



## Raymond John Groom

House of Assembly

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Electorate: Denison

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### ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

**Mr RAY GROOM** (Denison – Minister for Forests) – This is the second time I have made a maiden speech in a parliament in Australia and it is not quite the same the second time around. Nevertheless I do feel a sense of pride in now being a member of this important Chamber. I am very grateful to the people of Denison for the very generous support they showed in voting for me and I realise the onerous duty I have in honouring the trust they have shown. I promise them I will do my best to further the interests of the people of Denison and surrounding districts.

I might make the point that I do not believe I am a parochial person; I feel that I am a Tasmanian. I said before I am a Tasmanian number one but I am also an Australian number one and I hope I can do something also in a small way for the general community of Tasmania.

I want to congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to your very high office. I have great respect for you. I have known you for many years. We went to the same school; we played sport together but not on the same side. One of the mistakes you made was that you played for Burnie. We opposed each other in court a long time ago – you as a police prosecutor and myself as a very keen young barrister. I know you have all the ability and the qualities required to do your job very well. I would say, Sir, that you have already shown that quality in the way you have handled the House so far.

I want to commend the other members who have made their maiden speeches in this Chamber, particularly the member for Bass, Dr Madill, for what I thought was an excellent contribution in moving the Address-in-Reply. Many thoughtful comments were made in that speech. I commend also Mr Tony Rundle, the member for Braddon, for his excellent speech and the other members who have made their maiden speeches in this debate.

At the recent election the Government was returned and one would have to say it was a resounding victory. We had a swing towards the Government of almost 6 per cent which was very significant. It was in many respects an historic victory. One must ask why we had that victory – why did we win so well? I think the first point I would want to make to the House is that on this side of the Chamber we have an excellent Leader in the Premier, Robin Gray.

**Government members** – Hear, hear.

**Mr RAY GROOM** – He has proved himself to be a very strong member of this Parliament, a very strong leader of the Government and a man prepared to take the tough decisions, and I believe that is what the people are looking for. They like to see

strong leadership; they like to see a man who does not go to water when a little pressure is applied to him but is prepared to stand up and do what he believes is right. The other quality the Premier has which I believe is so important in politics is that he is a man of the people, he mixes with the community at large – with anyone in the community. They understand the way he thinks and he understands the way they think.

I think also that we now have a Party in Tasmania – the Liberal Party – which is a Party of the people. It is hooked in very much to the spirit, the feelings and the needs of ordinary Tasmanians. We are not bound, as the Governor said in his speech in opening this Parliament, by any strict political dogma, by any strict philosophy. As a Party and a government we want to do the right thing by the people we represent and to advance the interests of the community of Tasmania.

As a Party and as a government we recognise the workers particularly. I think sometimes people can ignore the workers. So many policies of governments over recent years, particularly from the early 1970s onwards, have ignored the contribution made by the workers in the community. They are the people who strive, who put in, who look after themselves and are not asking other people to look after them. They are the people who pay their taxes and do the right thing – the salt of the earth, the people who make Tasmania tick. Those who are working in our mines, out on fishing boats, in the forests, in factories, on the farms – wherever we like to mention – and in the offices too are the people who are making such a great contribution to Tasmania and they are the people we must look after. We support them as a Party and as a government, and they support us; that was shown very clearly in the result of the recent election.

I believe Tasmania has a exciting future. Let us not kid ourselves – our State is the best place in the world and we have to realise that. Many other people who are unbiased have supported the same conclusion. It is a beautiful place, rich in resources. Our people are intelligent and hardworking but what we must do, as Tasmanians, is fight for our identity. There is a risk that we could lose this if the trend towards centralism which we see developing and accelerating in Australia is allowed to succeed.

I believe in federalism. I think it is important that we have a division of power because the best way we can protect against some dictator or tyranny's taking over this country is to divide the power. Also it is a very big country geographically and it is best served by a federal system of government whereby government is very close to the people.

But we have a fight on our hands; there is no doubt about that. There is a gradual move towards centralising power which is accelerating all the time. We saw the dams case and decision by the High Court. Let us not believe that was a purely legal decision – it was a political decision. The judges were looking at authority but also, inside them, they had a philosophy which was expressed in that decision. People like Mr Justice Murphy and others were expressing their philosophy when they handed down that decision.

Here I give credit to the Premier, the previous Government and my colleagues. It is important that we do not concede anything but that we fight to retain this identity because we will make the most of our opportunities if we ourselves continue to have a

say in our own destiny. But if we are simply one small part of a mass Australia we will lose that chance to have a real say in our future.

After the election the Premier appointed me Minister for Forests, Mines and Sea Fisheries. I do not know whether he saw what was coming but I have found the job very interesting so far and I want to say a few things about forestry in particular.

We have had the controversies over Farmhouse Creek and the Lemnathyme valley and they are continuing – the protesters are still in the bush in the Lemnathyme area though things have quietened down quite a little at Farmhouse Creek. I want to say a few things on this point. With respect, not all the wisdom and sense of conserving the good things in our State reside in Dr Brown and Dr Bates – two members of this Chamber – and others involved in what I would describe as the radical conservation movement. They are not the only ones who know what we must do to protect our State. Over the years – going back more than a century – decent, ordinary Tasmanians have been making an effort to conserve our State and look after our State very well and I believe the record we have behind us is first class.

These conservationists were not ratbags; they were not people who threw themselves in front of bulldozers; they were ordinary decent people who acted in a responsible way maybe, on occasions, protesting. And it is good to see protests in our community; that shows we are a democracy. But it is very different if one throws himself in front of a machine or climbs on top of equipment. I do not believe that is a peaceful demonstration; I believe that is an act of violence because when one does that he is inciting others to react in some way.

I believe I know our forests as well as the member for Denison, Dr Brown. I believe I love our bush as much as he does. In very early days I used to go around the back of Trevallyn where I lived and walk through the bush with my dog and there are many other members who have done the same thing. We know what it is all about to be in the bush – and maybe on occasions we like to be there alone – but it is a matter of balance and applying some commonsense to the issue. We certainly need to preserve the beautiful things of our State and the things that are most rare but we also have to live, eat and exist.

The member for Denison, Dr Brown, who is a leading light in this movement – let us not kid ourselves – and his friends are challenging the values of mainstream Tasmanians. They thumb their noses at those values Tasmanians generally hold so dear. They and their friends apparently think we are mindless people, not able to think carefully and not able to reflect and reason about these issues. It is a sad fact that when these people go to the mainland they deride Tasmania and ridicule Tasmanians and this is not helping our image on the mainland.

The media coverage they receive is out of all proportion to their individual relevance to Tasmanian society. A worker at home playing his role as father and husband, with the sorts of responsibilities most ordinary decent Tasmanians have – hardworking, sensible, caring people – cannot hope to receive the same attention in our papers or on television as some galah up a tree. But the views of the workers are just as important individually as those of the galah who might want to sit up a tree for a long time. Fifty

galahs carrying on like idiots are not equal to the views of the total Tasmanian community of 350 000 or more people.

Government cannot take too much notice; though we must consider the views of these radical minorities we must also consider the general community as a whole. The Hare-Clark system allows people like Dr Brown and Dr Bates to be elected. That is fine; they are able to come to the Parliament and express their views. But it is rather a luxury for them to come here as single-issue people involved in conservation of the environment – and sometime involved in other issues – because the opposition and government parties must consider, weigh up and balance the broad feelings of the community, which it is not easy to do. That is democracy; we have to consider the views of the majority. If we acted in response to galahs and what they thought, we would not be doing the right thing for the community as a whole. We cannot listen and watch the antics of these people and say, ‘Hey, we must respond and we must satisfy them’. Heaven help us if a government governed by responding to the antics of a few well-schooled agitators or one or two hill-billy senators.

The values of these people who are victims of their own circumstances are not the values, as I have said, of ordinary Tasmanians. It was very well put in a comment in last Saturday’s *Melbourne Age* newspaper which is not often on the side of this Government, despite the fact that most of the paper on which the *Age* is printed comes from our forests. Mr Martin Flanagan said in this article:

‘The conservation movement is not blameless. At its edges, it contains individuals who, while claiming an acute sensitivity to nature, are capable of the most extraordinary insensitivity towards people and local cultures.’

That is exactly what they have been doing: ignoring the genuine feels of local people. There is some hypocrisy, I suggest, in their whole attitude. I am not sure how one compares the value of one tree against the value of another tree and say that tree is beautiful and this tree is ugly. These people burn wood in their fires and wood stoves, they eat off wooden tables and they have wooden floors on which they walk. They are prepared to use timber from our forests in that way to satisfy their own needs. One of Dr Brown’s colleagues, as I understand it, has at least an association with a shop which sells furniture made mainly from Tasmanian timbers. There is a slight hypocrisy in this. He is not concerned about one tree which has been cut down for his won use, he is concerned only about this other tree which he says is beautiful and must be protected in some way.

Those involved in the protest are basically against the work ethic and, as the Deputy Premier has already indicated, many of them involved in the protest are not themselves involved in work. They are anti-family and family life and I believe also that they are anti-Tasmanian. It is time that the general Tasmanian community, the silent majority, stood up and spoke out – not in any violent way, not inciting trouble, but in a very dignified way. They should speak out, express their own commonsense and tell these people what they really think of them. They have put pressure on the community and the community should put some pressure and some heat on them so that they understand the way the community thinks.

We are good managers of our forests. A long time ago there was exploitation of the forest but over many years – and I give credit to previous governments – we have had improving management of our forests. We have some 47 per cent of our land mass covered in forest at the present time. As far as crown land is concerned, we are almost at a stage where we will have sustained yield; that is, the total number of trees will remain the same. When an area is logged it is reafforested quite quickly and normally with the same kind of forest which has been taken away. Those trees are then left there to grow as eucalypts on 80 or 90 years' rotation, so eventually they will be cut down.

We have reached a stage really where Tasmania has a large area of its land mass protected – beautiful land, mountains, rivers, lakes and forest – as national park. We should begin to look at the forests within State reserves as productive ones – as farmland, in a sense, where trees are growing and can be cut down, just as agricultural land is used for producing the thing that we need. The area of State forest is for productive forest purposes and that is needed for our community to satisfy its needs in a sensible way so that it may also be used for recreational purposes, for producing honey and for aesthetic enjoyment. We can still do that and also use the forest in a proper way for production.

We have management plans which have been very carefully devised. In respect of both Farmhouse Creek and the Lemonthyme, as I have said many times before, management plans were put in place back in 1983, after careful consideration in both instances and with opportunity being given for public input. Those plans considered protecting all of the aesthetic values as well as providing logs and timber for our mills and it is just another example of the work being undertaken by the Forestry Commission.

Unemployment obviously remains a very important issue in Tasmania. We have created a very substantial number of jobs over recent years and I think the efforts of the Government and its record since it was elected on the first occasion have been very good. Much of our direction and drive has been to develop the State in a sensible and proper way and to provide jobs.

I want to refer briefly to the pilot scheme we have under way at George Town. I think it is an excellent scheme. I think it is very sad when people who are fit, young and able to work receive unemployment benefits and do no work in return for it. It is a very different situation for aged people, those with disabilities and so on but I am sure most of the young people on unemployment benefits would like to have the chance to work. I have put this to the Federal Government before. Even when I was a minister I put the argument that we should have a scheme – it could even be voluntary; that would still be an advantage – where people were required to do some work for a few hours a week in return for the unemployment benefits. This would give them a sense of making a contribution and getting something in return. It would give them a sense of direction. It used to amaze me that people talked about the conventions of the International Labor Organisation and said this would be forced labour and such a scheme could not be. The point was also made that it would not work.

I believe this House should give this scheme a real chance and support it. The Leader of the Opposition has already indicated that he does not think the scheme is very worthwhile and does not find it particularly impressive. I must say that I was disappointed that he would take that attitude because this is a chance for young people

who are unemployed and have been unemployed for some time to do some work and receive some benefit for that work. It is a pilot scheme which I believe could work very well in the rest of Australia. Let us give it a chance. I am sure if we do that and get right behind it, it will work and work very successfully. The detail must of course be handled with great care.

The only other point I want to make concerns the profession of politics. I think politics is a very noble profession and it is obviously very important. We are our worst enemies because we criticise ourselves as politicians and run ourselves down. I think one of the things we must be careful about is being puppets of the Press – doing the things it wants us to do and reacting as it wants. It is not that the reporters individually guide these things particularly. I think the general community probably guides them. The people want entertainment, they think they must have entertainment in the papers and the politicians must therefore be entertaining people and do all sorts of funny things to get on the front page. But let us not underrate the importance of the job we have. We have a duty to act as best we can and in the proper way, both in this House and outside, and to give some leadership to the community at large because I am sure that is what its members are looking for.

I do not think we can take the Parliament for granted. I do not think we can accept the fact that the Parliament will be here for ever. Its life has been very short if we look at the history of mankind and there is no reason to believe it will continue for ever unless we look after it as an institution. Unless the institution is respected by the community, I think it is in danger – I am not talking about the short term but maybe in 50 or 100 years, who knows when, of gradually losing its power and influence and becoming simply a token thing not having any real part to play in the development of policy or the government of our State.

Of course it is going to be very difficult for us to continue to behave the way we have over the past few days. That is not the nature of politics, and emotions will be aroused. It is obviously important that, from time to time when big issues arise, emotions should be stirred in this place, so long as we do it in the right sort of way and do not throw things at each other and as long as we try to avoid attacking personalities. But sometimes one has to make a point about a personality to get a message across. Quite frankly, I must say that I have been very impressed by what I have seen so far. Of course almost half the members of the House are new so we may still be talking to each other. But from my observations it is looking pretty good at the moment and maybe the Press could make a bigger point of that.

We have a job to do together and it is not only those in government who have a primary responsibility to govern the State. I think both sides of the House have to work together in their own way to develop the scheme of things in the interests of Tasmania. I am certainly looking forward to working within the Government and with all the members of this House for the benefit of all Tasmanians, no matter where they might live. I am looking forward to a very interesting and productive time as a member of this Chamber.

**Government members** – Hear, hear.