

Inaugural Speech – Paul O’Halloran MP



Paul O’Halloran MP

House of Assembly

Date: 9 June 2010

Electorate: Braddon

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mr O’HALLORAN (Braddon - Inaugural) - Mr Speaker, I rise today to offer my inaugural address to the House of Assembly.

Members - Hear, hear.

Mr O’HALLORAN - The school assembled for its annual prize-giving evening. There was an edge of excitement and quiet anticipation as Churchill, Prime Minister, strode to the podium. He paused, composed himself and said in his characteristic, deliberative, growling voice, 'Never give up'. That was it, and that was all that was needed to be said.

My history teachers told me that Tasmania was discovered in 1642 by Abel Tasman, but the true history of Tasmania predates European discovery. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today. I respect the determination and 'never give up' attitude of generations of Tasmanian indigenous people in ensuring their place in Tasmania's long history is not overlooked.

At this election, the Tasmanian Greens achieved a historically high vote and accepted the challenge to deliver a responsible, stable and cooperative government to help map a better and more prosperous future for Tasmania. This has been achieved without compromising our principles and we will work to build a healthy and sustainable future for all. The election has restored representation of Greens MPs in each of the State's five electorates, a situation last seen prior to the 1998 cut in MP numbers.

The Tasmanian people want increased transparency, accountability and honesty in public decision-making. They want a parliament which cooperates on the merit of the issue of debate in a constructive manner. A power-sharing parliament now makes very real a possibility of decisions being made on the Floor of the Parliament instead of one party being able to make decisions without consultation behind closed doors. This style of governance has a far greater chance of delivering what the people want. They want stability, they want cooperation and they want us to get on with it.

Government and Greens members - Hear, hear.

Mr O’HALLORAN - I remain optimistic that the renewed Government with its fresh new members will show willing and bring new thinking to the old political ways. We all have a responsibility to earn the confidence of the electorate in this new Government and build on that confidence to deliver stability, wealth creation and jobs. We have a responsibility to create a future based on hope and optimism. Cooperative government is already proving its worth because each grouping has significant leverage, but it is the mere sharing of ideas which is its greatest strength.

I am reminded of the great French novelist Marcel Proust who, when asked what his favourite colour was, responded by saying, 'Beauty lies not in the colours but in their harmony'. There will be many challenges along the way. We need to have robust relationships and processes in place to convert these challenges into twenty-first century opportunities.

I wish to recognise that Braddon has changed since Di Hollister so capably represented this electorate before she lost her seat because of the short-sighted and foolish decision to cut the numbers in 1998. I welcome the inclusion of west coast communities. I am committing myself today to working hard for a fair go for the west coast. I will also work hard to restore the numbers to the pre-1998 arrangements, as only this will guarantee adequate levels of representation, a viable backbench, and that accountability and decision-making return to the Floor of Parliament.

It is the work of artists like Raymond Arnold who are making significant contributions to the wellbeing of the west. Arnold has set up a project called Landscape Art Research Queenstown, LARQ, which aims to bring a focus to the western region through connectedness to community, culture and both the heritage and natural

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values inherent in this region. During the 2010 campaign I encountered Raymond on two occasions: once at the opening of his esteemed western Tasmanian paintings exhibition at the Devonport Regional Gallery, and later in Queenstown when I met with the steering committee for the proposed and exciting GeoPark proposal and to make an announcement about returning mining royalties to local regions. Raymond's print-making and painting is world class. His work life, which moves between Paris and Queenstown, embraces connections across the globe that best reflect the universal language of the arts. Arnold's journey to make the complex simple, complements the awesome power of the arts to bring communities together, importantly doing what the arts do best and that is to break down barriers and happen upon the essence of life.

Some talk about simple truths. As an extension of this valuing of the arts and Tasmania's sense of place in the global art world, we as Tasmanians need to feel pleased with our current levels of creativity and our future prospects. Hobart is a burgeoning centre of the arts, and we in Braddon take comfort in my schoolmate Martin Flanagan's observation that Bloomsbury can be found in Burnie. Tasmania has a very vibrant arts community, and this will be our salvation in the longer term.

Braddon is a small, unique part of the world. The mountains, coastline, wild beaches, forests, soils, climate and people of Braddon are special. I am standing here as a proud Tasmanian Greens member for Braddon because I want to be involved in maintaining the specialness of the area and at the same time create new jobs and maintain a high standard of living for all our people.

The last 12 years of Labor majority government saw a lack of accountability and transparency creep into Tasmanian decision-making. I promise to bring good and representative governance back to Braddon, governance that is inclusive and listens to the community. I will do my best to restore trust and to bring integrity, openness and transparency to decision-making.

I would firstly like to address issues of education. We are undergoing a time of rapid social, political and cultural change. Seventy per cent of students in school today will move into jobs not yet created. Those who are knowledge- and technology-rich will be the big winners. Education is fundamental to equipping learners with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to cope with change, and to provide economic security. It generates the jobs of the future and is fundamental to a vibrant economy and functioning democracies, to life in the twenty-first century. It is the main way we cope with change and solve problems. It is the key to investing in the next generation. Australia is towards the bottom of the OECD countries in funding to education. Australia ranks twenty-third out of 25 developed countries in spending on early childhood education. This is where maximum impact can be made with investment in early identification and intervention, a key area of focus in our Tasmanian Greens education policy. I compliment Labor on their Raising the Bar, Closing the Gap, and Launch into Learning initiatives as they are clearly making the rubber hit the road. These are excellent examples of funding schools on the basis of need, thereby addressing issues of disadvantage, but more needs to be done.

In my previous work as a teacher, and as the national project manager with the University of Tasmania, I was fortunate enough to see a lot of schools, universities and training bodies around the nation. I have a fair idea, given my background, of what works and what does not work in education. I want Tasmanians to have the best possible access to high quality education and training programs which best meet the needs of individuals and the economic needs of the State. Education is a key factor in socioeconomic status and social inclusion or exclusion. Those with a post-year 10 qualification greatly enhance their employment and economic status. Tasmania lags behind other States in educational participation and retention, and in educational attainment, with Braddon, partly because of its rurality, especially affected. A twenty-first century economy demands greater levels of education and training, and we must make significant improvements in all educational indicators.

Announced just two days ago, Labor and the Greens negotiated a way forward to build a new platform from which we can take all stakeholders forward together in the post-year 10 sector. Community trust needs to be restored and the spotlight needs to be placed back on learners and on the structure that best meets their needs and also the needs of the Tasmanian economy. Education in all its forms will underpin good physical and mental health, smarter ways of working, improved interpersonal relatedness, greater appreciation for and respect of our natural environment, and a dignified life and death. Our collective priority needs to be a cradle-to-grave commitment to all forms of education, customised to suit the stages of people's lives - as parents caring for our young families, as teachers and education workers in school settings, as employers working with employees, as community education networkers supporting adults in transition, as nurses and palliative carers allowing people to die with dignity.

Braddon needs to build on its strengths. To survive, our primary industry sector needs to be supported in research and innovation so that niche differentiated products are produced. This will reduce our vulnerability as we will become price-makers, not price-takers as we are at the moment. Our agricultural institutions, the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research, will all play a fundamentally important role in the future in a Greens-influenced government. The Greens have a sound track record in this area, having pioneered the clean, green and clever brand that now underpins the marketing advantage for the Tasmanian product, from King Island cheese to Cape Grim beef. We have also pursued securing agricultural training facilities such as the important Freer farm outside Burnie.

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I share the widely held view that the great global challenges we face include food and water security, climate security, energy security and continued environmental degradation. The Greens understand the urgency of the climate challenge as well as the opportunities that transforming Australia into a carbon neutral powerhouse will create. These benefits will be in the creation of new jobs and in the improved health and wellbeing of communities. Tasmania, with its wave energy, hot rocks, wind and Hydro, is particularly well placed to take advantage of the climate crisis.

Our global human population has doubled since 1950 and will double again by 2050. Two new children are added to the planet every second. Close to one billion children went to bed hungry last night. Practically all arable land is being used. We are in fact losing land normally used to grow food, to degradation, rising sea levels, changing climate, desertification, urbanisation and to the growing of biofuels. We need to grow more on less land. At the same time, we will have a 40 per cent deficit by 2013 in graduates needed to drive increased productivity, innovation and R&D in the area of food production. With its fertile soils and highly regarded university and private and public research bodies, Tasmania is well placed to take advantage of these global challenges.

Braddon has high levels of social disadvantage. A recent TasCOSS report paints a confronting picture of 150 000 Tasmanians struggling to survive just above the breadline, with 55 000 living in poverty. Some 38 per cent of Braddon residents are reliant on government allowances. I mention this because poverty generates fear, despair and a loss of hope and its compounding stressors can lead to family violence and breakdown, child abuse and neglect, alcohol and drug addiction, and to the desperate poor gambling away a non-existent disposable income, aided and abetted by a Tasmanian addiction to gaming revenue. These are the components of social exclusion. They are not the result of clever, kind connectedness. It will be frank and open community discussion on good and not-so-good trends that will enable the people of Braddon to guarantee their children and their children’s children a happy, connected community based future.

I will fight to bring a sense of hope to those in Braddon who are doing it tough. I will fight for a better public transport system, including cycleways, better public and affordable housing, and increased access to education and training opportunities, particularly the National Broadband Network. I am committed to a world-class north-west cycleway. This cycleway, parts of which are already constructed, will deliver substantial community benefits through improving community connectedness, promoting healthy lifestyles and providing alternative transport options. It will also showcase the unique features of the north-west and will provide a boost to employment, particularly in the small business sector. There is a growing domestic and international market in bicycle tourism. I will work with councils and stakeholder groups to see that this idea becomes a reality.

As a young boy, growing up on a soldier-settlement dairy farm, deep in the forests of the Tarkine, I experienced a happy and carefree life, full of innocence, with families working together in communities with spirit. I was just four years old when eight soldier settler families banded together and ran the first power lines; when the community shared the local telephone exchange. These are some of my very first memories.

That community, its milk tankers, its school, its community centre, which I helped to build, and its jobs have long since disappeared - sacrificed to the short-sighted ‘wisdom’ of managed investment schemes. This place of course was Preolenna. How well I can remember the beauty of the rainforests and the inspiration drawn from them. Even at a young age I used to wish that the rainforests of the Tarkine, their smells and their unique plants and animals could be protected from the ravages of industrial scale logging. It is with a great level of satisfaction that I am partly responsible for the demise of the divisive Tarkine loop road and the potential devastation it would have brought to the integrity of the largest tract of intact rainforest in Australia and the threat it would have brought to iconic Tasmanian species such as the freshwater lobster and the threatened Tasmanian devil. I am excited that the announcement of this road’s demise comes on the back of my first question in Parliament. However, much more work needs to be done to secure the long-term future and protection of our unique Tarkine region.

Greens members - Hear, hear.

Mr O’HALLORAN - I look forward to the time, hopefully in this term of Parliament, when this globally unique region, the Tarkine, with its outstanding ecological and cultural features will be protected within a national park. The Cradle Coast Authority in a well researched paper has shown that the Tarkine region could inject \$58 million into the region and create 1 100 new jobs. It will become the Kakadu of the north-west coast, returning economic, social and environmental benefits and job and wealth creation to the whole of the region from Corinna to Wynyard and from Waratah to Smithton. A Tarkine national park in the life of this Parliament would be more likely if all members of this Parliament would join me and walk through this jewel of Braddon. This is my invitation to you.

It was during the 2010 election campaign that I chanced upon my childhood neighbour and friend, Barry Duckett, whom I had not seen for 30 years. We reflected on our times at boarding school in Burnie and in the bush. This coming together after so many years has been a great reminder of the importance of childhood in giving kids a good start in life and building the personal resilience to manage the sometimes harsh realities of daily life. The

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sheer privilege and honour of being a candidate for public office has been an endless reminder of the importance of relationships and the vitalness of connections across communities.

Changing long-held community views is a long and difficult process and often involves conflict, pain and even death. Think of the civil rights movement in the USA, the battle to allow women the right to vote, the denial of the existence of the Aboriginal nation, the fight to save the Franklin River in Tasmania and the significant changes about to occur in the Tasmanian timber industry. All these changes were initiated at the fringes, always by brave individuals and groups who were ahead of mainstream thinking and had the capacity and determination to bring about change. Change needs to be informed by accurate information and robust and resilient decision making processes, that is informed decision making.

Our recent Tasmanian political history does not stand out in this regard and I would like to use one example - forestry. Fourteen of those present in this Chamber were also present when the then Premier, Paul Lennon, successfully moved to have Gunns proposed pulp mill bypass the independent RPDC process and have it fast-tracked by inadequate parliamentary assessment. Those present were not told that the mill was, in the view of the RPDC, 'critically non-compliant' against environmental guidelines but, instead, were told Gunns would abandon the process because it was taking too long. Labor, the Liberals, the Tasmanian Greens all went to the 2006 election supporting an independent assessment process. How quickly Labor and Liberal went to water and fell over themselves to pass enabling legislation. It was at this point that the mill lost community and scientific support. Only my four colleagues stood firm.

We have some of the most carbon dense forests on the planet. One hectare of our forests contains around 1 200 tonnes of carbon stored above and below the ground. Not only are these forests stores of tradeable carbon, they are extremely biodiverse and will drive future jobs growth and wealth creation. Some in this Chamber seem to doubt the science that old-growth forests play a critical role in storing carbon and mitigating climate change. Forestry Tasmania thinks that current forest practices are sustainable. This is about as accurate as the recent statement by Forestry Tasmania - and I quote - 'The Tasmanian devils' plight is a result of facial tumour disease, not the loss of habitat.' It may be because of this attitude and ignorance that we continue to plunder the habitat of this iconic animal.

It is an act of dereliction that Forestry Tasmania does not audit, does not even seem to know, or want to know, the climate change implications of its operations, especially the despised forest regeneration burns. My preliminary calculations suggest that carbon emissions from these burns exceed many times over those from all vehicles on Tasmanian roads. The science has spoken, and the science is very clear - deforestation accounts for more than 20 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, and Tasmania, with one of the highest rates of deforestation in the world, should hang its head in shame.

The Tasmanian forestry sector is clearly in crisis. It has received more than \$1 billion in aid since 1988, including \$3.6 million just last week - a subsidy to drive logging deeper into high conservation value forests. All this to prop up a failed business model, a model that has failed on social, environmental and economic grounds. The industry has virtual free access to a public asset, and is heavily subsidised, and yet still loses money. An Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics forest investment paper released recently details that subsidies and lack of competitive processes for the pricing of native timber have distorted the markets and put in place barriers to investment in plantation, thereby crowding out private-sector investment.

Who will take responsibility for 37 years of mismanagement in the Tasmanian forest industry? Will it be current and past members of the Legislative Council? Will it be those compliant and unquestioning former members? Will it be Forestry Tasmania, industry spokespeople, Gunns, backroom boys? Who will it be? Who will take responsibility for this scandalous situation? Will it be those returned members on my left? Will it be those returned members on my right? Maybe not, as they were falling over themselves to outbid one another to re-sign the Regional Forest Agreement seven years before it was due to expire. This is the very same Regional Forest Agreement that has been rejected by other States and has locked in the current appalling state of affairs. All that the Regional Forest Agreement and Community Forest Agreement have only is to encourage the industry to continue with a flawed business model and give it a prolonged happy hour, a happy hour that has continued unabated for 37 years.

There is no point in making more excuses. We have a responsibility to our fellow citizens to reflect on what has been lost and what it will cost to transform the forest industry into one that all Tasmanians can be proud of.

The industry has been handed \$650 million in monetary subsidies since 1997, \$250 million since 2005. It has enjoyed resource security, exemptions from many planning laws and the advantages of tax minimisation schemes. There has never been any analysis of the cost of the industry - of roads and bridges, of silted-up rivers and the costs to flora and fauna, to poisoned water and polluted air, to lost water availability and the cost of lost opportunities in other industries, particularly those of a low carbon economy.

I urge you all to read the Commonwealth Auditor-General's performance report, *Tasmanian Forest Industry Development and Assistance Progress Audit Report No. 26, 2007-08*. This report fully exposes the scandalous

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state of affairs that is the Tasmanian forest industry. We currently have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform the forest industry into one based on rigorous science, one which has a social licence, and one that is ethical, sustainable and viable. The community divisions on this issue need to end. We need a real plan for the future, a plan which secures long-term sustainable jobs in the sector.

How appropriate it would be for this transformation to take place in 2010. This year, we have renewal and transformation in this Parliament, and this is the International Year of Biodiversity. Just as human communities need to be connected, so too do the millions of living species in this State. Species are bound together by intricate and intimate co-dependent relationships, many of which we do not fully understand. We are currently going through the greatest species extinction rate in our five billion years of earth history, 1 000 times the background rate and Tasmania is far from exempt. Over the last six years, 41 native Tasmanian species joined the endangered list, with 11 being listed as vulnerable. We must do better.

In the midst of a climate crisis it is immoral to suggest, as Forestry Tasmania does, that it is environmentally and climate friendly to ram millions of tonnes of complex, biodiverse ecosystems through wood-fired power plants. Just as I fought against the introduction of industrial-scale wood chipping in the 1970s, so, too, I will fight the native forest-fed biomass generators being planned at the moment.

The time is right to make public the true cost of forestry practices via an open book, public audit of Forestry Tasmania. Tasmanians have a right to know how public subsidies have been used over many years. The veneer, the lack of transparency, over decades of forest subsidies has to end. My hope is that this becomes a reality in the first year of this Parliament, and I trust that this Parliament can work together to achieve this outcome.

The Tasmanian Greens have been strong advocates over the years in prosecuting the Greens manifesto of consuming less, sharing more and having fun. It is these three principles working together like a three-legged stool which provide the balance and stability for being healthy individuals, for becoming healthy communities and for ensuring a healthy, natural environment. This life view will underpin my agenda in representing the people of Braddon.

The inaugural parliamentary speeches of Tasmanian Greens' parliamentary leaders are full of vision and have, to a greater or lesser extent, been realised, and I would like to focus on a couple of those. Just out of Risdon Jail in 1993, having been arrested while protesting to protect the Franklin River, the newly-elected and now highly respected man of Australian politics, Bob Brown, noted:

'To stay a happy and prosperous place takes innovative government, new ideas, and a continuous concern that the long-term assets we have are not lost through short-term grab-and-run developmental policies'.

In 1989 Christine Milne asked how we could bring about the potential to move from a predominantly resource-based economy to a brains-based economy without making education a key priority of government. She also said the former Government had neither the strength nor the inclination to force the traditional powerbrokers in Tasmania, the resource-based companies, to pay their way.

Peg Putt, in 1993, very prophetically said:

'Change is our friend. It is Tasmania's friend, but unfortunately it appears an enemy to the Government of Tasmania. It looks back to the past and clings desperately to the ideas and methods of an era which is past.'

The old adage 'the more things change the more they stay the same' certainly rings true here.

Skipping forward a decade, it was the current Leader of the Tasmanian Greens, Nick McKim, who said this:

'The Labor and Liberal parties first heard the words "clean and green" from one of Tasmania's great 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 can remember standing on a mountain top overlooking the Florentine River with Nick just before the election in 2002, wondering who he was and where he came from. Who would have thought that eight short years later Nick would not only be the Leader of the Tasmanian Greens but would have led them to an historic vote-winning election and would be a Cabinet member in a power-sharing parliament. I thank you, Nick, for your contribution to making a better Tasmania, and especially the way you supported me in my pathway to being elected as a member of Braddon.

Bob Brown has more to do with my standing here today than anyone else. Bob is a person who stands up and delivers for what he believes is right. He is a man of compassion, of wisdom, of courage and of tenacity. He

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has championed the protection of many special places in this nation. He has been sued and imprisoned in his pursuit of a socially just and environmentally sustainable future. Bob has inspired thousands to fight against injustices, from the proposed flooding of the Franklin River to the rights of asylum seekers. Bob is a very special person, a truly great Australian, and I would like to thank him personally on behalf of countless others for his leadership and advocacy for a saner world. Bob Brown never gives up.

I would just like to conclude by acknowledging a few people. I would firstly like to thank all the people who supported me in my campaign in Braddon. There were countless numbers of them. Literally there were hundreds of people who supported me, and to every one of them I say a big, big thank you. I would especially like to thank my very selfless support candidates - there were four of them - who had no hope of being elected but stood purely to get representation by me in Braddon, and I thank them from the bottom of my heart. I would like to acknowledge their names in *Hansard*, and they are Claire Gilmour, Melissa Houghton - who actually is about to go to Macquarie Island to fight the rabbit plague - David Henderson, and Ted Field , who is a bit of a legend around the north-west. I know he will not like my doing this, but I would really like to especially thank my friend John Price, who was my campaign manager and who is sitting at the back. John has been a fantastic support to me over the years, but particularly during the election campaign and without his wisdom and support I just would not be here today, I am absolutely sure of that. Thanks, John.

I would like to acknowledge the support of my beautiful wife Angela, and my beautiful daughter, Claire, who are here today, and to thank them for their love and support during the campaign, so thanks very much, guys, I appreciate it.

Sitting suspended from 1 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Mr O’HALLORAN - It seems clear that I do not know what the bells mean. Clearly, I have lost a bit of momentum here, so I thought I might backtrack a little. The school assembled for its annual prize -

Members laughing.

Mr O’HALLORAN - No, I am only joking. I got up to thanking my wife, Angela, and my daughter, Claire. I was about to thank my son, Thomas, who obviously is not here. He is not here because he has just had a year snowboarding in Canada, and right now he is actually in Mexico parked up somewhere in a luxury resort about to watch the World Cup. So there you go. I just hope that he comes home soon and gets a job.

Members laughing.

Mr O’HALLORAN - I will just finish by saying that for the duration of our Braddon Greens campaign our mantra was: 'We can, if we can work together, standing shoulder to shoulder, committed to the notion of a better Tasmania'. We, the people of Braddon, did and we, the Parliament of Tasmania, can.

Members - Hear, hear.