



Hon. Leonie Hiscutt MLC

Legislative Council

Date: 29 May 2013

Electorate: Montgomery

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**CONSOLIDATED FUND APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2013 (No. 33)**

**CONSOLIDATED FUND APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 2) 2013 (No. 34)**

**Noting of Budget Paper**

**Mrs HISCUTT** (Montgomery - Inaugural) - Mr President and fellow councillors, although I am new to this honourable place facing this daunting task of my first speech, I find comfort in the fact that you have all been here before. You know what it is that I am feeling at this moment - the excitement, the nerves, and of course the deep sense of honour.

Overwhelmed by the vote of confidence placed in me by the people of Montgomery, I am equally wary of the weight of responsibility and trust that is now mine to bear. Today I take this rare opportunity, with the indulgence of the chamber, to tell you who I am, why I am here and what I hope to achieve.

Before I do so, however, I would like to congratulate the new President, acknowledge my fellow councillors and thank you all for your warm welcome. I am very pleased that the member for Pembroke was re-elected and I find her presence very comforting. I would also like to acknowledge the help and support I received through the election campaign from my family and friends.

I am very pleased and honoured to be a member of the Liberal Party and I bring with me their traditional beliefs to this chamber. At the same time, I would like to make it clear that while I come here as a member of the Liberal team, I genuinely want to work as a member of the Council for the benefit of all Tasmanians. I should admit that I did write this speech shortly after the election and that I was anticipating a warm welcome but I am pleased to add that you have not let me down with your many phone calls, offers of assistance, caring natures and the odd joke.

I must pay tribute to the retiring member for Montgomery whom I have the great honour of succeeding. The Honourable Sue Smith is a true inspiration and tireless worker for her community. On many occasions, I have said that Sue has large shoes that I one day hope to fill but on hearing this recently, Sue said that she would encourage people to walk in their own shoes and to make their own pathways. These are not the first wise words I have heard from Sue and they will not be the last. I am grateful that she has offered to be only a phone call away.

It would be remiss of me not to mention and pay tribute to members of my family who have been past honourable members of this chamber. They are, of course, Mr Hugh Hiscutt, member for West Devon from 1983 to 1995 and Mr Desmond Hiscutt, the member for West Devon, Emu Bay from 1995 to 1999. Those of you who have known Hugh and Desmond will agree that I am indeed fortunate to have so much knowledge, integrity and honesty available at my fingertips. We Hiscutts, as an extended family, often have an evening drink and discuss the week's events and issues. Arguments for and against are debated to the nth degree and many wise interjections made. I am sure that I will benefit from my family's advice into the future as I have done in the past.

You will discover that I am a fairly practical person who cannot see the need to say 100 words when two will do. I am going to try very hard to improve on that. My last 30 years have been spent with my husband, Ben, on the family farm and house, which is halfway between Burnie and Ulverstone, and sits very nicely in the middle of my electorate of Montgomery. My family and my husband's family all live within a bull's roar of each other. Family and family values, as I have alluded to, are very important to us all.

Before marriage, I worked in offices here and in Melbourne, I did some bank telling, did some travelling and I worked my way around Australia on a Harley with Ben. Who I am today, though, is largely from the experiences

of the last three decades on our farm. As all farmers do, my husband and I worked hard. Our main income in the early days was the new potato market. Amongst other varieties, we grew pinkeyes. We grew them in grey soil on our farm and then sold them to people here in Hobart. Hobartians reckoned it could not be done in the rich soils of the north-west coast; that the pinkeyes had to come from Douglas River or South Arm. But we could not keep up the supply. We were proud to be farming on a property that has had the same family ownership since 1867. It was hard work but it was very satisfying.

In my early thirties, I completed a mature-age apprenticeship and I am a qualified agriculturalist, commonly known as a tradesman. This is something I will also need to get used to; I am not yet politically correct. I still call a manhole a manhole and I call little penguins 'fairy penguins'. I really should call myself a tradesperson but I have never felt threatened by these gender terms. I have licences and qualifications of all sorts. I have a car licence, as we all do; I have a truck licence, a motorbike licence, a gun licence, a chainsaw licence, forklift licence and I can drive a tractor with ease. I can buy and sell cattle, sheep and pigs, and I can hold my own in the male-dominated saleyards.

Ben and I raised our three sons on the farm. Our kids learnt to count while they were cutting broccoli. They learnt an awful lot while they spent their time in their early days with their parents on the farm. They learned the value of hard work; they learned that in a household, as in a community, everyone should pitch in and help as much as they are able. Today, our eldest and youngest sons are fit and well. They were successful at university and are now established in their chosen careers. Unlike the member for Windermere, or the member for Hobart, and I am sure there are others, I have no grandchildren yet to boast of, but eight years ago our middle son lost his life to meningococcal disease at age 16.

My husband and I took a bit of a battering with the death of our son and we made a few changes in our life. Ben went to university and he now has a Bachelor of Regional Resource Management and, by the way, today is his birthday. For my part, I wanted something that was a bit happier so I became a marriage celebrant. I find this job most rewarding. I have it down to a fine art now, being able to handle nearly anything that may go wrong during the ceremony. At my first wedding I could hardly hear myself over the sound of my knees knocking nervously, and it is happening again now.

*Members laughing.*

**Mrs HISCUTT** - In time all will be well and the weight of responsibility will be more bearable. As an aside, Mr President, it was said during the election campaign that I marry people according to law. There is no state law with regard to marriage and nor should there be, it is the Federal Marriage Act 1961.

I was encouraged to become involved in agri-politics when we were growing poppies, as some others have done. I was nominated for the poppy growers committee by retiring member Ruth Paterson and had to work hard to be elected. That was then a new experience for me. We were a committee of 12 people and I was the only woman there at the time. In my time on the committee I questioned many things as to whether they were in the best interests of the grower. Today I ask why we would allow poppy material imports when we have plenty of good growing ground around here and spend millions of dollars on irrigation schemes - up to \$400 million.

My husband and I stopped growing poppies in the early 2000s when the price dropped by 17 per cent. Why should we grow when the price is dropped so significantly? Who else would work with such a price cut? We stopped growing buckwheat when the same thing happened. I remember saying to my husband, a business partner, that at that rate there would be nothing left to grow. That was about 10 years ago. I suggest that this statement is growing truer by the moment. The agriculture sector in my area is worth millions of dollars but there is also extreme pressure on the commodity prices, including contract potato prices and milk. The signs coming from New Zealand with regard to the milk price are starting to look more positive but still many of our farmers are growing milk for under the break-even cost. This sort of activity cannot and will not go on forever. I am very worried that companies are offering contract potato growers a 10 per cent cut on last year's prices, and the inputs are skyrocketing. We need to put some downward pressure on this situation.

In the world of business it is often said that you need to diversify to survive. On our farm we chose to take advantage of our natural assets and diversify into tourism. We were lucky to have a wonderful property right beside the sea. We set aside a 10-acre title, which is 100 metres above sea level, and built a self-contained, four-and-a-half star accommodation unit. We were owner-builders and I was the right-hand man - sorry, there I go again; I was the right-hand person. Besides physically assisting in building this unit it was my job to negotiate pricing. I was known for breaking arms when it came to pricing and this is a trait that I will be carrying into this House. It might be politically incorrect to say that I was tight but, Mr President, maybe I should say I

am

frugal.

For our tourism venture it took about four years of hard work to develop the clientele, but I think we have finally made it. We joined the Local Tourism Association, the Caves to Canyon Group, which helped us make many inroads into networking with the others. When it comes to marketing, governments can only do so much. Mr Luke Martin tells me that in real terms the new money that is budgeted is actually a cut so if an operator is to survive or to thrive they will need to do their own targeted marketing. Governments can only generalise with their campaigns and most operators need to, and indeed do, help themselves.

My growing exposure to the world of business led me to become involved with the local Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Three years ago I was elected president and that was a position that I have relished. It gave me great pleasure to see our chamber membership grow over this time. Like all such chambers, we gave our members a much-needed voice in politics with regards to issues that affect small business. With over 95 per cent of businesses in Tasmania being classified as small business, we needed a say and we needed our politicians to listen.

I used to go to bed at night happy and content that the chooks were fed and the dog was tied up, but now my thoughts are completely different. Now I want to make a difference; I want to build a brighter future for Tasmania and Tasmanians. I am a steady person who is usually consistent in my beliefs. I am a woman who tries to stay the course when I give my word and I will do the best to my ability for my constituents. I want to help where I can and to help where I cannot.

These are the traits I have relied on in my service to the community. I am a member of Tasmanian Women in Agriculture and this group has an excellent record of caring, nurturing and mentoring. I will be resigning my position as the Tasmanian representative on the board of directors of Australian Women in Agriculture to fully concentrate on this new role.

As you may be aware, Mr President, the electorate of Montgomery consists of most of Burnie and nearly all of the Central Coast municipal areas. We are currently experiencing high unemployment, with youth unemployment in Burnie alone running at just under 30 per cent. We all know that this sort of unemployment amongst our youth leads to many problems. It is a problem for our social services and for our community's safety. Our area is desperately crying out for jobs.

We need to be encouraging tourism, mining, agriculture and other manufacturing projects on the north-west coast. I am pleased to be able to report to you that I attended the mining rally in Tullah over the weekend to show my support for the mining industry. I note that I was one of 2 000 people there. This rally supports my argument that the main issue which most Tasmanians are concerned about is jobs. We need to make legislative changes for businesses to go about business without the interference and hindrance of over-regulation from government. As the member for Windermere pointed out yesterday, we need to be very careful of the legislation we pass. We need to make sure that there are no unintended consequences being placed on businesses such as more red tape, green tape, blue tape or brown tape.

We also need to address the activities of fringe green groups and limit the damage that they are causing to our economy. This subject has already been covered at length. I urge you all, when the opportunity arises, to carefully address all legislation and to think of the people in my area - the north-west and west coasts - and the jobs that we so desperately need. We must provide a glimmer of hope for the future within all business sectors in Tasmania and the flow-on effects will benefit us all.

I am looking forward to future increases in commodity prices and a brighter future. I also look forward to being part of the process which will enable this to happen. I welcome the weight of responsibility and I look forward to working as a team with the members of this council. I would now like to table my maiden speech, or, politically speaking, my inaugural speech. Thank you very much.

**Members** - Hear, hear