



Jeremy Rockliff MP

House of Assembly

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Electorate: Braddon

Address-in-Reply

Mr ROCKLIFF (Braddon - Inaugural) - In supporting the motion I wish to extend my congratulations to all members of the House on their election on 20 July. Mr Deputy Speaker, first I would sincerely like to thank the people of Braddon. I am deeply honoured to be given the opportunity to represent them in the House of Assembly and I hope to prove to my electorate that I am worthy of their support and their trust.

As all members in this House would know, a successful campaign requires a huge team effort. I wish to place on record my appreciation to all my supporters who trudged the streets letterboxing, attending early morning meetings, putting up signs and the million and one other things that go into running a successful campaign. In particular I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to Paula Febey, Lyn Laycock, Sally and Brian Chandler, Tony Read, Christine Morris, Senator Richard Colbeck, Jane Bennett and Glynn and Jenny Williams, also to my parents, Richard and Geraldine Rockliff, for their support and guidance and my partner Sandra Knowles for her love and friendship. It would also be remiss of me not to give a special mention to our much loved family dog, Flash –

Members - Hear, hear.

Mr ROCKLIFF - who was an integral part of the campaign. In fact, since the election my father often complains that all the photographs and media attention Flash has received has simply gone to her head and she is increasingly neglecting her farm duties.

Members laughing.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to acknowledge my predecessors in Braddon, Bill Bonde and Tony Rundle: Bill, who has been a great mentor and a distinguished member of this House for many years; and Tony, our former Premier, who I admire for his courageous vision for Tasmania embodied in the Directions statement. While at the end of the day all aspects of his Directions vision were not acceptable to Tasmanians, many initiatives in this statement are still evident in the State today - our Service Tasmania shops, our community online access centres, computers in our

schools, quality assurance for our producers from paddock to plate, Basslink and gas.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Tony Rundle's style of politics struck a chord with me. Here was a person who was willing to throw caution to the wind for the sake of effecting change in Tasmania. Some in this Chamber might call this foolish politics. I prefer to call it leadership. Leadership is not simply managing what exists but facilitating change and looking ahead.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am a passionate Tasmanian. I love living here, I love working here and one day I would love to raise my family here. With my passion for this State also comes vision and that is why I stand here today, for I can foresee, as many others who have come before me, a vibrant Tasmania; a Tasmania that is open for business, where we have limited impediments for investment, where the unemployment rate is at least on par with the rest of the nation; a Tasmania that values and encourages its youth and its entrepreneurs but welcomes diversity of culture and ideas and where our communities have the confidence to willingly embrace change; a Tasmania that has our quality brand stamped on everything it does and is renowned throughout the world to consumers and tourists alike because of that brand; and a State that can, as a result of the right economic policies, afford the best health and education systems that Tasmanians deserve.

Mr Deputy Speaker, basically I want the sort of Tasmania that every Tasmanian wants and by working together and being constructive I believe we can accelerate the pace of change and build that Tasmania. By embracing our differences, indeed celebrating them, we can realise the shared vision of this island.

I have grown up with a strong community obligation but also a strong work ethic. I was born and bred here in Tasmania and like many people on the north-west coast, I have made my living by rolling up my sleeves and working with my bare hands. The Rockliff family originated from Yorkshire in England. From a small Yorkshire farming village in the mid-1800s came four Rockliff brothers to Van Diemen's Land, all with the ideal of owning their own land. In 1857, after years of working for Henry Reed, a wealthy landholder from Chudleigh, they decided to settle in the virtually untouched area of Sassafras. The land was covered by tall dense timbers - a damp, dark and inhospitable place - but George Rockliff saw the potential of its rich soils and had the courage to start a farm.

The Rockliffs were pioneer settlers in this part of Tasmania and they worked untiringly to carve from the rugged and impenetrable forest the productive farms of Sassafras. Subsequent generations of Rockliffs took a similar approach to the life and work of those four brothers. I am one of those, as

are my parents, Richard and Geraldine, who have instilled in me a strong work ethic. I owe them both a great deal. They made sacrifices to ensure I had a good education because they wanted me to have choice and opportunity in the direction of my life - an incredibly valuable gift for any young person.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I proudly chose to be a farmer and while my forebears carved their living from the soil under the big trees of Sassafras, the current generation of Rockliffs, like most farmers today, have come the full circle, planting more trees, conserving the soil and the waterways and showing a real commitment to Landcare. In fact I am part of a whole generation of farmers who have grown with Landcare and natural resource management and I want to stress today the need to acknowledge that management of our land use for agriculture has come a long way.

There have been real gains and improvements in soil management and many farmers now put aside areas of less productive land to provide habitat for local flora and fauna. Mr Deputy Speaker, farmers today know that by protecting the environment they are also protecting their livelihoods. They know if they want to have a sustainable future, an income from their farm, they must care for the natural resources. There is no such thing as enough education, and ecologically sustainable production is only possible if our farmers are profitable.

Mr Deputy Speaker, with my family's history and with my working background, I embrace the challenge of the shadow ministry for Primary Industries, Water and Environment portfolio. It is a job I take on with great enthusiasm. I can tell you now that I will not be afraid to stick up for the rights of farmers in ensuring that their work and the work of all those in our resource-based industries - our fishing, forestry and mining industries - is recognised by this Parliament, because we should not forget the underlying strength of our economy is our resource sector. But these traditional industries will only have a future in the global marketplace if new technologies, new ideas and new practices are adopted.

Governments have a huge role to play in these industries. To begin with, we desperately need to help our farming families with education, to assist them to keep abreast of new technologies and new approaches. While it is increasingly difficult to get into farming, it is much more difficult to survive in a sector that is constantly changing its practices and is extremely challenging. People often say to me that what we need is to get young farmers back on the land, but the answer is not that simple. Young farmers will only come back to the land if they know it is economic to do so and they are rewarded for their efforts, and this is where governments can have a big influence on the future of agriculture. It is important they do so, Mr

Deputy Speaker, because the average age of farmers in Tasmania has now climbed to 57.

Two of the greatest challenges our farming communities face are the need for water and the constant threat of disease. Access to water resources is critical. Drought conditions are currently hurting farmers in New South Wales and Victoria and while Tasmanian farmers are not drought-stricken, the latest rural confidence survey shows that our farmers are still expecting tough times ahead. With the cost of farming operations expected to continue to rise, there are always fluctuations in the fortunes of agriculture, simply because most commodities are traded now on global markets. We have seen this in the last few days with Simplot upgrading one factory and closing another. While we do not have a lot of control over commodity prices, we do have a measure of control over the many issues that affect primary industries in Tasmania. If our farming sector is strong, then our rural and regional towns will be too.

Mr Deputy Speaker, there is a substantial untapped capacity in our agricultural sector and we have no hope of doubling production if we do not get the basics right. Water is our best natural asset. The Hydro recognised that 50 years ago but we have yet to manage this resource to get the best outcome for our agricultural sector. This Government knows how critical water is to farmers. It has talked about it and spent years going through the processes and motions of addressing the problems. It is now time to get on with it, because the creation of dams and irrigation not only provides benefits to agriculture, but with some lateral thinking can also provide some significant spin-offs in terms of tourism.

Outbreaks of various animal diseases around the world over the last few years have highlighted the danger of inadequate animal health controls. Such an outbreak in Tasmania would be devastating, not only to the livestock industry but to our entire economy. I cannot stress this enough. Luckily for us, one of Tasmania's advantages is our isolation. We can keep the pests and diseases out, but it is vital we keep it this way and that our State works hard, both in terms of preparedness and prevention of disease.

I would like to briefly touch on the area of forestry, an industry vital to my electorate. I wholeheartedly support the jobs of timber workers in Tasmania. They are hardworking people, like many others in this State and just as all industry sectors need to be continually changing practices and looking at new approaches, so too does our forest industry. Like farmers who support Landcare methods, I know our timber workers operate with the sustainability of their resource in mind, but our timber communities need the confidence of the Tasmanian people more than ever since the election. To win it, they may need to better explain their forest practices. Let Tasmanians

know we have some of the most progressive and advanced environmental forest management in the world.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Tasmania's fishermen also need the security of their resource. There are so many rules, regulations and restrictions governing our fisheries that many would be forgiven for thinking that our State was already one entire marine reserve. But fishermen know, just as farmers do, that if they do not conserve their resource, they lose their livelihood. Fishermen will not ask for any more than they believe will sustain their industry but they do not deserve any less and I am determined to protect the rights of fishermen - professional and recreational.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to address another of my shadow portfolio areas and I am delighted to have the responsibility for the arts. Investment by government and business in the arts is not subsidising artistic expression, it is an investment in community development, in diversity, creativity and cultural identity, and I passionately believe that the arts are empowering to local communities.

Just to give you an example of this, as one of my first duties as a member of Parliament, I opened an exhibition by two promising young Don College art students, James and Tobi Holland. The work of these two exceptionally talented young people has been nurtured by some wonderful mentors including parents, high school and college art teachers, but it was the process of exhibiting their work that I saw as a wonderful example of community empowerment. The local gallery offered space for the exhibition. The local framing service, the local restaurant, the local youth access centre and many others were involved in making the exhibition a success. Not only that the exercise has taught these young people what community is all about - getting behind each other and giving people the opportunity to succeed. Our arts community is alive and well in Tasmania and I will work to further encourage the diversity, entrepreneurship and creativity and to see the flavours of a wonderfully vibrant arts community continue to be injected into our regions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, life's experiences have taught me a great deal but there are many things that have had an immense impact on my life. Volunteerism is one, and I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the thousands of volunteers in our community, the people who contribute daily in their own way to make somebody else's life better. Volunteers are people who hold our communities together and they deserve our respect, recognition and gratitude. For me, being a volunteer with the Lifeline organisation for the past eight years including three as a telephone counsellor, is one of those. This experience has taught me some valuable lessons which I know will help me in representing Tasmanians from all walks of life. Lessons such as

empathy which literally means the ability to understand another person pretty much as they understand themselves, to see the world through their eyes. Lessons such as listening to others in a non-prejudicial and non-judgmental way, understanding the isolation people feel when their relationships break down, when they lose a loved one, when they lose their job, when they have a gambling addiction and when they are suicidal; the pressures people feel if they perceive they are different from those they consider to be normal.

But the greatest lesson to me in dealing with community organisations has been to deal with reality and not bury my head in the sand; the realities Tasmanians face on a daily basis. We cannot afford to continually sweep them under the carpet, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I believe that all members of this place - all 25 of us - acknowledge the realities. If we own up to the drug problems in this State or admit we have real problems with gambling, child abuse and youth suicide, we will take the first step to help.

Mr Deputy Speaker, we must address our social problems because they do exist. Similarly, we must address our economic problems because if we do not, we do not survive economically, we will continue to fail Tasmania socially. That is the reality.

Members - Hear, hear.

Mr ROCKLIFF - If people do not have jobs and if our businesses and industry decline then everything else - our education system, health system and social system - will follow.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the north-west coast may be a rich region in terms of its soils and natural resources, but most people in the electorate of Braddon are hardworking people and many are still doing it tough. I have an enormous passion for this region and fortunately, at present, I sense a great deal of optimism on the north-west coast that has not been there for some time. New businesses are springing up, as is new development. People are gearing up to restructure their business and employ and train more staff; it is a good feeling and very positive. The challenge for this Government is to sustain it and to ensure that new projects fulfil their potential and this mood of optimism translates into real productivity and real jobs. Recent research has shown that while many small communities in Australia are ready and willing to engage in a rural and regional renaissance, all they lack is guidance on what should be done and how to do it. That is where they are looking for leadership from government: to listen to them; to provide the right education and training opportunities; to facilitate public and private partnerships for investment; to empower our communities to participate and to mobilise their willingness into action.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to conclude on three values that I hold dear and that I expressed in my electorate during the campaign; three values that I bring to this Parliament. The first is compassion. I will always be an advocate for a compassionate and tolerant community because a compassionate community concentrates on the positives that unite us rather than the differences that divide us. There are many examples around Australia of rural and regional communities whose success points to their creativity fostered through compassion and tolerance of individuals and their new ideas.

The second word, Mr Deputy Speaker, is commonsense. I am able to draw on my rural background where practical solutions to difficult problems are the order of the day, and I can tell you that as a member of parliament I will be applying the commonsense filter to all the business of this House, ensuring that all government policy and all legislation is measured against the impact on working people and those industry sectors that generate the wealth in our economy.

The third and last word is commitment. Those who know me know that commitment and loyalty are two values which I hold very dear. Mr Deputy Speaker, my commitment to working people of all backgrounds remains my overriding goal as a member of parliament because I have come to this Parliament to make a difference, a positive contribution. While I may not have a silver tongue or an ingenious wit, I do have integrity, solid principles and a willingness to serve the people of Braddon, and to fight tooth and nail for regional Tasmania.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am very proud to be standing here today. I offer my commitment and loyalty to this forty-fifth Parliament, to the Liberal Party whose philosophy I hold dear, to the people of Braddon and to our magnificent State, Tasmania.

Members - Hear, hear.