



Greg Hall MLC

Legislative Council

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Electorate: Denison

Mr HALL (Rowallan - Inaugural) - Mr President and honourable members, although I rise on this my first occasion to speak in this House on matters relating to the Budget, I will take the opportunity to raise some of the issues which have the ability to significantly impact on the people who reside in Rowallan. I would firstly, though, thank the people of Rowallan for having the confidence to give me this opportunity to work on their behalf and for all Tasmanians to ensure that legislation put before me is fair and equitable to all. I would also like to thank you, Mr President, and all honourable members and the staff of this House for their assistance and support in what has been an enjoyable and enlightening, if not hectic, introduction to this historic Chamber. I also take this opportunity to formally acknowledge the significant contribution made by my predecessor, John Loone, during his two terms of office as a member for Tamar, then Roland and finally Rowallan.

Mr President, let me personally say that Rowallan is an electorate of contrasts. In the south there is low population density; it has low average annual rainfall and the agricultural opportunities are somewhat limited. The towns are small and the tourists tend to follow the higher profile and better constructed highways outside that region. In the north there are a number of mid-sized towns; average rainfall is relatively high, agricultural opportunities are relatively plentiful, tourism is strong and population density is higher. There are, however, few businesses with more than 100 employees. Goliath Cement at Railton, Tas Alkaloids at Westbury, SBA Meatworks at Longford, Cradle Mountain Lodge and Glaxo are some of the few. Small businesses - less than 50 employees - are the mainstay of communities in Rowallan. Most towns exist to support surrounding agricultural-based businesses.

Forestry-based businesses are of economic importance to some towns whilst tourism is an important element in the economic makeup of the area - Cradle Mountain being a particularly important destination. The only urban area is Shearwater, now a dormitory suburb of Devonport which has a relatively high population of retirees. Like all rural areas in Australia, Rowallan has suffered from the withdrawal of services. Local governments within the Rowallan boundaries are also facing huge challenges with the maintenance of expensive infrastructure like roads and bridges, yet there are community expectations that they also be involved in non-core activities such as tourism and youth affairs.

As I have already said, small business is the economic mainstay of Rowallan and will also be a major contributor in driving Tasmania's economic growth - not big business, not governments. Governments and their officers do not create economic growth, nor do they increase the community's wealth. Their job is to create the right environment for growth. Individuals or groups of individuals with ideas and energy and, in most cases, limited funds, work their hearts out to develop their idea into a thriving small business. They work long hours for many years with minimal reward to get

established. They employ fellow Tasmanians. They need to be nurtured and encouraged. Government needs to recognise that small businesses operate in a volatile environment; they are often small players in a large market, they can be wiped out very easily. They need to keep their eyes on the ball at all times. The paperwork burden of over-regulation can often be the difference between success and failure.

Small business needs a regulation-friendly environment if it is to lead Tasmania's economic growth. Small business can be crippled by bureaucratic regulation. Government must get away from the view that as far as business regulation is concerned one size fits all. Government needs to recognise that small business does not have the cash flow to carry the same administrative overheads as big business. It needs to recognise that the risks to the community from failure are also lower. Government needs to remove the shackles of over-regulation and let small business do its job in getting Tasmania's economy moving.

Small business needs fair competition. Big business and government business enterprises should be prevented from using their market size, financial strength and regulatory power unfairly. We all know that small to medium-sized businesses based around agriculture, timber, tourism, aquaculture and fishing still offer the best hope for future economic growth in this State. We have a duty to make sure they are not frustrated in their attempts to grow our economy. Small business is the lifeblood of rural communities. It provides the jobs that underpin local economies. This is particularly true in Rowallan, an electorate that largely depends on primary industry for its economic base, with agriculture and forestry being two of its biggest industries. Both of these industries are acutely aware of the need to maintain a sustainable environment. They know that it is in their own interests to do so. There is also now a growing tourist industry which can only exist and expand if the scenic beauty and historic character of our area is kept intact.

Our future will depend on how well we manage the sometimes competing interests of these key industry groups. I will be doing all that I can to ensure that there is a common understanding and a will to work together to achieve a better future for everybody. I believe there needs to be a balance between promoting economic development and maintaining a sustainable environment.

This brings me to one of the major challenges facing the area: the GMO issue. There are a number of inquiries under way, both Federal and State government initiated, attempting to come to grips with the complex scientific, marketing, economic, environmental, social and ethical issues involved. The final outcome of this debate will have a significant impact on most of the people who live in Rowallan. This is because the poppy industry touches just about every part of the area, from Latrobe right through to Bothwell. Although the two processors are in the north, one at Latrobe and one at Westbury, both are significant employers and purchasers of supplies from local businesses. Farmers from all over the area are also growing poppies for processing. These farmers in turn make significant purchases of machinery and supplies from local businesses in their district. They also employ local people. An industry that is competing internationally needs to be able to use every available technology to keep its market share. GMO technology is fundamental to the development of new varieties of poppy. Any decision to ban or even restrict the use of new varieties of poppy needed to keep our Tasmanian industry ahead of its

international competitors will have an immediate and terrible social impact on the small communities that make up Rowallan. Aside from poppies, progressive farmers across all sectors of agriculture are now recognising the significant economic and environmental advantages that this exciting technology can offer.

It is unfortunate in my view that there has been a skilful and successful campaign by opponents of GE technology to erode public confidence in the new technology and create unreasoned fear about its alleged risks. Whilst I also acknowledge it is important to maintain our clean and green image, we would be foolish to take an extreme political position on this issue and destroy small local communities in the process. That is not in the best interests of the people of Tasmania.

Another matter for concern in the community's view is the expectation that local government will be taking on a wider role in the delivery of services. Both State and Federal governments are asking more and more of local government. They have realised that, as more and more people in Australia want a say in what happens in their community, they are going to have to get a better understanding of community needs. They have realised that local governments already have this knowledge and understanding plus have the structures in place to deliver the outcomes from either State or Federal government decisions, should they agree to do so. Local governments have already moved into environmental and economic management and in some cases are also delivering both State and Federal government services to their local community. This is the new social dimension of local government involvement.

The State Government is pressing on with its local government partnership agreements. More councils are coming together in regional bodies and the Federal Government is linking more and more of its programs with local government who will end up as a major provider of government services. This added responsibility as a shopfront for the delivery of a wide range of government services - a real whole-of-government approach - will eventually mean higher costs and larger budgets for local governments. Local government needs to address this funding question now, not leave it until it is committed to a course of events from which it cannot back out. A share of the GST allocation to Tasmania may be a way to address this future funding shortfall.

This leads me to my specific comments on the State Budget, Mr President. There is no doubt that the honourable Treasurer has made a serious attempt to get Tasmania moving with this Budget. I note that the public presentation has been titled 'Caring for Communities and Boosting Business' - both being themes of my speech today. It is pleasing that the Treasurer has recognised the importance of the linkage between a community's wellbeing and business growth. Although the Budget has targeted the north-west and the west coast for significant infrastructure funding, which I applaud, I hope that in the fine detail to come there is some allocation to assist the struggling communities in the southern part of Rowallan.

In saying this, I congratulate and thank the Treasurer for including the Meander dam proposal in the planning for future funding. As the honourable member for Apsley noted, after 30 years of procrastination this vital project will kick-start economic development and job opportunity in the Meander Valley, as well as securing through management an appropriate environmental flow in this stressed river system. I am also hopeful that the water package includes allocation to progress the Longmarsh

dam project in the northern midlands. Allocations for redevelopment at Sheffield High School, Hagley Primary School and the Deloraine Hospital are also welcomed.

The concept of an economic infrastructure fund and a social infrastructure fund is a good one. It provides a degree of certainty for future planning. I am aware that the Federal Government also has money allocated to Tasmania for these purposes and I would urge the Tasmanian Government to work closely with the Commonwealth to get the maximum value for the money available.

It is exciting to have our first expansionary budget for some years but we all need to remember that this is only a budget. It is only designed to create the environment for State growth, it is not necessarily the reality we will face over the coming year. Small to medium business will still have to deliver the majority of the growth and the public's expectation of an increase in employment. Provided the Government and its officers remain at arm's length, I am confident that the small business community in Tasmania will take up the challenge and deliver economic growth for all Tasmanians. Thank you.