



Kim Booth MHA's Inaugural Speech

From House of Assembly Hansard, Wednesday 25 September 2002

Mr BOOTH (Bass - Inaugural) - Mr Speaker, I had intended to address this to the Premier and all Labor members, but unfortunately most of them must be exhausted from this morning and have left the Chamber. However, I will address it to those four members of the Labor Party who are present, and of course all the Liberals, and thank you for your courtesy in remaining here for my inaugural speech and, of course, all my fellow Greens who have been recently elected, and our party Leader. How proud I am to be sitting here next to Peg Putt, whose tireless work and vision in these last four years has brought us all together here today.

I would also like to acknowledge my wife, Keren, and my son, Bronte, who are here today to watch me, and I acknowledge also the joy that they have given me over the years, with my daughter, Kalinka and my younger son, Jirri, and also my grandson, Josh, who are all very important to me and have been my support and source of wonderment all these years.

Let me say first of all I would like to be here to represent the people of Bass, to represent their hopes and aspirations. The landslide result at the last election which has given the Greens a 400 per cent increase in representation is a continuation of a global change in politics that started here in Tasmania 30 years ago. However, I must say before I continue, Mr Speaker, that to our eternal shame we as a people have not yet dealt with the question of Aboriginal land rights and the question of reconciliation. The Tasmanian Aboriginal people occupied this country for perhaps 40 000 years or more before white men came to these verdant shores, and in a few short years savagely displaced these people with a regime of unbridled brutality, terror and inhumanity. Indeed, looking at our behaviour in contemporary terms we would class our forefathers' actions as terrorism, terrorism of the worst kind as our forefathers are guilty of attempted genocide. We are all diminished by our failure as a people to come to terms with this unhappy past. It is my fervent hope that we will, as a Parliament of 25 good men and women, come together and lead our community forward and truly resolve this with the Aboriginal people. Perhaps it is the relatively short history in terms of white occupation of this abundant land that is the reason that Tasmania has the opportunity to lead the world in an ecologically sustainable manner.

The legacy of indigenous land management was a land of unparalleled beauty, rich in natural resources, a land of abundance and opportunity, a jewel in the world, unspoiled by industrialisation of so-called enlightened nations. We are now unique in the world in that our small island State can boast a quiver of comparative advantages to the rest of the world. We have a robust democracy, with Hare-Clark giving us truly proportional representation in our Parliament, the kind of democracy that people in other countries are prepared to sacrifice their lives to achieve. We have a clever and hardworking population. We also have some of the richest farmlands on earth, and we still have the opportunity to keep it genetic engineering-free in order to protect our marketing advantage. By letting the genetic engineering genie out of the bottle, we are denying ourselves the opportunity to take advantage of enormous global markets for conventional GE-free

foodstuffs, as well as the burgeoning organic and biodynamic markets. A precautionary approach to GE makes a lot of sense and I commend the Government for the steps it has already taken in the last Parliament to protect at least our foodstuffs from this scourge. However, much still needs to be done with regard to resisting the attempts of global chemical giants to muscle their way into our State by the ruse of increased poppy yields and some quaint convoluted logic that says you can just be a little bit GE-free. The poppy industry itself has said that it does not expect increased yields of alkaloids from GE poppy trials. Why risk the creation of the kind of herbicide-resistant super weeds that are spawned in Canada as a result of crosspollination with genetically engineered plants? It is no secret that Canada and much of the USA is now barred from some markets in Japan and Europe because of their questionable chemical and GE practices.

The closure of Simplot at Scottsdale is yet another example of the folly of becoming dominated and controlled by multinational companies who bulk their produce and, I might say, could not care less about the communities they exploit. Mr Speaker, I have no doubt that we might have secured the opportunity for our rural communities to export their produce to all corners of the globe had we protected that brand and quality. Recently, it was reported the American producers had lost \$12 billion in exports due to GE contamination in their crops. Why would we clamour to join that market? Anybody can produce low-grade, low-value products; Tasmania's production is so small in global terms that our only hope is through niche marketing high quality products. Intensive horticulture can deliver four jobs to the hectare, but only if we grow crops that the market wants.

We have already seen the success of the farmer-driven Tasmanian beef label, something the Greens have been encouraging for years. Now is the time to proactively market Brand Tasmania internationally, and have the courage to make the tough decisions that will secure the reputation of that brand. Let us not allow chemical pushers to lower Tasmania's products to that of the world's lowest common denominator. We want the best for our people and we want to protect our global markets to underpin a future for our rural communities. We were told that thalidomide, DDT and dieldrin were safe. I urge all members to think very carefully and apply the precautionary principle with regard to genetic engineering.

Mr Speaker, I would like to make mention now of one of the great shames that stains the reputation of this House. We heard in an inaugural speech that a newly elected member was here to fight for the battlers, to give them a voice in the people's House. I applaud those sentiments but I wonder if that member is aware of the havoc being wreaked in households all over this State by the callous promotion of poker machines by his Government. Members of the Government and members of the Liberal Opposition should hang their heads in shame at the complicity shown in allowing the introduction and unchecked roll-out of poker machines in our community. Whatever happened to responsible government?

Mr Speaker, \$5 million was poured down the throats of pokies in 1997; in 2001, \$166 million drained from our community and the signs can be seen in the empty shopfronts in Bass and the 'for lease' placards on the awnings of small businesses whose incomes have dried up. With the current roll-out occurring as we speak, who knows what the loss will be this year, yet the one thing we do know, Mr Speaker, is that right now there are thousands of Tasmanians whose lives have been destroyed by this cancer within our society. There are counselling services being inundated with people desperate for help, and they are being ignored.

On 22 May this year, Mr Speaker, Peg Putt brought on a private member's bill, the second reading of the Gaming Control Amendment Bill, in an attempt to make this House aware of the damage being done to our society and our economy, and to remind this House of clause 10 in section 7 of the deed which states:

'In the event that the legislation is amended in such a manner that the Crown is prevented from complying with its obligations under this deed then this deed shall absolutely cease and determine and the parties thereafter shall have no liability to each other'.

In other words, Mr Speaker, there is nothing to prevent action being taken by this House to amend the legislation, no risk of legal action being taken by Federal Hotels, and thus there is no reason why the people of this State should have to continue to suffer the blight of these machines.

The only addiction that prevents action being taken is the dependence of Treasury on the ill-gotten gains of gaming revenue. The overwhelming response of the community on this issue during the election played no small part in the return of four Greens to this Parliament, and I beseech all members of this House in the spirit of cooperative politics to amend the legislation for the sake of our community.

With the support of Parliament, Mr Speaker, I see a jobs-rich future for Bass. A whole-of-catchment approach is needed to arrest the decline of our living systems and we must learn from the lessons of the past. The Meander River is a key contributor to siltation of the Tamar River. From the headwaters and starting at Wild Dog Tier, described in scientific reports as one of the most degraded environments in Australia through overgrazing and fire, then to the Huntsman valley. The scourge of woodchipping first manifested itself in this beautiful valley in the early 1970s. Out of the romantic past of bullocks, horses, axes, crosscut saws and selective logging came the first wave of mechanisation with the introduction of bulldozers and chainsaws which saw a rapid escalation of logging and environmental damage.

Smoko Creek, Mr Speaker, was one of the woodchip industry's first victims. Think of your favourite park, garden or place of outstanding natural beauty; think of that sanctuary blasted and burnt as if a nuclear holocaust had occurred. Smoko Creek was that sanctuary, a millennium-old, forest community of outstanding beauty reduced to ashes. Gradually Forestry, with increasing frequency as the woodchip megalith rolls out of control, has been revisiting the scene of the crime, chipping away at forests above the sandstone benches causing landslides and degradation and turning our forests into an industrial sheet mine. The valley floor now has been completely stripped and the native forestry replaced with serried rows of cloned nitans trees. Of course the propaganda is that it was all done in the interests of growing our future; that is what a Forestry sign up there in front of a plantation planted in 1976 says, but most of the trees are about three to four inches through. What a joke! I challenge Forestry to show me one mill log that has been produced in the Huntsman valley as a result of woodchipping.

The woodchippers have been using sawmillers, wooden boat builders, tourism, beekeepers and the craft industry as Trojan horses to get into the bush for years. Let me tell all the members of this House that those industries do not want woodchipping; they despise the use of their good name in this dishonest manner. Forestry's cynical manipulation of 10 Days on the Island has turned Tasmania's premier arts event into a cynical PR exercise. If Forestry wants to be part of the

community and take part in a festival, then it should adhere to the Tasmania Together goal 24 and cease logging those areas identified.

As the ghosts of the country's sawmillers fade into the past, the Huntsman valley that was, where King Billy pine was first discovered and named, is now just a dim memory and a monument to man's folly. This is our catchment. Heli-spraying of the plantations with insecticide has killed fish in the Meander River and who knows how much atrazine, simazine and other herbicides have gone down the throats of unsuspecting water drinkers from the Meander Primary School right through to Deloraine and Westbury. These poisons are totally banned in more enlightened countries and are known carcinogens but for some reason the profits of woodchippers are more important than the health of the nation, Mr Speaker. We will, as a community, rue the day that we have so recklessly damaged our catchments.

We now have irrefutable scientific evidence that the removal of native forest and replacement with plantations will massively damage our water supplies. Launceston City has just released a report detailing a potential 33 per cent drop in available water in the St Patricks River due to proposed logging and plantation establishment in the catchment. The council is powerless to stop the destruction and the community may well have to pay to build a new dam to hold a sufficient water supply. We cannot afford to allow Forestry to be exempt from LUPA any longer. Forestry activities are destroying our prime human habitat. Mother Cummings Peak was another woodchip victim in the Huntsman in 1998.

The destruction of this accessible wilderness was the last straw for me and started me on a journey that has brought me to this House. I was the Deputy Mayor of Meander Valley Council at the time and, with my wife Keren, the owner of Timber World at Meander. This forest that had never had an axe in it, Mr Speaker, was a place of great beauty enjoyed by many locals. It contained relics of the last ice age, sphagnum swamps and King Billy pine. It was of significance to indigenous history as well as a future tourism resource; it is now just another shabby mess. The ruthless trashing of this special place brought home to me just how urgent it is for every caring Tasmanian to stand up and be counted. I am proud to have been arrested, along with 167 patriotic Tasmanians for protecting Mother Cummings. The 1 000 people who marched that day are still angry, Mr Speaker, and will march again and this time they will be joined by communities right around Tasmania because, Mr Speaker, the tragedy of the Huntsman is being played out right across the State. Indeed I have just been on a tour of the Ringarooma basin, called out by despairing residents desperate to stop the slaughter of their environment. Mr Speaker, what I saw there would make your blood run cold. I was taken to a beautiful rainforest at Dunn's Creek - massive tree ferns, sassafras, myrtle, musk, celery pine and giant stringy barks, 13 metres around, blasted, smashed and ground into the metre-deep wheel ruts. As a good friend once said, what right does anybody have to so wantonly destroy God's garden? There was a man there, Malcolm Taylor, who runs possibly the only commercial bullock team logging operation in the country. In contradistinction to the carnage created by the woodchip operation, Malcolm's salvage and selected logging operation left a very small footprint. He had been getting Hydro poles and generally utility grade myrtle and celery pine. The myrtle and celery were typical of the sort of timber that the woodchippers regularly waste. Forestry only gave him a permit because they said they had no market at the time. A big contractor came in over the top of him to clear-fell the coupe and so he was ordered out. When he quite rightly refused, as he still had timber to haul out, he was rewarded for his concerns by being banned for life. Banned for life. While attending his son's funeral shortly thereafter, some of his

hard-earned logs were bulldozed into a windrow and burnt, celery and myrtle properly branded and paid for, bulldozed and burnt.

I bring this to the attention of the House because it is typical of the arrogance and wilful disregard of the rights of the community that is endemic in forestry. I know this to be the case from my own experience as a sawmiller and also through others in the industry, most of whom I might say are too frightened to come out publicly on this because they get dealt with the same way that Mr Taylor has been dealt with. Most people working in the industry are treated in the same way that Forestry has tried to intimidate Malcolm Taylor. I believe only a commission of inquiry will unravel the web of deceit spun by Forestry over this issue.

The third wave of industrialisation in the forests has heralded in an orgy of destruction. There has never been a time in history when so few people could do so much damage. Not many chainsaws in the bush any more, Mr Speaker. Mainly enormous excavators with felling heads and log grabs. Modern forestry, or sheet mining as it should be called, is nothing less than a war on nature. Like a swam of locusts, woodchipping is decimating our biodiversity, our water catchments and our landscapes. Napalming is next, with their 1080 killing fields protected behind locked boom gates. This is your country, members.

It is with some cynicism, Mr Speaker, that I note that one of the main architects of the special regime of privilege granted to the forest industries, past Premier Mr Robin Gray, is now one of the main beneficiaries of this hugely profitable business. John Gay's company, Gunns, Tasmania's biggest woodchipper, of which Mr Gray is a director, is making over \$1 million profit per week. How long will this Parliament allow greed to ruin our precious island? And I call upon all members of this House to accompany me on a journey through Bass to see with your own eyes what is happening, because the tragedy of the Ringarooma Basin is only the tip of the iceberg.

Mr Speaker, the last corridors of temperate rain forest in the north-east are in need of stewardship. We are the custodians of ecosystems that are the envy of the world, and when they are saved from the chainsaws people will come from all over the world to experience them. We have a one-off opportunity to create an iconic wilderness refuge that will support the kind of ecotourism that is becoming Tasmania's trademark, giving employment to rural communities, driven by a resource that they control, and the profits of which will stay within their local community. The Mount Victoria reserve, the Rattler Range and the Blue Tier must be immediately protected with a view to creating the North East Highlands National Park. There must be a moratorium on all clear-felling that endangers the environmental significance of the area and threatens its inclusion in registers of international significance such as the Gondwana Network of National Parks.

In the face of crises such as the Simplot closure, we flail around seeking stop-gap measures to halt the decline of our rural areas, and yet one of the most sought-after commodities in the world, wilderness, is being destroyed as we sit here. The Tahune AirWalk has proven what we have always known: people will pay just to walk amongst these leviathans of the forest. The pristine waters of the Ringarooma River spring from this area. These catchments are priceless. Caring for our catchments will underpin our future. A navigable river will revitalise Launceston and stimulate tourism and economic growth. The people of Bass want the issue of air quality dealt with. The World Health Organisation reports that three million people die each year from the effects of air pollution. A toxic plume hangs over southern Asia with two million people expected to die from it.

Well, Mr Speaker, you do not have to go to Asia to die from air pollution. The Tamar Valley has special problems with an inversion layer holding down the smog and some nights you could nearly cut it with a knife. People in Launceston are dying each year as a result of the smog and countless suffer from asthma and respiratory illness. It is not good enough.

The wood heater replacement program is a good start and taking Forestry's matches away in the burning season would help. But this issue is too big for the ratepayers of Launceston alone and needs a specific State solution as a matter of urgency. I urge all members of this Parliament to think very seriously about some special assistance to try to deal with this problem. Launceston is one of the best preserved colonial streetscapes in Australia. If we clean up the river and the smog it will have a tremendous impact on the economy of the whole State.

I would also like to see the creation of a chair of ecological sustainability at the University of Tasmania and look forward over this term of Parliament to helping to create opportunities for Tasmanians underpinned by a world-class education system, GE-free agriculture, a thriving arts and tourism industry and adequate health and community services for all.

We have an opportunity in Tasmania to create a safe haven for refugees and to benefit from the cultural exchange that follows. I value our democracy and pledge to always support progressive legislation from any side of politics that raises the status of education, health and community services. I will work for the benefit of all Tasmanians and help to weave a community where we celebrate our diversity and our skills to create opportunities for long-term job creation and conditions for our young people to return to Tasmania because I believe that Tasmania is the best place in the world to live.

The Premier has a chance to be recorded in history as the man who led this State out of the old industrial age. To be remembered with appreciation by future generations enjoying the scenic beauty of our evolved nineteenth century landscapes, our magnificent native forests, our wilderness areas, just as you now enjoy as icons the precious places protected by earlier visionaries. However, so many of these unique areas are still under threat.

The Premier says he will listen to the people but the people have already spoken. Through Tasmania Together they have called for an end to the clear-felling of high conservation value old-growth forest in the following areas: the Styx Valley, the Tarkine forest extensions, the north-east highlands, the Tasman Peninsula, the Eastern Tiers, the Western Tiers, Reedy Marsh and the Ben Lomond National Park extensions. This is what the Tasmanian people want. This is what the Government has pledged to act upon and the time to act upon it is upon us now. On 1 January 2003 will the Premier go down in history as the man who betrayed the people or will he be the statesman?