

## Inaugural Speech – Allison Ritchie MLC



Allison Ritchie MLC

Legislative Council

Date: 31 May 2001

Electorate: Pembroke

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**Ms RITCHIE** (Pembroke - Inaugural) - Mr President, I rise to fully support the budget papers and Consolidated Fund Appropriation Bill 2001 but would also like to take this opportunity on my first address to this House to say that it is an honour to be elected to the Legislative Council as the representative for the electorate of Pembroke. I would like to thank the President for his kind welcome and all honourable members of the Legislative Council for the manner in which they have assisted and welcomed me as a new member. I would also like to take this opportunity to put on record my appreciation of the assistance I have received from the staff of the Council who have been most generous with their help since my arrival. I would also offer my formal congratulations to the honourable member for Nelson on his re-election and the honourable member for Rowallan on his election. I look forward to working with you both.

Mr President, I am thankful for the faith and trust the people of Pembroke have bestowed upon me by electing me as their representative in the Legislative Council. I look forward to the opportunity of repaying this trust by working full time for the promotion and advancement of Pembroke. I would like to thank all those who assisted during my election campaign and in particular David Price, Carol Brown, Nicole Wells, Rod Hunt, the Honourable Lin Thorp, Ken Wriedt and the many volunteers that I was fortunate enough to have support my campaign. Final thanks must go to my family for their unending support - my mother, Christine, my sisters, Mary-Anne and Carolyn, my brothers, Joe and Peter, and my fiance, David. I am sure that I would not have managed without them.

Mr President, since the beginning of my campaign in February of this year I announced to the electorate that I would be a full-time and accessible representative. My campaign was based on a grassroots approach that focused on a vigorous door-knocking schedule that enabled me to door-knock the electorate twice during the campaign period. Pembroke includes the suburbs of Risdon Vale, Geilston Bay, Lindisfarne, Rose Bay, Montagu Bay, Rosny, Warrane, Mornington, Bellerive, Howrah and Tranmere. Not only have I developed an excellent understanding of the areas geographically by door-knocking but, more importantly, I have been privileged to be able to develop a better understanding of the underlying issues that are affecting the daily lives of people in my electorate, issues that include concerns about the natural resources of Pembroke, our beaches, wildlife parks and skyline, resources that must be respected and protected to provide long-term benefit and enjoyment for the future.

I have already met with numerous groups and individuals in relation to our environmental needs and look forward to achieving the best outcomes for Pembroke in this area. I was pleased to see that the Budget announced that this year there will be

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the development of a natural resources management framework to continue to assist identifying the management and conservation needs of our environment.

The people of Pembroke also voiced their concerns about the need for increased services on the eastern shore, services such as health, banking, increased police to match the ever-growing community needs on the eastern shore.

Mr President, I was delighted at the recent announcement that a Service Tasmania shop will soon be operating on the eastern shore and commend Premier Jim Bacon for his positive action on this issue. The citizens of the eastern shore will no longer be disadvantaged by having to travel to Sorell or across the Tasman Bridge to take advantage of a Service Tasmania shop.

I will continue to strive for increased standards in Pembroke, particularly for the disadvantaged, by the elimination of inequity and the extension of fairness and empowerment to those in need, a process that may only be achieved by strengthening community bonds and understanding that dignity must be afforded to all. The people of Pembroke can be assured that I will be working hard to ensure that all members of our community are represented in the manner they deserve.

I would now like to touch upon two issues that were prominent during my election campaign and they are the issues of Aboriginal reconciliation and parliamentary reform. The issue of Aboriginal reconciliation was raised with me in the electorate on numerous occasions. I am in support of the need to understand and recognise in real terms the relationship that the Aboriginal community has with the land and how this ties in with the wellbeing of the Tasmanian community. Any attempt at reconciliation that does not include the fundamental principle of land transfer would indeed be unrealistic and hollow, a sentiment that I am sure would be accepted by all honourable members in this House. I am also sure that all members of this House were as proud as I was at the fact that 25 000 Tasmanians walked the Tasman Bridge as a show of community support for reconciliation, a show of support for the value of recognising Aboriginal culture and appreciating the differences in social and heritage perspectives. This action was a clear indication that the Tasmanian community does want to move forward on the issue of reconciliation, a move that I look forward to being able to participate in on behalf of the people of Pembroke.

I would now like to move to the issue of parliamentary reform, particularly in regard to the Legislative Council which has received a lot of publicity over the past few months. Interestingly, in 1825 the Legislative Council was formed as a unicameral legislature. It was not until 24 October 1856 that a bicameral parliament was introduced and opened on 2 December of that year. The fact that it took 31 years to change to a bicameral system would seem to be quite a fast turn of events in the history of Parliament, given that full adult suffrage could not manage to be extended until 1968. Unbelievably, it took Parliament 143 years to become truly representative. It is fair to say that until 1968 - a time in living memory for most in this House - the application of democracy could only claim to be extended to the privileged minority.

I stand here to support the opposition of any system that would see the election of members that are only representative of a select few for the governance of the many. This brings me to the point of upper House independence and those arguments that

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have called for only Independent candidates to be elected as members to the Legislative Council are not those who argue that only those who claim to be Independent should be elected to the Legislative Council, arguing against the very principle of full adult suffrage, the introduction of which allowed for the first time the truly democratic right of the people to voice their preference for election of members in both Houses of the Tasmanian Parliament. Given that this right of full adult suffrage applies to both Houses of Parliament, why has this argument that advocates the election of only Independents not been applied to the House of Assembly? The answer is that it does not make sense in the lower House and nor does it make sense here in the Legislative Council. It would be undemocratic to attempt to deprive the Tasmanian electors of their hard-earned right to elect the candidate of their choice, regardless of whether candidates be Labor, Liberal, Green or Independent. Ultimately the choice should be with the Tasmanian people.

During the last cycle of Legislative Council elections I was very disappointed at the number of candidates who were opposed to a referendum on parliamentary reform when surveyed by the Mercury newspaper. I believe as members of parliament we are duty bound to at least be open to debate on the issue of parliamentary reform, regardless of the outcome. Not to do so dismisses our relevance to the people of Tasmania. We must strive at all times to be an accurate reflection of the needs and desires of the people who elect us. As members of this Council we are not masters unto ourselves but servants to the electors who have put us here by due democratic process.

I sincerely hope that all members of this Council look forward to openly debating any issues to enter the Parliament regarding parliamentary reform. I am certainly looking forward to examining the details and merit of all legislation that enters this Parliament on behalf of the people of Pembroke who have elected me to do so, understanding the principles upon which I stand as their elected Labor member in the Legislative Council. It is with these sentiments that I commend to you a budget that I believe underpins a very bright future for Tasmania.