

Inaugural Speech – Peg Putt MP



Peg Putt MP

House of Assembly

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - The honourable member for Denison, Ms Peg Putt. I remind the House that this is the honourable member's maiden speech and I ask honourable members to afford her the normal courtesy.

Ms PUTT (Denison) - Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have the honour to deliver my inaugural or maiden speech.

I feel very strongly that the first thing I must say in this House is that we are invaders in this land. Until we fully acknowledge Aboriginal rights in Tasmania, no one amongst us can hold his head up proudly; our actions are all rendered worthless and we are shamed. The early European settlers brought with them a cultural baggage that included incredible arrogance and an unwillingness to acknowledge the reality of the Aboriginal occupation of this island. Instead they preferred a fabricated story which suited them better.

The doctrine of *terra nullius* was overturned only last year in the historic Mabo decision which has finally acknowledged that native title exists in Australia. Ironically this had to be achieved by going through our European justice system. Added to this denial of the existence of the Aboriginal nation was the vile and despicable attempt to exterminate the Aboriginal race in Tasmania, and just as vile and despicable today is the attempt now to deny the very existence of Aboriginal people on this island.

The enactment of land rights here is absolutely imperative. This Government should stand condemned for not making that the primary emphasis of its governance in this term. The Legislative Council also stands condemned for the role it has had in ensuring that Aboriginal land rights have not yet been enacted in Tasmania. I think perhaps it is time that we actually thought about Federal government intervention. It would be welcome and it would be long overdue.

I also support self-determination for Aboriginal people in Tasmania. If the Aboriginal national chooses to live alongside ours under its traditional customs and laws, so be it; it is welcome to it and I support it. I have been fortunate in my life to spend a couple of years living with Aboriginal people - the Yolnu people of Elcho Island in north-east Arnhem Land - as well as spending considerable time with the kooris in New South Wales. I speak the Aboriginal language, Djumbapurgnu, and I recommend to other people that they take the trouble to go and spend some time and learn, through speaking the language, to understand a different culture.

I learnt much in my time in north-east Arnhem Land about myself, our culture - one sees it well when it is reflected against another - Yolnu culture and language, and our relationship with the land and our materialist outlook. We do not own the land; it

Inaugural Speech – Peg Putt MP

owns us. We belong to it, we are formed by it, we are part of it, we rely upon it for our existence and there is an overriding imperative for us to nurture it.

Our culture has gotten the relationship with the land and the rest of nature completely mixed up. The doctrine of stewardship from the Bible was somehow misconstrued into the concept of subjugation and all that has come with that. Recent religious argument has focused on the reinterpretation of 'Genesis' so that stewardship is comprehended as caring, not simply as doing what we wish with what we find at our disposal.

When the doctrine of evolution was first postulated it led to responses of horror at the very suggestion that we were part of the animal kingdom. And then we look at the alienation of modern society, the artificial world created by cities, entertainments, distractions, worlds of concepts and ideas, talk and babble, and very little time spent simply on being in a natural setting. It has led to a society where surveys have shown that inner city children cannot tell the difference between one type of leaf and another.

But the underlying theme in all of this and the behaviour of our culture has been greed and selfish exploitation. I agree with David Suzuki, who has described modern Australia as 'an ecological disaster, characterised by a squalid history of greed, shortsightedness and ignorance'. Unfortunately these attitudes are well entrenched in government in Tasmania.

We are blessed here with environmental treasures of international renown and significance: the wild expanses of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area; the Franklin River flowing free; the magnificent tall forests of the south; the rugged beauty of the Great Western Tiers; the incomparable temperate rainforest of the Tarkine - Australia's largest tract of rainforest whose Gondwanic affiliations connect us to one hundred million years of evolution.

The role of my predecessor, Dr Bob Brown, in championing the protection of these wonderful places and the myriad of creatures who dwell therein cannot be overstated. Bob's wisdom, courage, tenacity and vision combined with his ability to articulate so well on behalf of nature; his boldness in advocating for social justice; and his ability to inspire others to give of themselves for the planet and each other, set him apart as a very special person. As Christine said earlier, he is a person of international stature. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him on behalf of conservationists around Tasmania and Australia for his unstinting efforts on behalf of Planet Earth and to wish him well in this Saturday's Federal election.

In Tasmania we have seen Liberal governments facilitate the ruthless exploitation of the State at considerable environmental and economic cost. Labor has proved little different. They recognise the evils of exploitation of an unprotected work force by corporate greed but when they are confronted by that same exploitative corporation's destructive and degrading impact on our natural areas for profit, they go to jelly. In the words of Bob Dylan, 'Money doesn't talk; it swears'.

We have seen Labor introduce forest resource security legislation in Tasmania with Liberal support. The two old parties will again collaborate on mining resource

Inaugural Speech – Peg Putt MP

security and, all the while, as environmental values are eroded so too are economic opportunities.

Once not so long ago the Greens' suggestion that Tasmania's wilderness and high-quality environment were its most significant competitive advantage was greeted with mirth. This was surely some implausible attempt to advance an economic argument to counter the economic credentials of the forest industry which has saddled Tasmanians with a \$500 million debt. The Greens are the innovators and the change makers.

Federally little divides Labor and Liberal on the environment. They conspire to keep conservation a dead issue. They compete with platitudes and bandaid measures, never coming close to tackling the root causes of environmental decline nor understanding the social and economic consequences of this failure.

Today I believe we have the Federal Minister for the Environment, Ros Kelly, announcing a wonderful environmental initiative that will not cost any money, that will not ruffle any feathers, and that is to be announced late in the afternoon in a car park in some nether suburb of Melbourne. What commitment!

Wilderness has become a Tasmanian trademark, of course, although we still struggle here in this House and around Tasmania with entrenched attitudes that would not have it so. Canberra deserves the same shake-up, the same breath of fresh air that the Greens have brought to political life in Tasmania and in Bob Brown and the Greens they will get it at this election and the next - the times they are a'changing. Ideas take on their own being and cannot be stopped.

I spoke earlier of Tasmania's wild places. I am fortunate to come from a conservationist background. My parents are both mountaineers and my father, Colin Putt, is a well-known adventurer. He was in the party which first climbed Big Ben, the mountain on Heard Island, and he was made a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society after that expedition. He has also taken part in several sailing and climbing expeditions to Greenland with the late Bill Tillman, and more recently to the Antarctic, ferrying private expeditions to Mawson's Hut and Mount Minto. He ventured up the Baliem Valley to the Castenz Mountains, in what is now west Papua, in 1960. My grandmother is also a conservationist and was always an avid walker and lover of wild places. She survived a night caught out in snow on the top of Mount Ruapehu in New Zealand when she was in her sixties with no ill-effects - she did want a cup of tea.

My parents imbued me with a love of the bush from an early age. Photographs show me perched in the top of Dad's rucksack long before I could walk and I spent a large part of my childhood in the bush.

Marie Byles, New South Wales' first woman barrister, also a Buddhist monk and responsible for the reservation of most of the national park areas to the immediate north of Sydney, was a family friend. Dorothy Butler, the 'barefoot bushwalker', often minded me when I was little. I had the pleasure of two weeks' walking in the MacDonnell Ranges west of Alice Springs the winter before last with Dorothy, aged eighty, and Alex Colley, aged eighty-two, founder of the Colong Committee, one of Australia's earliest conservation groups, and still a conservation activist.

Inaugural Speech – Peg Putt MP

Conservation has a history; some attempt to portray it as a very recent phenomenon but this is not so. The Tasmanian Conservation Trust, of which I was director until less than two weeks ago, celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary this April. I grew up with avowed conservationists. I will not call it a tradition. I abhor the use of the term 'traditional user' by government members in this House when they so comprehensively ignore the rights of the real traditional owners and users of this island.

Conservation has gained prominence as our society has encroached further and further upon our natural treasures, as our ecological understanding has grown and as the magnitude of our impact on the environment has become clear. As we have increasingly threatened the very survival of species, of ecosystems and of ourselves, the alarm bells have begun to ring.

We have seen the Earth from space - a beautiful blue and green sphere, finite and fragile, and infinitely lovely - and with that image our consciousness has been changed forever. We know absolutely that clean seas do not go on forever; that if we pour our waste into the water it will not just disappear but will pollute and damage aquatic ecosystems. We know that there is not an infinity of forests over the next hill and the next, and that we have cleared too many already and the desert is encroaching. We know that the air - the atmosphere surrounding the planet - cannot be polluted without causing damage and changes which will affect all life; the ozone hole, the greenhouse effect - we know that everything is interconnected.

We have yet to integrate this knowledge into our economic thinking. Our economics still regard environmental input as infinite and always there. The depletion of our natural capital is not accounted into our thinking as yet. Economists still imagine that we can go on degrading forever, and that our resources will not come to an end and the inputs will still be there for perpetual growth.

Not only do we deplete our natural capital but we deny ourselves other opportunities in the destruction of our environment. The impact of destructive activities on other uses and values impacts on our economic system as much as it impacts on our environment. Internationally, conventions are now signed dealing with ozone depletion, the greenhouse effect and with the maintenance of biodiversity.

In Tasmania we have no satisfactory legislation or strategy to protect threatened species, ecosystems and landforms. A Clayton's strategy has been developed, of which the Government and the Environment minister had not even had the commitment to declare ownership before they sent it out around the place for discussion. Perhaps they realise that it is weak and irresponsible and are waiting for an opportunity to do better. The outlook of this discussion paper is best typified by the section entitled, 'What are the issues?' which then contains the curious heading, 'Balancing conservation with progress', and states that in Tasmania as in other parts of the world there is a need to balance conservation with progress. The implication that conservation is somehow the antithesis of progress is highly offensive, especially as the booklet then goes on to describe extinctions of species, processes of species and ecosystem decline and disruption, and the important role which Tasmania plays as a last refuge for many species unique to the world which have already been lost forever from mainland Australia. Where is the progress in that? Where is the balance which

Inaugural Speech – Peg Putt MP

we must be careful not to tip too far towards conservation when one-fifth of our Tasmanian species here are under threat?

I aim in this Parliament eventually to achieve that guarantee for nature. We will do our utmost to ensure the survival of species and ecosystems through the enactment of nature guarantee legislation, the establishment of a well resourced and staffed unit in National Parks and Wildlife and, through the provision of adequate funding, resources and access to expertise, to allow landholders to meet this priority without financial hardship.

I will also work for the enactment of conservation covenanting legislation to allow landholders to ensure that their land is managed in perpetuity for such conservation purposes as they may choose to designate on the title. Currently no person can be assured that if he wishes to protect a special patch of bush on his land it will remain protected indefinitely through changes of ownership. This measure would facilitate the voluntary approach to conservation so loudly touted, but which in practice the Government seems unwilling and unlikely to implement.

I advocate and will do all in my power to achieve the secure protection of the World Heritage value forests of Tasmania - the Huon, Picton and Weld valleys of the south; Beech Creek, the Counsel River and parts of the Florentine, the Great Western Tiers and the Tarkine - which all merit protection for their outstanding natural values. We should cease immediately the logging of our ancient forests and implement a rapid transition into plantations and areas of seeded regeneration.

We have an obligation to the rest of the world to protect these areas because of their international importance, but if we are wise we will recognise self-interest as another motivator for conservation. Tasmania faces a crisis in terms of future economic direction at the same time that the whole earth faces ecological crisis. The Chinese pictogram for crisis has two parts. The first part of the word means 'beware' or 'danger' - this is the negative aspect. The second part has a positive implication: it is 'opportunity for change'. We have the opportunity to capitalise upon our unique environmental inheritance, to resolve our economic difficulties. The resource-based industries are destroying our environmental capital at the same time that they are shedding jobs.

Jobs can be created based upon this environmental capital. With respect to wilderness we can name direct jobs in areas such as tourism and water from wilderness areas, and indirect jobs based upon the image, such as beers - all sorts of products, you name it. But this cannot be sustained if that wilderness is not really there, if we damage and degrade some while treasuring a little elsewhere. It must be authentic.

The Government, in its failure to follow this direction, stands accused of destroying jobs now and for the future. The extraordinary response to the questions about Benders quarry today illustrates this very clearly. Here we have a cave of international significance, for which that part of the World Heritage Area was nominated - and whose values were acknowledged by all the commissioners at the Helsham Inquiry. Although they scarcely agreed on many of the other values in question, there was absolutely no doubt about the World Heritage values found in Exit Cave. Nobody could deny those values. It is the longest cave in Australia; it is a cave of great repute.

Inaugural Speech – Peg Putt MP

Yet we have this absurd notion that somehow it is a good idea to go on blowing it up so that we can grow 'world heritage' apples. We can get limestone from elsewhere; that is well known. We can get it nearby for the same price or even better. So what on earth is the point of destroying that irreplaceable environmental resource, upon which we can base so much in terms of development of jobs and opportunities in that region which is facing a downturn because of the downturn in the traditional resource-based industries?

The same applies to pollution. The extension of exemptions from pollution standards, raised last week in terms of the negotiations with Tioxide Australia Pty Ltd, would place a brown stain clear across the 'clean green' image of Tasmania. There should be no exemptions. We should take the lead in setting international standards and in developing the technology to make those standards possible, which we can then export to the rest of the world. As well, all Tasmanians have a right to the enjoyment of clean air and water and that should be an imperative too. Tasmanians' quality of life does matter.

Then again there is the failure to implement land conservation legislation despite agreement by all parties on the need and on the direction and content of suggested legislation. I was involved in those talks. We conservationists came to agreement with the farmers and with all the other people in the task force about the need for legislation. But would the Government put it in place? No, it ditched it, despite the fact that the degradation of our land is bad and will continue, and that it is unsustainable and will eventually undermine jobs as well as putting the environment in jeopardy.

The opportunity for change is here and the need for that change is urgent. We can capitalise on this direction to create a new model of prosperity based on peaceful and nurturing relationships with our land and those around us.

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

Now I would like to turn to the future of our cities, and Hobart in particular. There are many important environmental and social questions bound up with the future shape of our cities. The ability to capitalise on the heritage qualities of Hobart's built environment should be boundless. We can put it together with the heritage qualities of our wild natural areas. What other town has the magnificent Mount Wellington standing behind the historic city built around the harbour that we have here?

The city belongs in a very real sense to the people who live in it and use it, and not merely to the owners of real estate. It gives us a sense of place. We have a right to have a say in how that city grows, in how it changes and in how it reflects our lifestyles and our values. That people are very concerned about this has been demonstrated by the argument and debate of recent years over the shape of urban development in central Hobart and Sullivans Cove. In areas like Sullivans Cove years of hard work have now achieved a workable set of guidelines, and I would like to read from the Citizens for Hobart newsletter 'City Views' which says all this as well as I could say it:

Inaugural Speech – Peg Putt MP

'workable set of guidelines (the award winning Sullivan's Cove Planning Review) which have been accepted by all sides of the development debate, will be cast back to the days of uncertainty about what is acceptable' -

under the Government's proposed planning package -

'and whether challenges to projects might be mounted.

Hobart has the opportunity to promote Sullivans Cove as an area where the conflicts have been resolved by cooperation and where any developer can know exactly what is acceptable. That is certainty and not some loose "fast-track" plan which is bound to put the community off-side despite any inherent qualities of a project.

As far as development in the city goes, there are absolutely no grounds for arguing that projects have been held up. Citizens for Hobart maintains' -

and I maintain -

'that only two major projects have been challenged in the Appeal Board by urban environment groups in the last four years. The Minister for Planning has not demonstrated the need for fast-tracking city development nor can he argue about what has been held up. What has in fact happened is that the city has been saved the worst excesses of rampant development through economic conditions beyond the State's control and fortunately for Hobart we have had the time to develop a new aesthetic which is far more in sympathy with the city. The Government can't really believe that responsible developers are going to flock to the State because of the possibility of Cabinet approving projects which the community sees as contrary to their interests. It is the equivalent of the Papua New Guinea Government expecting companies to set up mining in Bougainville on the basis that they will guarantee the community won't interfere. Investors in the rest of Australia will steer clear of Hobart as an investment site because of the threat of community discontent. That lesson was learnt with the Civic Square debacle where John Holland withdrew from the project not because of planning appeals but because of obvious community rejection of the proposal. Over the years since then, architects, planners and community representatives have tried to find more cooperative approaches to resolving conflicts about developments but the State Government has managed to snatch confusion and controversy from the jaws of cooperation and consensus.'

The new planning package contains an incredible contempt for democratic rights. The sales pitch is based on the restriction and denial of community access to decision making so that whether we have a modest desire to comment on development in our own neighbourhood, cable cars on Mount Wellington, wilderness lodges in remote areas, inappropriate urban developments or a world-scale pulpmill we will be, at the very least, denied some access and quite likely, through fast-tracking, denied all access.

Urban conservation has more to it than simply maintaining heritage character, and here I would like to go on to a consideration of other aspects of the shape of our cities and in particular urban sprawl.

Inaugural Speech – Peg Putt MP

We all know that urban sprawl is a problem. Hobart has virtually doubled over the past ten years in terms of the area that it occupies. That urban sprawl impacts badly on rural land; it takes away our opportunities by gobbling up that prime agricultural land for subdivision for real estate.

Dr Bates - Right-to-farm legislation will fix that. Sorry!

Ms PUTT - Right-to-farm legislation is not the way to go about fixing it. It is touted as a resolution to that problem but it really is a front for denial once again of community rights; for denial of the ability of people who move into a rural area to be able to take up their rights with regard to pollution and other matters. I notice that the farmers have said quite clearly that with the introduction of right-to-farm legislation they do not expect there will be any inhibition - and they are lobbying that there be no inhibition - of their right to subdivide. It sounds as though they want to have their cake and eat it too. We have heard a fair bit about the infrastructure costs associated with urban sprawl this last week. They are enormous and they have to be absorbed by the community.

The other thing that is really interesting is that the density levels of cities is in direct relationship to energy consumption levels. Those energy consumption levels are primarily associated with car use. In European cities, which are much more densely populated and where there is a high degree of urban consolidation, the energy consumption levels are much lower than they are in American cities and unfortunately we tend to follow the American model where we have sprawling city development and high energy consumption. Forty-seven per cent of Hobart is dedicated to the motor car and 70 per cent of car spaces in Hobart are dedicated to the home-to-work trip. Only 13 per cent - which is the next highest percentage in the breakdown of usage - is devoted to the home-to-shopping trip. Obviously there is a great potential for urban consolidation in Hobart if we want to do something about urban sprawl, the greenhouse effect and energy consumption.

We should be looking at, and we must look at, the reintroduction of light rail in Hobart - it has been done in Perth and in Los Angeles - and we must also look at the reintroduction and upgrading of ferry services. Public transport is absolutely essential to achieve urban consolidation. But the other thing that we need to think about very carefully when we consider urban consolidation in our city is that we make sure that it is affordable to live here and that we do not simply go all the way with gentrification, leaving the poorer people living on the fringes and making the city simply a haven for the rich and trendy.

Talking about cities, and Hobart in particular, there is a glaring need for greater regional cooperation. We have seen that in the sewerage debate and with, once again, last week's news about the unsuitability of Lauderdale tip for landfill. With the municipal waste facilities we really need regional cooperation on a lot of levels, particularly to do with our wastes.

To move on, I would like to acknowledge a few other personal influences which have brought me here. One of those most important is a man called Bill Eason who started the Australian International Independent School Ltd in Sydney some years ago. I was privileged to attend that school in its first year. He introduced me to the concepts of

Inaugural Speech – Peg Putt MP

internationalism, to the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian poet, and to the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi on satyagraha - non-violence and non-cooperation - and they have been very influential in my life. He taught me also that it is possible to dream of something that we feel needs to be done and, when we are told it is impossible, we can persevere, we can put it into action and if we are going in the right direction it will come to pass, and people will flock to that idea and they will support us.

Bill Eason carried that through with that school and since then I have seen it happen again and again in life. Because of his influence I travelled to the United Kingdom where I studied international relations at the University of Sussex in the School of African and Asian Studies, and I took a particular interest in development processes, technology transfer and appropriate technology, and also in our history and place in Asia. These are all issues that now surround our economic directions and I feel I am well placed to make a valuable contribution, based on the knowledge that I have garnered through study and through these experiences, that will help Tasmania in its quest for an appropriate avenue of development and to find its place in Asia.

There is one other person whose views I wish to share with members. Unfortunately I have left the quote behind so I will have to summarise, but I thought it was appropriate that I mention Emmeline Pankhurst, given that yesterday was International Women's Day and that we still have a long way to go to deal with the inequities suffered by women in Tasmania, Australia and around the world. What Emmeline Pankhurst said was essentially this, and I am paraphrasing:

'I have no use for sympathy if it is not practical sympathy. We have had sympathetic men standing up on platforms for years telling us that they are very concerned about women's suffrage but we have had no action, but as soon as we have put a thorn in their side and as soon as we have made life uncomfortable, we have begun to see action. I would prefer to be unpopular and to get action than to go for the nice handshake and the soft smile'.

I think there is a lesson there for all of us. It is certainly something that has kept me going for many years. It is relevant for women's groups, environmental activists and Aboriginal activists and I think there is something there for the Greens in Parliament.

In summing up, I would like to acknowledge the people whose influence has really brought me here. My father, the mountaineer and adventurer taught me that if we want to do something other people do not ordinarily do - something very difficult and challenging - it can be done. We simply determine to do it and give our all, and when we think we have no more left, we find the reserves and keep on going. Bill Eason, the visionary and educator, gave me the ability to dream and the understanding that we can get there with non-violence and the Gandhian philosophy and that those dreams can be put in place. And of course there is Bob Brown, who has inspired conservationists around the world and, once again, has let us all know that what we all dream can be made a reality. I am here to build a better future for Tasmania and that future must be based on a harmonious and nurturing relationship to our environment.

Members - Hear, hear.

Inaugural Speech – Peg Putt MP