



Catherine Mary Edwards

Legislative Council

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Electorate: Pembroke

Mrs EDWARDS (Pembroke - Inaugural) - Mr President, it is a privilege to be elected to this House and to take my place amongst its members, particularly at a time of considerable change in the Tasmanian community. It is clear that the deliberations of this House will play an important role in determining the future directions of this State in ensuring that legislation enacted by the Tasmanian Parliament is fair, balanced and meets the expectations of contemporary society, indication for those who while supporting parliamentary reform have maintained the importance of the bicameral parliamentary system.

The Premier's statement sets out the goals for his Government for the next twelve months. The emphasis on economic development and job creation is welcome as is the attempt to establish a longer-term strategic framework through the Tasmania Together process. After all, local councils have been required to develop strategic plans for some years now but it is pleasing to see the State Government also recognising the merits of this approach.

Initiatives to encourage business development are particularly relevant to the eastern shore at the moment. For many years the eastern shore was seen as a dormitory, suburban, outpost of Hobart, highly desirable as a place to live but rarely considered in terms of setting up a business. The reality has changed significantly and it is time the general perception caught up with the contemporary reality. The eastern shore is fast emerging as a business and commercial centre in its own right and the Rosny Park CBD has grown to be the business and shopping hub of the growing southeast region.

There are more businesses on the eastern shore than in either Devonport or Burnie. There is the highest proportion of small businesses in Tasmania with 88 per cent of businesses employing between one and nine people. Recent traffic studies show a substantial decrease in the number of vehicles crossing both the Tasman and Bowen bridges with suggested reasons being the increased employment opportunities on the eastern shore together with improved opportunities for shopping and increased commercial activities.

In this context I must however express my disappointment at the continuing refusal of the Government to establish a Service Tasmania office in the thriving, expanding Rosny Park area. The establishment of Business East, a local organisation set up last year to promote and encourage local enterprise, is further evidence of a growing realisation of the importance of our business sector. Business East recently attracted over 200 local business people to the launch of a research project, a project which was funded by the Commonwealth Government and supported by both State and local governments. In fact the State Treasurer, the honourable member for Elwick, was present as the guest speaker and he would, I am sure, agree with me

that the occasion provided a good example of the increasing awareness of and interest in business issues on the eastern shore as well as a good example of the three levels of government working together to achieve positive results in the community. It is an approach which I hope to see frequently repeated.

I will watch with interest the shaping of the Government's Industry Development Plan and the information technology and telecommunications industry plan and particularly their relevance to the people of the eastern shore.

Mr President, there is no doubt that the most dramatic and significant spur to the increasing independence and selfsufficiency of the eastern shore, to say nothing of the healthy growth of a strong sense of identity and community spirit, was prompted by the disaster of the *Lake Illawarra's* collision with the Tasman Bridge in 1975. I draw your attention to the fact that the twenty-fifth anniversary of that accident is soon to be commemorated, on 5 January next year, and arrangements are under way for a service and permanent memorial to those whose lives were lost in that disastrous accident.

I do agree that many current issues and problems can only be solved and goals achieved by communities and all levels of government working together. There are many examples of this, the Derwent River Improvement Program being a particularly important one. However, to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of this approach it is vital that more work be done to clarify the respective roles and functions of the various levels of government and that more effort be directed towards reducing the overlap and duplication that presently exists.

There is also a need to be on guard against allowing past progress to be diluted. For example, we were told that we had the best resource management and planning system in Australia, but since its inception there has been a growing raft of legislation emerging outside this system. The original aim was to promote sustainable development but there are increasing moves to introduce specialised legislation outside this framework. The latest example is the Major Infrastructure Projects Bill, referred to in the Premier's statement. On the other hand I note with interest some current attempts to bring some provisions of the Historic Cultural Heritage Act more in line with the Land Use Planning and Approvals Act.

Other problem areas are highlighted by the recent confusion over State policy on agricultural land, the water quality policy which has no clear linkages to the recently considered Water Management Bill nor to the integrated catchment management process, the coastal policy - no-one knows what it means or how to implement it - and the continuing unresolved saga of the proposed model planning scheme.

Mr President, there needs to be a system of appropriate checks and balances but it needs to include accountability and monitoring, and most of all it needs to be meeting the aspirations of the people of Tasmania and the previously

endorsed goal of promoting and facilitating sustainable development. The present system is complex and legalistic, extremely resource hungry and frustrating to local councils, developers and other involved parties. The challenge is to provide a system which balances the contradictory demands of certainty and flexibility and the conflicting demands of speed and genuine consultation. Mr President, I believe that the present system is becoming increasingly fragmented and complicated and is in need of review.

Mr President, as this is my first speech in this House, I would like to conclude by thanking you and the honourable members for the manner in which you have welcomed me as a new member and I would also like to thank the electors for their support. As it is a long time since there has been a new member for Pembroke, I would also like to acknowledge the contribution to the electorate and to Tasmania by the former member and his father before him who combined to achieve the remarkable distinction of a total of 40 years as members of the Legislative Council. It is a long time since there has been a new member for Pembroke and an even longer time since there has been one not named McKay.

Mr President, I look forward to participating in the functions, duties and activities of the Council.

Members - Hear, hear.

Mr LOONE (Rowallan) - Mr President, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the new member for Pembroke on her initial address to this chamber. I am sure we can look forward to many good, brilliant contributions over the years and I look forward, later in this debate, to listening to the new member for Rumney. I am sure her contribution will be equally interesting.

Mr President, I listened with much interest the other day to the Address given by the Premier in another place and I truly hope from all his predictions and hopes for the State that he and his Government will be able to deliver on those commitments. One of the areas he mentioned was the injection of \$235 million into the Health and Human Services budget over the next four years. It does appear that the problems within the Health department have quietened down and probably the minister is to be congratulated for that but a lot of questions are still being asked and not answered and I would like to think that the Leader may be able to answer this, and that is the position of the waiting list in the public system at this time, particularly in the elective surgery area. People, I am sure, would feel much more comfortable if they knew those lists were coming down and that those who are on the waiting list could look forward to early treatment.

Another area that he raised and which is of particular interest to me and to my electorate and probably to most Tasmanians is the restructuring of the racing industry. The Premier mentioned that it was his intention to streamline the administration and to introduce legislation this session to bring about those reforms. But, Mr President, like many other Tasmanians I am greatly concerned as to the future of all three racing codes - galloping, harness and

greyhound - in Tasmania.

On 28 April this year the honourable member for Murchison introduced an urgency debate into this House because of his concerns at that time as to where our racing industry was headed and a very constructive debate took place. Since that time I have had numerous approaches from concerned people involved with the racing industry. Some three weeks ago - to be precise, it was on Monday 6 September - with two of our colleagues, the honourable member for Apsley and the honourable member for Paterson, along with the chairperson of the Tasmanian Turf Club, Mrs Margot Smart, I met with a number of trainers located at the Longford training complex to hear their concerns. They raised a number of matters regarding not only the industry's future but their own long-term viability. Many of the points were raised in the previous debate but there are now some new matters of great concern.

Mr President, the most serious point raised was the inability of the Tasmanian Trainer's Association members or individual persons being able to meet with the Racing minister, the Honourable Paul Lennon. Consequently, as a result of that meeting the three Legislative Council members present undertook to arrange a meeting with the minister at which two members of the Tasmanian Trainer's Association would attend. The next day, Tuesday 7 September, I rang the minister's office and requested an appointment. I am pleased to report, after a long wait, that at last a meeting has been scheduled for Wednesday 6 October.

Mr President, I do not want to go back over ground that has already been well covered in the previous debate in this House but I must repeat the urgent need for an injection of funds and I am told from very good sources and authorities that it will take around \$4 million immediately if the industry is to be sustained and remain viable. It must be remembered that the industry was given an assurance by the previous Government and the present Government when in Opposition that if the introduction of poker machines into clubs and pubs reduced TAB turnover, stake money would be maintained from the revenue received and that guarantee is recorded in *Hansard*. Members would remember that a commitment was given from the then Premier and read into *Hansard*.

Mr President, the serious situation in the racing industry was demonstrated in a race at Mowbray some weeks ago. Nine horses competed and only one horse was not part-owned by a trainer, the reason being that individuals are not attracted to the industry because of the level of stakes and the rising costs. In the past, Victorian country meeting stake moneys and Tasmanian stakes were always on a par but at this time the stakes - for example, for a maiden race in Victoria country - are \$7 000 and a similar race in Tasmania carries a stake level of \$4 750 so it is easy to see that the racing industry in Tasmania without the injection of funds will not survive in its present form.

Mr President, I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister for Health and Human Services and the Government on the progress being

made with the redevelopment of the Ashley correction centre. Following the fire that unfortunately destroyed practically all the accommodation at Ashley, completion dates for various redevelopment stages have been brought forward and I understand tenders for the first stage are to be called early in October.

I recently had the opportunity to visit three of the Victorian juvenile justice centres. These centres and particularly the Malmsbery Centre have been used as models for which the Ashley centre plans have been developed. Malmsbery is a greenfield site similar to that of the Ashley site. Each unit accommodates fifteen inmates with one twin and thirteen single rooms. The units have plenty of open space for recreational activities and a modern security system. Ashley will have three of these units.

I feel very confident that the new facility will greatly improve working conditions for the staff and will certainly assist in the rehabilitation of those committed to Ashley for whatever reason. It is anticipated that the first two units will be completed by April 2000 and the third completed by July 2000 with administration, kitchen and education areas completed by September 2000.

Mr President, two weeks ago I attended a dinner at Ashley hosted by the staff. Those in attendance were the Minister for Health and Human Services and a number of Deloraine citizens who are friends of Ashley and who visit on a voluntary basis. The visitors, some staff and the residents of Ashley were treated to a fine three-course meal. It was a wonderful opportunity for the visitors, staff and residents to sit over a meal and to meet with the residents.

The residents dressed for the occasion, and I might add that I guess many of these boys would never have worn a tie. The males were in shirt and tie and the ladies were in smart attire. It was a most successful evening and I feel occasions like this will do much to assist residents when they return to the mainstream society.

Although the Ashley staff are consistently under criticism for the escapes - and I might add here that the night of this dinner the Ashley staff themselves, the male staff, waited on the boys and the visitors and it was an excellent opportunity for them to reverse the situation where they were controlling the boys. This time they were helping the inmates and treating them as equals.

They really do an excellent job in endeavouring to rehabilitate these young offenders under very difficult circumstances. I feel that when the new centre is completed Ashley will be an excellent rehabilitation centre.

Mr President, I was absolutely amazed when I saw the headlines on the front page of the *Sunday Tasmanian* dated 5 September, 'Putt hits new dam plan'. The member in another place was referring to the ongoing proposal to build the Warners Creek dam on the Meander River. She said, and I quote:

'Anyone who says the conflict in this has dried up is not only wrong, they are misleading people.'

She went on to say:

'This isn't the way to deal with flood problems, forestry is causing the problems.'

Mr President, statements like that have no credibility. After very heavy rains and a major flood some twelve months ago when landslides occurred on the face of the Western Tiers a number of experts inspected the area. All declared it was a natural occurrence and that logging and farming operations in no way contributed to the landslides. The Western Tiers has a long history of land movements and it was considered to be a natural phenomenon.

The Meander Valley Dam Action Group have worked hard to put together a proposal to finance a building of the dam on land already owned by the Crown. This land was partly cleared some years ago when, I think, in 1988 everything was ready to commence building the dam.

Mr President, it has been well documented that when the Warners Creek dam is built - and it will be built - it will benefit the whole Meander valley. A 43 000 megalitre dam will control the flash flooding of the Meander River that has caused and continues to cause many thousands of dollars worth of damage. It will have the potential to generate much-needed hydro power, to increase agricultural production, to provide boating and fishing facilities and to become a major tourism attraction. Mr President, the dam group's package could see the Warners Creek dam built involving both State and Federal funding, along with private investment. Since the original costings of the dam in 1988, the costs have been reduced by around 50 per cent. The estimated cost of the dam in 1988 was \$23 million; the estimated cost at this time in 1999 is \$13 million.

During the debate last week on the Water Management Bill much emphasis was placed on the environmental flows in Tasmania's rivers. The Meander River was cited as possibly the most environmentally stressed river in the State; the Warners Creek dam would overcome this problem.

The Hydro is currently investigating the viability of establishing a minor hydro scheme on the dam as part of the strategic renewable energy program. Results to date I believe are very promising. The State Government has set a target to double Tasmania's primary industries and increase output by \$2.5 billion. The Meander valley would play a vital part in any primary industry expansion and the Warners Creek dam would need to be part of it. As I said earlier, Mr President, the Warners Creek dam will be built; it is just a matter of when.

Another area of concern in my electorate - and this has been going on for some time - is compensation for landowners who have been refused timber harvesting permits in the Mole Creek karst area. This issue has been ongoing

now for some years. The payment of compensation was raised with the previous Government and again with the present Government when it came to power. I raised this issue again during the Estimate committee hearings and the minister advised that he had held discussions with the Forest Practices Board member, Mr Kevin Kiernan - a karst expert - and the Minister for Primary Industries, Water and Environment but at this time it appears that no decision has been reached. Whilst I fully understand that it is a very difficult and complicated problem, it must also be realised that it is very difficult for those landowners who are involved. Some are very embarrassed financially and are in desperate need of an early settlement. I would be pleased if the Leader could inform me as to what progress has been made and when a decision on levels of compensation can be expected. Individual landowners cannot be expected to carry this burden.

Just to explain - and I probably have done it previously in this Council - land from which people would gain many thousands of dollars in royalties for the timber has been tied up because of the risk of logging being done in the karst system and damaging the cave system at some stage, although most of the areas have been previously logged. It is understandable that it should be locked up and cared for, but it is not fair that individual Tasmanians should carry the load that all Tasmanians should carry. One person in particular has been very financially embarrassed and at one stage looked like losing his home.

There are just a couple of other smaller matters I would like to raise. One is the future of the Tasmanian online access centres. As I understand it, in the initial year of setting out with the online centres, funding was provided by the Commonwealth and in-kind support was given by the State Government in the supplying of access to premises and to Internet connections. Since they have been established a lot of use has been made of these online centres. In a study that has just recently been completed, up to 31 August, it has been shown that 10 935 have registered as users; 104 916 one-hour bookings have been utilised by Tasmanians in the online access centre in their areas; 5 774 new email accounts have been created; 783 free training courses have been introduced; 2 695 people to a basic computer and Internet training. Just another one is that 433 volunteers have contributed 20 730 hours of service to assist users at online access centres.

That funding was available for the first year; for the second year they have received funding of 62.5 per cent of a coordinator's salary from Federal sources, but nothing has been made available for the third year. What I would like to know from the Leader is, is it the Government's intention to assist these centres into their third year, because I believe that without some assistance it will be impossible for these centres to carry on. As you can judge from the figures I have read out, there is a lot of use at these centres and it would be a very sorry situation if they were to disappear.

The only other area I would like an answer on concerns a report in the *Examiner* today of a study that has been done on the Parks and Wildlife and

Tourism, and for those who have not read it I might just quote one or two areas for you:

'A shock tourism report has blasted State Government agencies for their past incompetence and sometimes deliberate obstruction of wilderness ventures.'

It was prepared by consultants for the Tourism Council.

It goes on to say:

'The survey of tourism operators' experiences with public land managers confirmed that the development of Tasmania's tourism industry is being severely impeded by difficulties in dealing with some land managers - with the Parks and Wildlife Service almost exclusively the main offenders,' the report said.'

It goes on:

'The frustration includes:

- Delays in processing developments costing the State millions of dollars and ruining industry confidence.
- Bureaucrats who do not answer correspondence or process applications in a reasonable time frame.
- Bureaucrats with no business experience, who do not turn up to meetings. In one case a public servant had a flexi-day off on the day of a meeting.'

Those are pretty disturbing comments and no doubt will not do the industry any good. I wonder what the Government's intention is on that report and how it intends to overcome those problems and review some problems in our tourism industry. It brings home some of the comments we have heard for quite some time, and I do not mean in the last twelve months but over the last few years where people wanting to develop tourism facilities have not been able to get an answer. Consequently they have either gone away or lost many thousands of dollars in the waiting time.