

## Inaugural Speech – Jim Cox MP



Jim Cox MP

House of Assembly

Date: 4 October 1989

Electorate: Bass

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### **CONSOLIDATED FUND APPROPRIATION BILL 1989-90**

#### **Second Reading**

**Mr COX** (Bass) - Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is with pleasure that I rise for the first time in this House to support the first Budget of the Labor Government. It is also the first opportunity I have had in the House to congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker and rather belatedly I do so now.

**Mr Cornish** - You'll get on.

**Mr COX** - It is my intention.

I took the not inconsiderable step of seeking the honour of representing the people of Bass in this Parliament after living through the grim years of community discord and confrontationism provided, for reasons of cynical electoral manipulation, by the Government of Robin Gray.

We live on a small island and the characteristic of small islands - as international experience has shown - is that such islands are fragile economically, socially and environmentally. It became more and more evident as these grim years rolled on that the Gray Government was not willing to do what was necessary to protect the environment's fragility. Moreover, as the former Government embarked upon its suicidal course of confrontation with the people who sought to defend our island's environmental fragility, it also became clear that it was simply cavalier about the social fragility of our island's communities. Its policy was to set neighbour against neighbour, workmate against workmate and parent against son and daughter. In those heady days of community fragmentation and confrontation violence was always just around the corner and it is my opinion that we avoided that only by good fortune.

Those days are past. The vote for change on 13 May was a vote for a new way - a way emphasising consultation and openness; a way emphasising the sharing of information; and a way that treats the citizens of Tasmania as adults and fully participating partners in government, not as subjects to be hoodwinked, patronised and insulted by the crude and contemptible politics of the pork barrel. The Government has now changed hands and we have been given an opportunity to assess properly the State of Tasmania's finances. We can see that the outgoing Government was also contemptuous of the fragile nature of our island economy.

The state of the Tasmanian debt is a standing indictment of the gung ho approach to economic management which characterised the Gray years. The Labor Government

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inherited a debt which was becoming increasingly unsustainable. As an increasing percentage of that debt has shifted to non-income producing activities, the State's capacity to service this debt has fallen dramatically and the financial sleight of hand indulged in by the previous Government in order to maintain a level of spending which, in its contempt for the good commonsense of the electorate, it believed was necessary to achieve success at the polls, has been exposed for what it is: gross fiscal irresponsibility.

Now, for the first time in many years, a government is prepared to bit the bullet. It has produced a budget which has been accepted by business, unions and media as economically responsible. It takes the tough decisions and provides a sound basis for the program of reform which will unroll in the years ahead.

Employment creation and social justice will be high on this Government's agenda and these concerns are reflected in this, the first of a long series of Labor budgets. The Government I support has signalled that the 9 per cent employment rate which characterised the Gray years is not good enough. Behind the statistics lies a hidden picture of misery, wasted human resource and, I guess, the hopeless apathy which goes with long-term unemployment. Our young people, who bear the brunt of unemployment, deserve better than this. The employment summit which will take place later this year will be the first step towards a turning around of our disastrous employment rate. I have a great deal of confidence in the summit; it will generate a full community pulling together which will stand in stark contrast to the divisiveness of the past.

I understand that in conjunction with that summit there will be a review of employment creating programs. Such a review is to be welcomed. I believe that various local employment initiative schemes have been brought to the attention of the Minister for Employment, Industrial Relations and Training and I commend him for the interest he is showing in such schemes. Their community-based nature offers much at a time when local community supports have come under increasing pressure.

I am also watching with interest the emerging success of the new enterprise incentive scheme. This is an initiative of the Federal Labor Government whereby the Commonwealth and the State assist unemployed people to commence their own new and independent business. I have been concerned for some time that such programs were not being sufficiently promoted in my Division of Bass. With the introduction of the business skills training course at the Launceston technical and further education college for the first time this year, things are changing and I have it from the minister that he will continue to expand the decentralisation of employment creating initiatives.

I would like to give the House one of the reasons I stood for the seat of Bass. It is because I have a very clear and heightened sense of what it means to be Tasmanian. I am fiercely proudly fifth generation Tasmanian. That is why it was so distressing to live through the Gray years and watch the social fabric of the Tasmanian community being slowly torn apart and why it was so distressing to see the wanton disregard which the previous Government showed toward the environment of this the most beautiful of islands. To the Gray Government Tasmania - this marvellous island in which I believe we are privileged to live - is simply a store of resources that were

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there for its plundering. That it may have deserved respect and reverence in itself seemed to be beyond its capacity to comprehend.

Tasmania is home to me and a home should be cared for. That we are lucky enough to live in a part of the world so special that 20 per cent of it merits international recognition under World Heritage area listing should be a source of great pride to members and indeed to all Australians, as the Treasurer has said on many occasions in this House. To argue that World Heritage listing is something to be deplored is to maintain that Tasmania is not special; it is not marvellous; it is not to be judged by other and higher standards than apply to less fortunate parts of the world.

The Government has dramatically hoisted care for our island's fragile environment up the political agenda. As a member for Bass I welcome the Government's budgetary commitment to station a senior environment officer permanently in Launceston and to provide a further \$1.6 million for beautification works on the River Tamar.

I also welcome the commitment of the Minister for Environment and Planning to establish a working group on marine parks. There has been some extraordinary and ill-informed nonsense spoken recently about marine parks. Properly marketed a marine recreation park can be an enormous tourist drawcard, while in no way impeding the rights of access of customary users. At the same time we have a responsibility under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's Man and the Biosphere Program to establish reserves to protect perpetually representative marine habitats. Again this can be achieved without mass violation of customary user rights.

As stewards of the world's finest environment we have a duty to nurture and protect that environment. We also have a duty to make it available to the world. The tourism industry is crucially important to our future but, as the pilots dispute has demonstrated, it is an industry that is cruelly vulnerable to forces beyond our control. This Government reacted promptly and effectively under the circumstances to minimise the impact of the pilots dispute.

The pilots dispute has served to emphasise the importance to the State of waterborne communication. For that reason I am firmly committed to the proposed interstate ferry services and facilities in George Town. In my opinion there is no more urgent need currently facing this State and I will be doing my utmost to ensure that such facilities are put in place with all due despatch.

I do not require an extension of time. I think that covers all I wish to say in this my inaugural speech and in closing I would like to commend the first Budget of this Labor Government to this House.

**Members** - Hear, hear.