



Mark Shelton MP

House of Assembly

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Electorate: Lyons

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#### ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

**Mr SHELTON** (Lyons - Inaugural) - Mr Speaker, I can begin because my support team is here - Merrilyn is in the Chamber. I would like to begin by congratulating all re-elected members of this House. I also congratulate my newly elected parliamentary colleagues and wish them all the best in their respective endeavours. I would also like to acknowledge all the candidates that put a huge effort into their own election campaigns.

It is indeed a privilege to stand here today to represent the people of Lyons and the people of Tasmania. It has been a long and interesting journey since I first decided to stand as a Liberal candidate for Lyons. During this time my commitment to progress the views and interests of the people of Lyons remains stronger than ever. I am extremely proud that my election is a first in that I am the first person from the small township of Bracknell to sit in this House of Assembly. This honour and significance is not lost on me, considering that I have lived in the district all my life and I am part of five generations of the Shelton-Page family, which has made a proud contribution to this small rural community. Passion, commitment and loyalty are certainly values that I aspire to, and these values have been passed down through generations.

My forebears settled in our area in the mid-1800s, and the property we now own was part of the original landholding. My mother was born at a property called Denbury just outside of Bracknell. She had lived at Bracknell all her life prior to moving into the Toosey Nursing Home at Longford. As young girls my mother and her sister would milk 17 cows by hand each morning and night before walking three kilometres to the Bracknell school, although of course in those days no-one would have known what a kilometre was. My father was raised in Elizabeth Town and left school at the age of 13 to work on the threshing machine. Outside the harvest season he earned his keep by cutting firewood for the Deloraine bakery with an axe and a crosscut saw. At the age of 19 he had saved enough money to buy a new two-man chainsaw, the first one in the district. 'It cost me the same price as a new car', he always said. He had many stories to tell about his time working in the bush and clearing the Hydro transmission lines. On settling in Bracknell he moved into contract farm work, fencing, splitting posts and droppers, and hay-carting.

I started working with my father in the bush around the local farms every holiday and weekends. It seemed to a young boy that he never stopped working. If he was not working for himself he was assisting someone in need. Both parents received awards for their community service and became life members of the local community groups. How you approach life is often taken from the examples you see, so my approach to working with the community was probably inevitable, given the commitment and passion that my parents displayed towards their community and those genes that I inherited from them.

This leads me to the essence of my address to Parliament today. My entry into local government some 11 years ago was driven by my desire to represent the interests of the residents of my small town and the Municipality of Meander Valley, which comprises a number of small townships ranging from 200 and 4 000 people. Far too often I see governments of all persuasions, State and Federal, overlook the needs and aspirations of small rural and regional communities which are under pressure to exist.

Mr Speaker, I believe that currently there is an enormous disconnect between government, the policies they apply and the smaller communities which government has the responsibility to serve and represent. I intend that my time in this House will be spent representing the views of these communities to ensure that the services that residents rightly deserve are delivered and to ensure that the many small townships which Tasmania is made up of do not wither on the vine.

As mayor of Meander Valley, I have witnessed first-hand examples where the current bureaucracy does not fully comprehend the implications that its actions have on smaller communities and, in some instances, has a total disregard of the struggle that these small townships face every day. As a collective group of representatives on the Floor of this House, we need to restore the balance. The provision of far better essential services in the areas of health, education, transport, community support and basic water and service infrastructure must occur, otherwise there is a very real risk that many of these communities I speak of will simply disappear off the Tasmanian map.

We remain the most decentralised of all States in the Commonwealth, but what sort of place would it be if almost everyone lived in the major urban centres? Whilst it would be far easier for governments to manage and deliver these essential services if they were centralised in higher population hubs and metropolitan areas, the reality is

that, for various reasons, people will choose to experience the rural splendour and sense of community that our smaller townships offer. Let us face it, Mr Speaker, our regional townships are the absolute essence of the Tasmanian living experience. It is imperative, therefore, that we, as representatives of our respective communities, reconnect with them to listen and, more importantly, deliver solutions which address these issues and concerns.

During my election campaign our team, which was essentially myself and my wife Marilyn - and I cannot mention too many others at this stage - doorknocked thousands of homes across Lyons. This gave me a tremendous insight into the challenges faced by many Tasmanian families who are doing it much tougher than any of us here today could ever imagine.

Mr Speaker, as you would well know, as well as Lyons being made up of 90 small townships and communities, there is also a strong farming element in this electorate. It has been well reported that many individuals and families working in the agricultural sector are struggling due to a number of factors. There is a certain misinformed view that many of our primary producers are at the affluent end of the earning scale, but nothing could be further from the truth. The days of the rural gentry have well and truly disappeared and now there is a critical need for the development and implementation of clear, relevant and effective policies and initiatives to support the agricultural sector. This Tasmanian Government must play a greater role and demonstrate decisive leadership if the agricultural sector is to have a successful future.

The water and irrigation investment, supported by both previous Labor governments and my party, is certainly welcomed by the rural communities and is an initiative that, as mayor of Meander Valley Council, I have lobbied hard for. This, however, is only one part of the solution to secure agricultural prosperity for Tasmania. The Premier has stated on a number of occasions that Tasmania has the potential to be the food bowl of the nation. Yes, we have the potential but potential is only a word, and one that I dislike, because all too often potential is unrealised, especially when we speak about it in the context of Tasmania.

Many in the agricultural sector are tied to commodity markets and suffer when a national and global downturn occurs. It is my clear view that this Government must, through the Department of Economic Development, think much more creatively and invest more resources in identifying new markets which are less volatile and give greater levels of security to this sector. Surety of water will assist producers to grow the best carrots, the best peas and the best potatoes. However, it is a pointless exercise if we do not have the markets to sell into.

In 2008-09, the Tasmanian gross State product contributed only 1.8 per cent of the national GDP. The 2006 census data indicated that agriculture contributed 16 per cent to the Tasmanian GSP, which outstripped the national average of 12 per cent. The important point here is that whilst we will agree that our agriculture is critical to the Tasmanian economy, we are a relatively small contributor in the national sense and could be well considered to be a niche market producer. The eastern seaboard of Australia presents us with an enormous opportunity to sell into but our food producers simply do not have the resources to identify the wholesale and distributor markets. This is where the Department of Economic Development, supported by robust government policy, can take the lead and assist food producers in this area so that they have an option to make choices and to either sell into the more lucrative targeted niche markets or be tied to commodity markets.

A shining example of success, which is in my own municipality, is Ashgrove Cheese - the second time they have been mentioned in this session. Many years ago, the owners of this enterprise made the smart, strategic decision to transition from the milk-commodity market to the value-added niche market through the production of high quality cheese products. I am very proud when I walk into delicatessens and independent supermarkets in a township in regional Australia and see the Ashgrove Cheese products for sale. This company has built an extremely successful business through the production of high quality products and also, importantly, through expending blood, sweat and tears and taking a calculated business risk to develop their own wholesale and distribution networks. I strongly believe that this is an example of the way forward for many of our food producers across Tasmania. However, the catalyst for us to get some real traction in this area must be a far greater level of support from the Tasmanian Government and its agencies.

Linked to the effective operation of government and parliament is the topical issue of the most appropriate number of members in this House of Assembly. I would like to place on record my support for a legitimate review to determine the best possible model in terms of numbers appropriate for this House and to give effective representation across the Tasmanian electorates in the future.

The recent allocation of ministerial portfolios has highlighted the difficulties associated with having a balanced workload and the ability to maintain a standard which does not compromise the quality of decision-making. If we are serious about delivering high quality government, we must acknowledge that the allocation of five or six ministerial portfolios to an individual is ridiculous and cannot deliver the effective policy or decision-making which is expected of a functional, efficient government. At a time in our political history where greater levels of accountability are expected and demanded by constituents, there is a significant risk of substandard governments when unsustainable ministerial loads occur, which in my view is the situation with the current Government.

In these instances, regardless of how talented or dedicated an individual may be, the reality is that the full responsibilities that ministerial positions carry cannot be fully executed. When this occurs there is a genuine risk that the power and responsibilities associated with such things as policy development, implementation, interpretation and critical decision-making will default to State bureaucracy.

I believe that the smaller Parliament has inevitably led over the last 12 years to unelected officials taking more decisions which should have rightly been taken by elected accountable ministers in this place.

Mr Hidding - Hear, hear.

**Mr SHELTON** - During my time in local government, Mr Speaker, I have witnessed this situation occurring first-hand. I have been involved in many negotiations and discussions where ministers of previous governments have not been fully across or understood the issues being discussed and have had to rely on the opinion provided by the way of a briefing note from an agency bureaucrat. This is not a criticism of the individual minister but a criticism of the framework that restricts effective delivery of government.

Mr Speaker, these situations cannot continue to occur and the risk of them occurring must be eliminated. The residents in our respective electorates empower us to lead and govern for the common good of all Tasmanians. This responsibility must never be devolved to another group which has not been democratically elected.

My shadow portfolio responsibilities are Police and Emergency Services and Resources. I look forward to working with and understanding the issues that the relevant agencies have in delivering the level of service that the community expects statewide. To date my experience revolves around Meander Valley and the wonderful effort of the SES, the fireys, and Tasmania Police in covering such a large regional area with the resources at hand. To this end I am sure the police are looking forward to the Government fulfilling its election promise of up to 100 extra officers. We will just have to wait and see.

Resources includes forestry and mining. Both have gained their fair share of media attention of late. However, putting that aside I would like to place on record the acknowledgment that these two industries are absolutely vital to the Tasmanian economy and to the sustainability of our regional communities. The forest industry is particularly important to Lyons. Not only does it provide employment for thousands of people through the local contractors and businesses but it also provides many farmers and private foresters with an annual income.

Mr Speaker, I understand that this view may not be shared by all in this Chamber but wouldn't life be boring if we all thought the same way and we all had the same ideals?

Another area where we may not all agree is support for the business sector. Individuals with the intestinal fortitude to invest their difficult-to-accumulate and hard-earned savings should be encouraged and when they are willing to risk by investing in business they should be supported by strong government policy. Small business is and will continue to be one of the main drivers in our economy, provided that government does not overburden it with red tape and regulation. I also note with interest that His Excellency in his address yesterday stated, 'My Government will support small business to start up and thrive'.

I cannot remember my father ever stating that he worked for a wage full time. He was a shearer, a forest contractor, a farm contractor and a school bus operator. He never relied on someone else for an income, he created his own opportunities. He supported his family by making the most of his business - a typical small businessman willing to have a go.

All new members addressing this House have stated how they would all like to see Tasmania grow, improve essential services and create jobs and opportunities. I certainly also agree with this, and in my view the answer is in wealth creation through small-business development.

Mr Groom - Hear, hear.

**Mr SHELTON** - As previously mentioned, I started my working life hay contracting with my father, carting thousands and thousands of hay bales. Dad was the principal contractor and my brother and I in the early days were on half a cent a bale. Under intense negotiation over a couple of years we managed to increase the rate to one cent a bale. My sons are now contracting around the Bracknell area, and thankfully the rates are somewhat higher than they were back then.

I entered the full-time work force at the age of 16 as an apprentice motor mechanic at Shaw Contracting of Whitemore, a business that has had its ups and downs but has stood the test of time. Shaw has developed into a leading Tasmanian business from a humble beginning as the Whitemore blacksmith shop. I would like to

thank the Shaw family for their moral support over the years and for building one of Tasmania's leading businesses, one recognised for its human resources and business development.

My career led me to a TAFE college, where I spent 20 years as a motor mechanic, small engine- and diesel-fitting teacher, and indeed was a member of the AEU. The bulk of the apprentices that I have taught over the years have been employed by small business. I have had a wonderful opportunity to experience a number of vocations as a farmer, tradesman, trade teacher, mayor and small business operator, and I look forward to sharing my experiences with this House.

In conclusion, I would like to say a big thank you to my wife Merrilyn for walking with me every step of the way through my campaign. She has been a tower of strength. There is an old saying that behind every man there is a good woman. I certainly hold that true and would simply say behind this man there is an even better woman. To my three children and their partners, Brent and Olivia, Clint and Purdy, and Jacquilyn and my two grandchildren, Lillian and Tyson, and to my extended family and friends, your support and encouragement has been outstanding. My thanks also to the Meander Valley Council staff and councillors for their encouragement, and to my work colleagues at the Skills Institute, better known to me as the Automotive College of TAFE, for their years of friendship, camaraderie and advice, and in particular for the political training that the lunch room jousting provided. The campaign strategy, both statewide and locally, of remaining genuine, true to ourselves and well-grounded, proved to be critical for me as a first-time candidate.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition on the way he led our campaign, and the comprehensive platform of forward-looking policies that he laid out. Mr Speaker, when we are engaged in robust discussion, which from time to time will feel like unpleasant combat, I would encourage all my colleagues on the floor of this House to stop, take a moment and refocus on the reason we are here. Mr Speaker, I am sure all of us recognise the privilege given to us by our electors to be members of this House. I, for one, aim to spend my time here making a contribution which will help to make life better for the people whom we represent now, and leave a positive legacy for future generations of Tasmanians. I thank the House.

Members - Hear, hear.