting out of sheep, um, which is, uh, um, you know, gives provides those, um, wheat belt farms with a, with some diversity in their income stream. Uh, without livestock in the system, they virtually become a monoculture, as you say. You then become very reliant on, on chemicals to control weeds or chemical fertilizers. And, um, certainly having, you know, a livestock or ruminant animal, whether it be cattle or sheep, uh, or even goats, but there's not that many goats in the wheat belt. Uh, but um, uh, that then provides that, that diversity in the, I guess, in the actual, uh, farming system. And, uh, sadly, as I say, we're seeing particularly wheat belt farmers and the, you know, the further you come west. Um, the, uh, I guess there's a few more sheep that are still maintaining their place. And then, of course, we get into the into the beef areas, uh, around Donnybrook and in the higher rainfall areas. But, uh, but it's very sad. And, you know, you lose your, you lose the sheep from the district and you lose your shearing team, uh, you lose your trucking, your local cartage contractor, the stock and station agent, uh, that provides the drench and the wool packs and those sorts of, uh, supplies. Um, you know, they sort of close up in the little towns and they get centralised in the bigger towns. So it's it's very sad to see what's happening. Um, the band doesn't come in until the 1st of May, 2028. Uh, but people are already making decisions based on. Well, if I can't, uh, if I can't export my sheep in 2028 and the price has dropped and the confidence has gone out of the industry, then, you know, I might as well get out today. Yeah.

**Barry Green:** But on the positive side, Ian Di Haggarty West Australian Citizens of the year and they operate in regenerative agriculture, which sheep is an integral part of that. So, you know, people need to understand there's there's been this breakdown between the city and the bush and, you know, and and from our point of view, I guess in the local community, we sort of there's a lot to talk about tourism. But I think agri tourism, which gets a conversation going between farmers and eaters, can have a big place to play.

**Rick Wilson:** Yeah. Look, anything that we can do to make the city people more aware of how agriculture operates is a good thing. And agri tourism is a key component of that. One of the interesting things that the Keep the Sheep people are telling me is that, um, when they, they, they've been going to sort of farmers markets and markets in the metropolitan area and um, they've been taking a few sheep and they've been blade shearing these sheep in front of the crowd. And it's it, it's so popular. And people, you know, hundreds of people will gather around to see a sheep being shorn. Of course, they're all in this day and age, um, you know, recording it on their phones and sending it to their friends. And and it's it's just great that people are taking an interest and are seeing, you know, how sheep shorn now, you know, back when I was a kid and and, you know, you're of a similar age. Um, most people had a, you know, had a relative who owned a farm, even if they were from the city, you know, a cousin would come down and visit on school holidays. Yeah. That that connection has been lost now. And there are many, many people in the city for several generations who have never been near a farm would have no concept of how a farm operates. So so they are a bit susceptible. And, um, you know, some specific activist groups start getting some traction and airplay and, um, so that's why, uh, I'm really supportive of the keep the sheep movement because they're not just lobbying for a political outcome. They're also, you know, doing their best to educate people about farming and how it operates.

**Barry Green:** But it does have a flow on effect to the domestic food supply. And we hear all, in all this money we're spending on defense hardware. But there's no point in having a 21st century defense force if you're reliant on import of food. So, you know, food security is fundamental to our security.

**Rick Wilson:** Absolutely it is. And, you know, we produce about twice as much food at the moment as we consume. But our population is growing quite quickly. Um, the urbanization of our sort of outer metropolitan areas means that a lot of the high quality horticultural areas are being swallowed up by urban sprawl. Um, and sadly, and this is, uh, happened just in this district in Balingup, um, one of the big, uh, one of the big, uh, ASX listed companies has bought a quality farm property, uh, to plant back to trees for carbon credits. Now that that may well be a very worthy and worthwhile thing to do. Uh, but quite frankly, to I think that, uh, taking productive agricultural land out of the system, which could be, uh, will be producing food in 100 or 200 years time, uh, and planning it down to native bush, basically, uh, so that a company can continue to, uh, pump gas for the next 10 or 15 years or however long that, that, uh, that, um, that gas, well, is going to last for, uh, is the height of insanity.

**Barry Green:** It is. Absolutely. And getting back to the regenerative agriculture that is essentially carbon farming, you know, it's about putting organic matter in the soil. And, you know, this this idea that we can take land. And I discussed this on this program last week with our shire president. You know, this is taking people out of the community. They're the volunteers who put the fires out. So, you know, if you take those people out, where's it going to leave us?

**Rick Wilson:** Well, precisely. And that's, um, uh, you know, that is one of my major concerns, particularly for my smaller regional communities like, you know, Southern Cross, where they're buying up a lot of land out there. You know, it's it's a smaller country town of, you know, 500 people. Uh, where. Yeah, there are less and less volunteers. Uh, and there are less and less people to play footy in the local footy team and so on. And every time they come in and buy up one of those farms, that's a family that's out of the district. So, um, I, you know, I think it's, uh, I will personally fight that. Um, as for the rest of my political career, because I think that long term, uh, it is such bad policy. And, um, to be fair to the companies, I mean, they have they have to reduce their emissions. That's, uh, that's part of the legislation that they're operating under. But, um, they need to find other ways other than taking productive agricultural land out of the system.

**Barry Green:** And what we're seeing in the in the wheat belt with, you know, so much corporatization to people who live there, it must feel somewhat like, uh, a new wave of commercial colonialism. If you if you lose, you know that sense of community. That's what's made Australia. It's made regional communities, the people who live there and have a vested interest in the success of the community.

**Rick Wilson:** Mhm. Well you're absolutely right about that. I mean the small communities, provided they've got the critical mass to, to maintain the footy team and the local hotel are the best communities, you know, to be involved in. And um, you know as I say I represent, uh, you know, 57 local government authorities, there's probably about 120 towns of reasonable size. When I say reasonable size, you know, those are in.

**Barry Green:** The West Australian context. Yeah.

**Rick Wilson:** But, um, yeah. So they are they are very special communities, but it is an uphill battle to try and keep the population there. Now it's not, you know, it's not corporatisation of farming as such. Although I, I would describe some of the businesses across the wheat belt as family corporates. I So I mean, they are such large operations and the machinery and the technology is such that, you know, we're 30, 40 years ago, there might have been ten farmers in an area all with, you know, families and, you know, a couple of sons on the farm or whatever. There's now probably two farmers farming that same area of land. Uh, and, you know, they might employ some backpackers to drive some very big machinery at seeding and harvest time. Bit risky, bit risky.

**Barry Green:** Putting backpackers into half $1 million machine, isn't it?

**Rick Wilson:** Yeah. There's a there's backpackers and there's backpackers. They the farmers that use them tell me that the European backpackers, particularly the Germans, are very ofay with the technology. And so they're very sought after. But um, but yeah. So that's, that's the sort of business model for the wheat belt now. And, um, you know, get big. Um, yeah. Don't have permanent labor, you know, use, use casual labor, uh, you know, in the busy times of the year. And that's why, you know, a lot of those communities have lost their footy teams or the pubs closed down. And and if you don't have the local pub, then, you know, where do people get together for a, you know, on a Friday afternoon or a Friday evening for a, for a beer and a catch up. That's, uh, that's, you know, my concern going forward. But, uh, you know, but they are great communities and, um, you know, those.

**Barry Green:** They can come back. They can come back.

**Rick Wilson:** Yeah. Look, I think, um, you know, we've, uh, every, every community that I deal with is having a go. They're trying to find they're trying to find that that sort of X factor or that thing, uh, that, um, that gets them happening. I mean, look at a community like Nyabing, uh, which is, uh, about 60km east of Katanning, their pub closed down. Um, you know, the town was was looking a bit sad. Uh, the progress Association there raised over a million, $1 million. Uh, they got some, some grants from the government. They built a new, uh, won't call it a pub because it's, uh, it's a community center that's got office, meeting rooms. It's got some accommodation for, you know, travelling workers and so on. And it just happens to have a coffee shop and a bar. Yeah. Um, but that's the that's the community hub. That's where people go to meet. And, you know, that's a little town of probably 100 people live in the town, and another couple of hundred live in the, in the rural hinterland. So, you know, it just shows that, yes, as you say, can be done. They can has to.

**Barry Green:** Be it has to be grassroots, bottom up community radio. We have to pay our bills. So we'll just run a sponsor message, Rick, and come back and talk a bit more.

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**Barry Green:** It's 1:46 on Donnybrook- Balingup Community Radio. My guest this morning is Rick Wilson, the member for O'Connor and a Liberal candidate in the upcoming election. Eric, the World Health Organisation and things happening around that globally. World Health Organisation has IHR International Health Regulations, which if we don't not sign up to, I think the process goes. It means next time there's a pandemic declared member states can be required to inject the population with the currently fashionable injection vaccine. What's the Liberal Party's position on on the IHR going forward? Do you have?

**Rick Wilson:** Well, **my understanding is that we will never surrender the sovereignty of our country to make that sort of decision. And, um, there's you know, I've heard this, um, this proposition that, you know, we Australia is going to sign up to this. I'm not sure whether the current government has done or whether they intend to, but certainly from our perspective, we will never do that. And, um, it's very interesting. And I know, uh, President Trump is not everybody's cup of tea, but he's made some interesting appointments as part of his cabinet and obviously, um, uh, Robert F Kennedy as the, uh, as the health, um, uh, I think they call them, uh, secretaries over there. Um, but I listened to a fascinating, uh, podcast on Bari Weiss's Honestly podcast the other day with a fellow called Jay. And I'm, I'm going to try and announce his Indian surname. Jay Bhattacharya**

**Barry Green:** I know who you mean.

**Rick Wilson:** Yeah, he **he was a professor at Princeton University who objected to, uh, the vaccine mandates. And and in his case, he was particularly concerned about children, uh, being vaccinated when there was actually no particular health reason that they should be. Um, and uh, given given that, you know, there was very low mortality fears for children with, with Covid. And so he, he questioned why, um, children should be, you know, have to be vaccinated, given that there was very low risk of the actual disease having any long term consequences. He was ostracized by the by the medical community, including, um, Anthony Fauci, who was the then head of the running the the United States Covid response. Uh, prime Minister. Sorry. President Trump has appointed this fellow as the head of the National Institute of Health in the United States, which conducts all the research and so on. So the the wheel has certainly turned. Um, and he brings, I think, a healthy level of skepticism, uh, to, you know, some of the, the, I guess, the decrees of the health industry. And it is an industry, it's a massive industry, in fact, it's, you know, probably is bigger industry as the, you know, as the tech industry.**

**Rick Wilson: Um, and um, so I was interested to see that, uh, President Trump has also pulled out of the World Health Organization or pulled the United States out of the World Health Organization. So I do wonder if how many of these sort of international bodies have a lot of credibility left, uh, when, you know, the the biggest funder, the biggest, uh, I guess most, uh, you know, the most, you know, financially important members of these organizations have pulled out. So, um, I, you know, I'm on the record as being, um, a supporting, uh, people who refuse to have the vaccine. I didn't support the vaccine mandates. I thought they were, uh, well, and truly over the top. I, you know, I had the I had to have the I had to have the vaccines myself. Otherwise I couldn't travel to Canberra to, to attend parliament. But, um, I respected those people who made a decision not to. And I thought it was absolutely outrageous that many people, like many people, contacted me to say that they'd lost their jobs as nurses, policemen, firemen.**

**Barry Green:** And these are people who are seeing the consequence of the of the injection coming through. So there's a lot of questions to be answered there. And you talk about Robert Kennedy. He's appointed Joel Salatin as an agricultural advisor. Right. And I watched a very interesting podcast with him and and Michael Pollan, the author of The Omnivore's Dilemma. Very interesting. And they're talking there about what's happened to agriculture, how the, the corporatization of, of, of food has destroyed the, the ability of farmers to compete in a free market. So what happens in America tends to flow on here. So, you know, I remain optimistic because it feels better to be optimistic that it will have a flow on effect. And we will get back to, you know, more producers because a stable system needs multiple players. The fewer and fewer players you've got. And we've seen that in the situation with the abattoirs. We had a lot of small. You know paddock to plate producers and you know with the the corporatisation of the abattoirs that's become really problematic. And a lot of that's come about because of tighter and tighter government regulations that have shut down family abattoirs.

**Rick Wilson:** Yeah. Look, um, fortunately, uh, you know, the United States does tend to be a bit of a canary in the coal mine. So we get to have a look at where we might be in 20 years time and, and hopefully, uh, you know, change course before we get there. So, um, I think that's a that's a very valid point that, uh, farming in the United States is very corporate. I don't think we're we're not there yet here. Um, some of the agribusinesses that you talk about, such as, um, some of the meat processing plants are part of big, uh, big operations. We do have, um, we do have a couple of smaller ones. I think you're referring to the the. You know, there's no custom kill left now. So. So for those smaller producers who want to market their product directly to the, you know, to the customer, um, sadly, I don't think there's that opportunity. I have had approaches from people in Albany to, um, set up a, you know, a small, uh, basically custom kill abattoir. Yep. Um, and, uh, you know, we don't we don't have funding for that, although there is, uh, part of the the live sheep transition package, uh, includes, uh, there's about $100 million, which includes about $60 million for infrastructure. And I put that in inverted commas because I haven't actually said what that means. I know some of the larger abattoirs, uh, are looking for, you know, funds to expand their, their processing capacity. I actually don't think, um, that they're going to need that because sheep numbers are dropping precipitously. Uh, the wool clip is down 20% this year, which which indicates there's probably 20% less sheep being shorn.

**Barry Green:** A lack confidence

**Rick Wilson:** The confidence in the industry is gone. So, um, you know, perhaps some of that infrastructure money, uh, you know, can be spent on assisting, uh, a couple of small abattoirs getting set up that are going to, you know, look after those, um, those niche players who have got, uh, you know, a direct, you know, a direct access to market. Yeah.

**Barry Green:** Well, very good. Rick, thanks for taking the time. And come and talk to us. And, uh, as I said on my show earlier today, if in the interests of democracy, if you belong to another party and want your your person on this show, if they're in Donnybrook, get in touch with us and I'll give them an opportunity to put their pitch. So, um, thanks for coming in, Rick, and I'll wish you all the best.

**Rick Wilson:** Yeah, thanks very much, Barry. And thanks to the listeners for taking the time to have a listen.

**Barry Green:** Very good.

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