



Nick McKim MHA's Inaugural Speech

From House of Assembly Hansard, Wednesday 25 September 2002

Mr McKIM (Franklin - Inaugural) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to begin my inaugural speech in this Parliament by acknowledging the owners of the land on which this building stands, the Mouheneenner people, part of one of the most impressive social systems that this world has seen. This group of people was, along with the rest of the original Tasmanian population, subjected to a callous and brutal attempt at genocide. Their land was stolen from them by European invaders and adequate recompense has not yet been made.

Unfortunately, as we have seen in response to the terrible attacks of 11 September last year, the so-called war on terrorism, Mr Deputy Speaker, the world is still a place where strength and military might bestow upon their holder a spurious legitimacy, a legitimacy which I sincerely hope will not be used to justify Australia's participation in an invasion of Iraq, a course of action which would not only result in death and misery for countless people, but entrench the hatreds which have led to the world's current security predicament.

While we Tasmanians and the country to which we belong are complicit in the holding of suspects without access to legal advice merely because they are accused of being terrorists, and while we are complicit in the imprisonment of children and families who seek asylum in this country and who are proved guilty of nothing except wanting a better life, we demonstrate that in terms of civilised behaviour we are not far advanced, if advanced at all, from the behaviour of the first European settlers on this island.

Speaking of civilised behaviour, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to quickly say something about politics. I have really enjoyed my time in public life so far. Since my election I have been insulted by the Deputy Premier in the same breath as he insulted Bob Brown and Peg Putt. Both the Government and the Liberal Party have descended to personal criticism of me and the Government has misquoted and misrepresented me in the media. Mr Deputy Speaker, as a Green, I could have hardly wished for a better start to my political career. There were a couple of surreal moments during the campaign that I would like to share with the members here today. I received more than once the thumbs-up from log truck drivers during this election campaign and from Forestry Tasmania utes, and I would like to say that says quite a bit about the opinions of people in the forestry industry about current forestry practices. I would also like to take the opportunity to assure the members of the House that I am quite capable of telling the difference between a thumb and an extended middle finger.

It is to the future that I wish to dedicate most of my time today, specifically the future of this island which is home to all of us here. When I look around this Chamber I recognise that every person who sits here has come to this place motivated by a desire to participate in the betterment of this State. We may not always be in agreement about the mechanisms or directions by which we can achieve this aim but nonetheless it is a goal that we all share.

Mr Deputy Speaker, this fact is often lost in the heat of political debates in the rush to get a suitable sound bite or pithy statement for the media, but I believe it is crucial that we remember through the inevitable disagreements that what we in this Chamber have in common is far, far greater than what divides us.

One thing we do have in common is the desire that Tasmania and Tasmanians enjoy a prosperous future. There has never been a better time in the history of the world to live on an island such as Tasmania. Being an island means we can keep at bay the blights, diseases and industrial farming disasters that have recently afflicted so many other countries, yet continuing advances in information technology bring knowledge and power to our fingertips and mitigate the tyranny of distance under which all islands have previously struggled.

Best of all, being an island gives us an immense advantage in carving out an identity for ourselves in the global markets and in establishing a brand. Our brand as a clean, green island high in wilderness values is undoubtedly our biggest strategic asset. Around the world it is the first thing which comes into people's minds when they think about Tasmania. I have worked in advertising for a number of years, I have some knowledge of the value of a brand, and I would like to share some of that knowledge with the House today.

Interbrand, a company that is a recognised global leader in brand valuation services, has done some interesting research. The Coca-Cola company, for example, had in 2001 a brand value of just under US\$69 billion, out of a total market capitalisation of US\$113 billion. In this case the brand represents 61 per cent of the value of the company and many companies have significantly higher percentages in terms of brand value against market cap. Consider the case of Xerox: according to Interbrand this brand is worth 93 per cent of its market capitalisation.

In today's global market, perception is everything. The way that consumers feel about a product determines whether or not they will buy it. Multinational companies realise this and, as a result, they protect their brand with every means at their disposal should it be threatened and they nurture it at every opportunity.

I would like to know why Tasmania approaches things so differently. If some of the most successful money making organisations in the world's history value their brand above all else, surely there is a lesson in that for Tasmania. To say that our State displays a haphazard approach to the management of our brand is substantially understating the matter. Much is made of the fact that Tasmania has the cleanest air in the world, yet this Government is proposing to build a power plant that burns woodchips just up the coast from the air monitoring station which allows Tasmania to make that claim.

Every log truck that comes out of our old growth forests diminishes our brand; every old-growth tree we propose to burn to generate power diminishes our brand ; every day we poison our wildlife with the ravages of 1080 poison, we diminish our brand. Clean water is one of the world's most precious resources, yet we allow toxic chemicals such as atrazine into our water tables - we diminish our brand. Every megawatt of dirty brown power we import from Victoria and every day we prevaricate over our GE-free future, we diminish our brand, and we diminish it at our economic peril.

No work I know of has been done seriously to attempt to measure Tasmania's brand. This is an indictment on recent governments, but if I may be allowed to whip the metaphorical envelope out of my pocket I will give the House some figures from the back of it.

Our gross State product is generally accepted to be somewhere over \$10 billion annually, so what is our brand worth? We have many industries that rely to a large degree on our brand. It is already used successfully to advertise everything from our beer, cheese and seafood through to our tourist industry. Almost every industry that exports into global markets relies, to some degree or other, on our brand and some industries like tourism almost totally rely on it.

Even at an ultraconservative estimate of 20 to 30 per cent of our GSP, it is clear that our brand is worth billions of dollars to this State every year. I will do everything I can during my term to assist the Government to gain an appreciation of the value of our brand and at the role it can play in bringing prosperity to Tasmania. I call on the Government immediately to undertake a study to determine the value of our brand.

But the value of our brand is far greater than its importance to our reputation or to our bottom line. We need to look beyond the use of our brand in marketing campaigns and use it to drive and shape our strategic decision making. It can and should provide a framework within which Tasmania can make the difficult decisions that lie ahead. We need to make a choice about whether we want to continue as an extractive, resource-based economy, structured around digging it up and knocking it down, which will inevitably lead to our attempting to compete in terms of scale with our competitors and becoming a price-taker in the global markets.

This is the woodchip model and the Basslink model, where we export our raw resources, be they forests or electricity, in order that others can value-add and profit. Or we can make choices that will allow us to trade on our unique qualities, our differences from our competitors, and use our natural advantages to access niche markets and truly value-add our raw resources in Tasmania for the profit of Tasmanians. These are the choices that will lead to the prosperous and brilliant future that Tasmania deserves. It is our reputation which is our point of difference from the rest of the world, and it is this reputation that means we are in the enviable situation where what is good for Tasmania's environment is also good for our economy.

I would like to say something about our supposed GE-free status. In marketing terms, being mostly GE-free is absolutely useless. I am tempted to say that the Government's fumbling attempts to be mostly GE-free are ripping about half a hole in Tasmania's marketing strategy, or they would be if we had a marketing strategy for this matter. I was very disturbed to learn that, in an Estimates committee earlier this year, the then Minister for Primary Industries admitted that the Government had not done any marketing of Tasmania's GE-free status in international markets. This is a serious omission. We hear many words about resource security for our major industries. It is a concept I know both the other parties in this Chamber feel strongly about as they support the environmentally calamitous Regional Forests Agreement that provides unprecedented resource security for forestry companies and woodchippers. But where is the resource security for our biggest strategic asset - our brand? Well, there is none; no resource security at all. Our brand continues to diminish under a government which has no idea of its value. Unfortunately, I hear of instances where potential investors spurn Tasmania because our brand does not stand up to

scrutiny. The Government talks the talk about our brand, but they are going to have to learn to walk the walk.

The Labor and Liberal parties first heard the words 'clean and green' from one of Tasmania's most eminent futurists, former Greens Leader Christine Milne, and they had better get used to hearing it because they will continue to hear it from the Greens until they get it right.

I would imagine that all here would agree that an inclusive society is a healthy society. Indeed, that sentiment has figured strongly in the Government's rhetoric since it was elected four years ago. An integral action of an inclusive society is for the Government to find out from the members of that society what their hopes and aspirations are, but we have already done that, haven't we? The recently completed Tasmania Together process was by its own description one of the widest community consultations ever undertaken in the world, a process that Tasmanians believed had the full support of the Premier and his Government. Now that Tasmanians have spoken and made known their vision for this State's future, they are told by the Government that some of their opinions will not be heard.

We have all heard of the core and non-core categories into which the current Australian Prime Minister places the promises he makes to the Australian people: core promises and non-core promises. Now in Tasmania it seems that our Premier believes that the Tasmanian people have core and non-core opinions, and that he and his Government can pick and choose between them. I refer, of course, to the Tasmania Together recommendation that certain high conservation value old-growth forests be protected by the end of this year. The Tasmania Together Community Leaders Group recommended that this issue be addressed as a matter of priority. There are three months to go, and it is not good enough for the Premier to beg an extension from the Tasmania Together Progress Board. It is not the board's position, it is the position of the Tasmanian people, and to call into doubt this recommendation is to call into doubt the entire Tasmania Together process. We learn today that the progress board has looked at the Tasmanian people's recommendation. Their response: 'We are making maps'. The progress board fiddles while Tasmania burns. Three months to go before the Tasmanian people learn whether they have been the victims of one of the biggest cons in our State's history - three months to go.

The electorate which I represent has been unfortunate enough to have visited upon it one of the more monstrous proposals in Tasmania's recent history. I am referring of course to the proposed Southwood development. Even though it appears that this project is sinking under the weight of being environmentally, economically and socially unsustainable, I would like to briefly refer to it for it provides a window into the dark reaches of this Government's methodology. The Government persists in claiming that Southwood will generate electricity by burning waste wood from the forest floor. The truth is that Southwood will burn woodchips created from clear-felling some of Tasmania's most spectacular old-growth forests. The Government here is operating on a principle used by many masters of propaganda through history which has it that if one says something loudly enough for long enough it will be believed. I do not think that Tasmanians are going to fall for that one, no matter how many times the Government repeats its lines.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the Huon and Channel areas of the electorate of Franklin are fertile grounds for apples, pears, cherries and other stone fruits and a range of other crops and seed crops. These economically vital crops are reliant on the beekeeping industry for pollination services. The entire

southern section of this industry is under threat due to Forestry Tasmania's rampant destruction of the leatherwood resource in the southern forests. Mr Deputy Speaker, I put the Government on notice that unless this threat is addressed, the loss of many local jobs and much regional wealth will be laid squarely at its door.

In one of my first acts as an elected representative, I took the position regarding a major project which will have massive implications for the economic and strategic future of Tasmania. I acted on behalf of the people who voted for me and in Tasmania's best interests and I spent three days in Victoria sharing the Tasmanian Greens' concerns about the proposed Basslink interconnector with a range of people. Can I say, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am very disappointed in the standard of public debate that followed. I raised what I believed and still believe are legitimate concerns but would anyone debate the issues with me? No, they would not. Instead, I was accused of being self-serving, being a saboteur, spreading untruths and misrepresentations. I was criticised by parliamentarians who at that stage had done little, publicly, since their elections except enjoy the comfort of their taxpayer-funded chairs. Since my return, I have been maliciously misquoted and misrepresented in the media by a member of the Government. This is not only deceitful behaviour that adds nothing to the debate, but in my opinion it is a subversion of the democratic process. Let it be clear that I personally regard it as a badge of honour to be attacked in this way by the Government and I raise the issue here on behalf of the Tasmanian people who deserve a far higher standard of debate from their elected representatives.

For the record, the Greens' concerns about Basslink include these: the size and nature of the financial gamble to which Tasmania is committed for the next 25 years by a project which Hydro Tasmania says, and I quote, '... is a very thin deal commercially for Hydro Tasmania', therefore, Mr Deputy Speaker, a very thin deal for the Tasmanian taxpayer. Hydro Tasmania also rated the chances of the project breaking even as only 65 per cent and this was before additional expenditures were forced on the project by the requirement that a metallic return be included. Prior to these additional expenditures, Hydro Tasmania said that moderate cost increases, and I am quoting again, '... would render the project non-viable'. We are deeply concerned that Tasmania's future prosperity may be being gambled away on this project, and how much are Tasmanians gambling? They have no idea because the Government will not tell them.

We also oppose the project on the grounds that it will substantially increase national greenhouse gas emissions and therefore increase the rate of global warming, a position with which the Australian Business Council for Sustainable Energy, among many others, concurs. Basslink will also result in damage to the banks of the Gordon River within Tasmania's World Heritage-listed wilderness area.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the Greens reject the implication that Basslink is necessary to secure investment in windpower in Tasmania. Windpower is a beautiful technology. I would like to place on the record - if the House will pardon me the pun - that in relation to windpower I am a huge fan.

Members laughing.

Mr McKIM - The Greens absolutely support wind-generated power to provide jobs and prosperity for Tasmanians. We see it as far more than just an export commodity and the Greens absolutely reject the notion that Basslink is necessary to secure a component manufacturing facility in north-

west Tasmania. I am also worried that Basslink will cause Tasmania to miss the boat in relation to the hydrogen economy in the same way that we have in relation to wind power.

The Greens were ignored 20 years ago when we suggested wind power as an energy generation method of the future. If only we had been listened to then, Tasmania could be in the position that Denmark is today, a world leader in a booming industry. Now that the government of the day has finally caught up to the Greens unfortunately Tasmania is forced to play catch-up with the rest of the world and watch another country enjoy the real profits and opportunities. I sincerely hope that in 20 years' time we are not bemoaning the fact that we missed the hydrogen revolution due to our decision to allow the importation of dirty power from Victoria.

Mr Deputy Speaker, in 1998 the Labor and Liberal parties colluded to cut the number of members able to be elected in this House. This was not only an attack on democracy but has been widely recognised as a deliberate attempt to disenfranchise Green voters in Tasmania by removing the Greens from this Chamber. Well, Mr Deputy Speaker, as a proud member of generation X, I would today like to paraphrase Bart Simpson and invite the Labor and Liberal parties to eat the Greens' shorts. You can eat our shorts because you failed in your cynical attempt to remove us from the political landscape. You are now stuck with us because the Tasmanian people recognise that they truly need a party that will stand up to the homogenous lump that the Labor and Liberal parties have become.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to speak about some life experiences that I have had. I have worked in Switzerland on an organic market garden and I would like to say something about the opportunities that this industry has to offer Tasmania. In the wake of mad cow disease and other industrial farming disasters, trade in organic food and beverage products has become a crucial part of global agribusiness. Yearly retail sales in Western Europe, the USA and Japan cumulatively are currently worth over US\$40 billion a year and are growing at up to 40 per cent per annum. Tasmania is perfectly placed to take advantage of this exponential growth. We are off-season to the Northern Hemisphere suppliers who will be our main competition. We have great soils and climate and knowledgeable, hardworking farmers and, best of all, the organic industry is labour intensive. It is a creator of local jobs and regional wealth and it has a tremendous synergy with our brand.

I have also worked as a wilderness guide sharing our magnificent wilderness with visitors to our State. I have led many groups through the Overland Track, the South Coast Track and into the Walls of Jerusalem. I have seen the most garrulous groups struck into silence by examples of our superb natural heritage but unfortunately, Mr Deputy Speaker, I have also seen the happy smiles of a satisfied group freeze on their faces when they have seen the clear-felled destruction that this State wreaks on the wilderness they came here to see.

I am lucky to have spent so much time in the Tasmanian wilderness and to have had the opportunity to come to know it on such an intimate level. I have been utterly lost in the white-out of a blizzard in the Tasmanian highlands, not knowing in which direction was shelter or survival, and I have reached a place within that experience that I embraced it and immersed myself in it and came to love the place, not for what it could do for me or for what it did to me, but simply for what it is, and that is the truest and purest knowledge that I have.

An experience of a similar nature can be found in some of the majestic forests we have here in Tasmania and to those who sit in the House and who may be listening to me today who have never

experienced the stillness and awesome majesty of an ancient forest, I do offer to take you to a place where that experience would be possible for you. To those who do not want to take me up on my offer and who are complicit in the current destruction of our forest heritage - and that is the other two parties in this House - I can say that I do understand that you are busy people and I do understand that you may be a little scared about what you might discover about yourselves in the process, but can I also say I am not convinced that history will be so understanding.

While I am on the subject of forestry practices I would like to say that clear-felling in old-growth forests is not only an environmental disaster and an economical debacle but it is also becoming a social problem of the highest order for Tasmania. This has been clearly demonstrated by the problems resulting from the Government's decision to sponsor the Ten Days on the Island Festival with money from Forestry Tasmania. I congratulate those artists and authors who have had the courage of their convictions in relation to this matter - and as an aside, Mr Deputy Speaker, who can forget the atmospheric mushroom cloud installation displayed by great effect to Forestry Tasmania during the inaugural festival? I am sure none of the tourists who were here at the time can possibly forget it.

I would like to say a few words about some of the influences on my political development, many of which have led to my standing here today. I did not participate in the Franklin campaign but watched with admiration as a huge range of people from right around the world left behind their day-to-day lives and in many cases gave up their liberty in defence of that wonderful wilderness icon. May I say that hindsight has proved that their sacrifices were most certainly in Tasmania's long-term interest.

The town of Strahan is the most popular overnight destination for visitors to Tasmania, outside our two major cities. Strahan, of course, is a town that relies substantially on its reputation as a gateway to the wilderness areas that were saved as a result of the Franklin River campaign. May I also say that at around that time the Greens displayed a quality that has become something of a hallmark of the party I have the honour to represent in this Chamber. I refer to the quality of foresight, specifically to the 1983 proposals for the refurbishment of the Abt Railway as a tourist attraction and for the development of wind generation as a technology for generating electricity. Nearly 20 years later, the other two parties are finally catching on.

Shortly after the Franklin, I was involved in the blockade at Farmhouse Creek and was arrested while protecting our magnificent forests from clear-felling. It is a personal disappointment to me that this issue is unresolved 20 years after I sat in front of the bulldozers. It was at Farmhouse Creek that I first met a man who had a profound effect not only on my life but on Tasmania's history. I refer of course to Bob Brown, now Senator Bob Brown, a man of honesty and integrity who is not only a role model to me but is one of the world's foremost environmentalists and human rights advocates. Interestingly, after I was arrested at Farmhouse, my mum told me I might struggle to get a respectable job. As I look around me in this Chamber, there are probably a few people who reckon she has been proved right yet again, as she has been so many times in my life.

Members laughing .

Mr McKIM - While I am speaking about my mum, can I just quickly thank my family; my father John, my mother Joanne, my brother Thomas, and my partner Jane Binning, who have all supported me through the campaign to be elected to this Chamber. I also thank the many Greens who worked

very hard on the campaign and supported us all in this election. Our great result was a victory for everyone who has contributed to Tasmania's social and environmental movements since Lake Pedder 30 years ago.

In the last couple of years the Greens have filled a vacuum of compassion and decency which has appeared in the political spectrum right around the world. This has been exemplified by our stance on issues of human rights, specifically the humane treatment of asylum seekers, and against war as a solution to complex problems. It has also been demonstrated by our proposals to extend the rebate on power and transport costs currently granted to pensioners, to students and holders of health care cards. I am pleased to see that the Government appears finally to be following our lead on this matter, although I look forward to seeing the detail of their proposals.

I am really looking forward to the next four years. The range of issues which sets the Greens apart from the other two parties will, I believe, see the Greens consolidate our position as the true opposition party in Tasmania.

Mr Deputy Speaker, may I close by informing the House of something that the Dalai Lama said when he was asked by a television reporter a few years ago if he had a message for the people of the world. He simply looked straight down the camera, smiled that beautiful smile he has and said, 'More kindness, please'.