



Tim Morris MHA's Inaugural Speech

From House of Assembly Hansard, Wednesday 26 September 2002

Mr MORRIS (Lyons - Inaugural) - Mr Deputy Speaker, to commence my time in this House, firstly I must acknowledge that this land that we live on is stolen land. It was taken from the Tasmanian Aboriginal people without their consent and many injustices have been committed to the owners of this land since Europeans invaded. I am sorry that this has occurred and I will do whatever I can to rectify these wrongs. I am excited to be sitting in this Parliament and I have a view of the future that is rich with possibilities for Tasmania. I sought election to this House so as to present to the Tasmanian people a vision that will provide a quality of life for all Tasmanians whilst maintaining environmental values. My vision for Tasmania is one where the values of peace, caring, sharing and justice for all are paramount; where clean air, water and earth are the sustaining substances of our existence. I wish to see Tasmania build a reputation throughout the world for care and respect for the natural environment and our fellow citizens.

To explain a little of how I have come to find myself here, I shall provide a little of my background. My mother, Muriel, who to this day continues to follow her dream on the land, raised me on a farm at Molesworth in Central Victoria. It is the sort of place where floods and bushfires were the excitement amongst the regularity of the milking, fencing and multitude of farm maintenance tasks. Much of my childhood was spent trapping and ferreting for rabbits which could be a good source of pocket money when prices were okay. The occasional fox that I caught was a real bonus, with scalps at ten shillings a piece. At that time even wombats still had a price on their heads. Another job that I remember well was the ringbarking of red gums at a penny a piece. Indeed, my mother is still cursing the regrowth that dares to show its leaves in her paddocks.

My primary schooling was at the local one-room rural school and my most memorable moment was when a three-foot ruler was broken over my backside because I did not want to go swimming on a freezing morning. The first three years of secondary school were at Alexandra High. There, I was bullied, bored and performed poorly. I think the pivotal point of my youth was in 1969 when I simultaneously had a nervous breakdown and moved to the city to live with my father, Peter. He showed me new exciting worlds where books, art and interesting conversation were the key and also the beauty to be found in nature.

At 15, I left school and my second job was to labour on my father's new house. It was built from salvage materials, railway sleepers and mud bricks and it was set in the bush. The factors that he brought together in this building in the last year of his life have been a significant influence in my work and life over the next 30 years.

In 1972, not long after my father's death, I found myself underneath a police horse in the middle of the largest protest that this country had ever seen. It was my political awakening. The thought that I could be conscripted into the army and sent to participate in the Vietnam War horrified me. I did not have a quarrel with the Vietnamese and anyway I had better things to do than shoot or be shot

at. Once the Whitlam Government had abolished conscription, there was a sense that anything was possible and that Australia had changed its attitude towards following America blindly and we would show the world a new direction. How wrong I was to think this.

The other significant event of this time was in meeting Dickie Blackman who taught me to see the beauty in wood and how to turn boards into tables, capable of giving pleasure and service for generations. I also started to see the forests differently too. No longer were they an endless resource to just keep hacking into or a nuisance that with effort could be replaced with pasture grasses for stock but a finite and critical part of the life support system for this planet.

The mid-1970s were an intensely exciting period when I would work hard and play hard, read lots, listen to music, loud and radical or quiet and contemplative. Sleep was kept to a minimum. I encountered Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, a book that gave me a new insight into the world and how I could relate to it. I now understood quality for the first time and why different things that appeared so similar on the surface could have such different values.

In 1976 I happened to come to Tasmania for a holiday. I immediately felt at home and so I returned to Victoria to pack up and move south to start a new life in the Derwent Valley. Fortunately I was able to get work quickly at Glenelg near Gretna. Whilst it was going back to doing things that I knew as a child, I was able to live well and save for a block of my own. Droving sheep and cattle through the valley and the highlands provided plenty of time to look about and observe the state of the environment around me. This job was quite historic as it turned out. The farm labourers' award at that time was the last to still prescribe the 44-hour week as a standard working week, and there was included in it provision for a quarter of a sheep per week. It was removed whilst I was working there.

By the early 1980s I had bought land at Lachlan and started to build when the dispute over the next hydro development escalated and I became involved. I need not go into the details except to say that again, as in the early 1970s, my thinking was out of step with the government of the day. During the Franklin campaign I discovered that there were many others who felt like me, that there was a real opportunity in Tasmania to have a special place in the world, a place that would lead the way in showing that people could live in reasonable harmony with the environment rather than continuing the conquering and alteration of the past couple of centuries. That place is Tasmania, the so-called clean, green and clever Tasmania. Those I represent in this House today hold that vision even more strongly and clearly than 20 years ago.

Other highlights of the 1980s were working on the Helsham Inquiry and the Forest and Forest Industries Council, where I learnt much about the workings and politics of the forest industries. It was in 1989 that I was first elected to the then New Norfolk Council, enabling me to learn about and participate in the grassroots politics of potholes and garbage.

The past 10 years have been spent predominantly in Maydena restoring the old Australian Newsprint Mills hostel and building up a tourism business with my family. I retired from the Derwent Valley Council in 2000 after two exhausting and exciting years as mayor. The major project of that period for the council was the purchase of the Royal Derwent Hospital and Willow Court from the Government. The council and its private partner, Gordon Fyfe's Isle Property Group, provided the presentation now in the lobby of this House. I would to thank the minister, David Llewellyn, for his considerable efforts and I would like to offer any member a briefing at any time

on this exciting project. I would also like to acknowledge the partnership agreement signed recently between the Government and the Derwent Valley Council. It is my hope that the Government and the council can deliver it for the valley, particularly in relation to the railway restoration.

Mr Speaker, there are several issues that I intend to comment on, commencing with peace. The cause of seeking peace between nations and peoples is so worthy that if it could be achieved, and the machines of war scrapped, then we would free up the human and financial resources to resolve most of the other problems facing this planet, given the will to do so. I do not believe that there is any nation on earth that we as Tasmanians and Australians should even contemplate war with. On the contrary, we should lead the way in promoting peace for all and I condemn the Federal Government for its talk of war instead of peace.

On the economy, I wish to state that I have long studied economics as an enthusiastic amateur and it is my conclusion that it is a miracle that it hangs together at all, given the competing demands within the community. There is always pressure to provide pay rises, new capital works, funding for worthy causes, and there is a constant demand to reduce taxes. I understand that it is a delicate balance, thus we need continually to find more efficient ways to provide services to the community whilst improving the quality of those services. Indeed, I think that some of the best advances we will make in the provision of services will be where there are not just demands for extra funding but creative, new ideas funded by less or similar amounts to those provided currently. I see around me examples of wasted resources from office lights left on and unnecessarily large cars to rigid rules that make it difficult and frustrating to access services. It goes on and on. Indeed, one of the exciting possibilities for me is that I see so much scope for improvement.

I am concerned that one of our great weaknesses here in Tasmania is in the manufacturing sector. I believe that there are many products that we currently import that we could manufacture within our State. We only have to look around us to see those things that we constantly buy that are made elsewhere. My recommendation is that we specialise in creating small scale, highly efficient businesses. Included in that is the need to ensure that compliance with regulations is not a significant administrative burden. The GST is a good example of what not to do if you want to assist small businesses. It is a significant amount of extra work, perhaps relatively easy in big business, but onerous on small business.

The education of the 1960s and 1970s that I experienced did not teach me very well, and my written skills were of a very low standard at the time I left school. Fortunately, I had developed a love for reading, listening and learning from the world around me. I felt that the first couple of years after school were of more value to my education than my time in the formal education system.

I do not think that we can afford to let young people fail to learn the skills that they will need to launch them successfully into adulthood. By this I mean the skills to communicate successfully, to be able to access ongoing education and training, and to keep an active and inquiring mind. To understand the value of health and how to maintain it through good hygiene, nutrition and exercise is worthwhile in order to get the best from our bodies. How to manage personal finances and get the most from the resources at our disposal is an important skill as well. For everyone to have a basic understanding of why it is we have laws to regulate individuals and businesses is

important, along with the understanding of how and why we are governed. Our education system must teach respect for neighbours near and far so that our children truly treat others as they would be like to be treated. To have an understanding of our emotions and how to manage relationships will ensure a more stable and caring society and families. Of paramount importance is a comprehension of how we relate to and impact on the planet. This is imperative if we are to develop a sustainable society.

With the area of health, it seems that there is vast room for improvement in the overall health of the population. In the future many of the problems that now cause so much distress and disease will be prevented if we can educate the young and somehow convince them to take real responsibility for their own wellbeing.

Invariably, we will have to put controls on advertising where the images do not match the reality, such as soft drinks that project a glamour image and yet are loaded with caffeine and rot the teeth of our children. These addictive and unhealthy products are still sold in schools under the control of this Government, presumably with its blessing. We have Tasmanian apples grown, juiced and packed here and actually providing good nutrition. When will we see this as the norm for our children in their schools?

The area I am most familiar with is smoking, having been addicted for about 30 years. I am fully supportive of efforts to reduce the rate of take-up in smoking. Indeed, I think it is obvious that we must go a lot further in reducing the ready availability of tobacco. We could restrict its sale further, perhaps even by prescription only because I am not in favour of prohibition. Of greatest immediate concern is the continued sale of cigarettes to those under the age of 18. Despite the threat of significant fines for retailers, there is apparently little respect for the law and even less effort by governments to ensure that it is enforced. I could talk about the grog or other drugs that are consumed to excess by such a large percentage of the population but suffice it to say the story is similar. They are too readily available and too many people make too much profit without accepting responsibility for the products that they sell.

I am of the view that funds for research need to be prioritised to ensure that better quality of life, not greater quantity of life, is achieved. We do not need to live longer, only better. If we can make an impact on the avoidable health-related problems then it will allow for more resources to assist those in need of care through no fault of their own.

To tourism. After 10 years of having a small business in tourism I am well aware of the potential of that industry. It has the potential to provide employment and much-needed economic activity in the regional areas of this State. I was significantly involved in setting up the tourism task force, the tourism arm of the combined southern councils. The task force has developed the touring route strategic plan that is currently being implemented in conjunction with Tourism Tasmania. This should assist in providing a larger and stronger industry.

Whilst the decision to invest significantly in the transport infrastructure between Tasmania and the north island is to be commended, I wish to offer a warning of a possible negative impact on the small business sector in tourism. Because the unmet demand for transport is only in the summer we will see a greater spike in summer tourism that requires a significant investment of new infrastructure. In the winter there will be extreme competition for roughly the same number of visitors who are currently coming to Tasmania and who will be spread even more thinly than they

are now. I urge the Government to give consideration to ensuring that extra effort is put into expanding the numbers in the winter at least to ensure that existing businesses can maintain existing levels of trade.

To the forests. It causes me great anger and sadness knowing that the machines and mines of destruction are still raping and pillaging their ways across Tasmania's precious forests and lands. In the process, large areas of our precious natural heritage continue to be converted to monoculture plantations. Our unique native wildlife suffers slow, agonised death from 1080, our rivers and water supplies are silted and poisoned and the air polluted from unnecessary, so-called regeneration burns.

It is the Premier and the rest of this Government who are responsible for the ongoing vandalism by their failure to act, when they know full well that there are alternatives available. What a shame it is when the consultative process set up by this Government is attempted to be bullied into altering its conclusions to pander to the bullies of the forest industries. We will not be thanked by future generations for continuing to destroy that which is irreplaceable when we know better. At a minimum, we should delay the harvesting of forests of high conservation value for 20 years so as to look at the situation with the fresh eyes of a new generation.

An example of the care for the natural and archaeological heritage by the agents of this Government is the destruction of a cave in the Florentine Valley earlier this year. Is this how the Government conserves our heritage - by clearing it out with an excavator and breaking it apart in the process? You will have to do much better to convince me that you care for anything but the quick bucks of dirty profits.

Another issue that is close to my heart is container deposit legislation. Some three years ago I had a motion passed at the Local Government Association of Tasmania's annual general meeting that requested this Government to introduce container deposit legislation. Every council in this State supported that motion, but what did the minister do in response? He did nothing except to write a limp-wristed reply with pathetic excuses, most of which were invalid. It demonstrated that this Government has a higher regard for a few paid lobbyists from throwaway drink companies than for all the 26 democratically-elected councils in this State. This is one area where the Greens will be developing legislation, legislation that will have a positive impact on reducing litter and increasing the recycling efforts for Tasmania. We will also be including a proposal to reduce significantly the scourge of disposal shopping bags.

There was one item that I did not manage to complete whilst at the helm of the Derwent Valley Council and that is the important matter of government business enterprises paying rates to councils. I did intend to pursue this matter as it is of great importance to most councils in the electorate. The former Liberal Government signed an agreement with the Federal Government to the effect that the government business enterprises would pay rates as of 1996, but still not a cent has been handed over.

This is not an issue that should be tied to the unending financial relationships talkfest between the State Government and the councils. Rates are owed and they must be paid. To continue the current situation hurts rural councils, ratepayers and also undercuts the private timber sellers, because Forestry Tasmania is still operating with an unfair competitive advantage. I heard the Premier state today that the Government has to abide by the national competition principles as far as gas was

concerned. Why is it that this does not apply when it comes to the government business enterprises paying rates?

Next I would like to thank my family: Wendy, my wife, who still talks to me and supports me even though I am often absent and distracted by my public duties; and the children, Emily, James and Will, who are always full of helpful suggestions. Then there is Bob Brown, and Peg and Alistair, all of whom have long encouraged me, as well as the rest of the Greens organisation who put in such an effort to ensure that I was elected to this Parliament. I would also like to thank those in the Derwent Valley and the rest of the Lyons electorate for their support for me and the other Green candidates who supported me in the campaign.

To conclude, I must say it is very exciting to be part of a growing worldwide movement that has a vision of a fairer and cleaner planet with a sustainable and vibrant future.

Finally, I give my commitment to the people of Tasmania that I shall work diligently on their behalf to make Tasmania an even better place to live in than it already is.

Members - Hear, hear - well done!