



Ms Tabatha Badger MP

House of Assembly

Date: 21 May 2024

Electorate: Lyons

[11.48 a.m.]

Ms BADGER (Lyons) (Inaugural) - Madam Speaker, after that last performance there is no real need to hold back.

Ya pulingina. I begin by acknowledging that we are on Aboriginal land, the stolen land of the Muwinina people. I pay my deepest respects to the Tasmanian Aboriginal people, and their elders past and present.

Lutruwita/Tasmania's traditional owners, the palawa, have over 60,000 years of immeasurable connection with land, sea and sky country. The heritage is living, and I express my sorrow for the ongoing harm caused by European invasion. May this government, in the spirit of restoration, prioritise reconciliation and empowerment for the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. It is time for healing, and time for meaningful action, justice, truth-telling, treaty and land returns.

Tasmania is facing a myriad of crises. Our health system is failing, housing is increasingly unattainable, the cost of living is pushing people to breaking point and our environment is precariously close to ecological collapse. Each of these crises was created by poor political decision-making, so they can each be overcome by good political decisions. To each of you elected, entrusted to make those good decisions, congratulations and no pressure, but future generations will be judging you.

It is an extraordinary privilege to be elected to this House. Thank you to my community in the vast electorate of Lyons for entrusting me with this position, particularly during this pivotal time for Tasmania. I am looking forward to our forthcoming hearty debates, our inevitable but civil disagreements, and collaboratively shaping a better future for our state. Whether we are willing to admit it or not, there is more that binds us than divides us. Beyond any political division or discourse we face, together we share an endearing passion for Tasmania as one of the finest places on this planet.

Coming into this unexpected chapter of my life as a member of parliament, the most important role I believe we can all play is ensuring Tasmania remains extraordinary for future generations, a view best articulated by the words of Tasmanian visionary and wilderness photographer Olegas Truchanas:

Is there any reason why Tasmania should not be more beautiful on the day we leave it than on the day we came? ... If we can revise our attitudes towards the land under our feet; if we can accept the role of steward and depart from the role of conqueror, if we can accept that man and nature are inseparable parts of the unified whole, then

Tasmania can be a shining beacon in a dull, uniform and largely artificial world.

I stand here today as the youngest member of this 51st Parliament. I am part of the generation inheriting the climate and inequality crisis. For decades governments have been warned that these two interlinked crises are the greatest threats to modern society, yet there has been overwhelming inaction. Denial of the fact that these crises exist has transcended into delaying finding solutions and is causing widespread disillusion with younger people, who are anxious about their future, and is there any wonder?

In my lifetime alone, I have seen accelerated shoreline erosion of the north-west coast beaches where I grew up. As children, my sister and I would spend countless hours after school each day at Boat Harbour beach. Its once painfully freezing water is now at least tolerable to swim in as water temperatures are rising at record levels. Prior to the global pandemic, I lived in Freycinet, working in land management and then running a tourism business. Along the east coast, fish migrations are changing with the warming waters. New species are travelling further south, but the cold-water species do not have that much further south to go. Giant kelp forests that once entangled your arms and legs while snorkelling have thinned to such extremes that most are now non-existent.

As a bushwalker, I trek off track routes that were once laden with waist-high mud but have now become so dry that I might just take up wearing white shoes. What once seemed like perpetually snow-capped mountains are now a rare mid-winter treat. I have had the exceptional privilege to climb peaks right around the world, and sometimes I even made it to the top. In remote Himalayan villages I have been accepted into homes and shared evening meals with people whose language I could not speak, but we could communicate through the shared wonder of the world around us. I have come to learn that the world's kindest people are those who have the least. These isolated places and people are disproportionately suffering due to climate change. Well-trodden routes are now safety hazards for melting glaciers. Increasing avalanches are frequently cutting off food supply, power and tourism income.

In the short time since being elected, I have been approached by farmers who state they are not green, but their water sources are frequently running dry. Their crop rotation is changing, as is their productivity, with the changing, increasingly unpredictable seasons. They know that the time for climate action is yesterday, and the Greens are here fighting for it.

The people in the southern beaches are struggling to keep up with the landcare work required to stabilise their coastal landbanks, which are succumbing to erosion which will only exacerbate with sea level rise. They are one of an increasing number of communities on the ground trying to find nature-based defences for what is to come.

Nowhere else on Earth except this island does the Tasmanian devil live, nor the Miena cider gum, the Tasmanian masked owl, Huon pine or the Maugean skate, yet we are continually witnessing a stream of informed and therefore conscious decisions to destroy the habitat of these amazing creatures, sending them to the brink of extinction.

We do not have to continue on this trajectory of destruction. With our remaining intact, functioning environments, Tasmania can and should be leading the world in protecting biodiversity, preventing invasive species and reducing emissions. We can lead the charge in Australia's commitment to the 2022 Global Biodiversity Pact to end extinctions and expand our protected areas to not only conserve nature but restore it, but we are running out of time to turn the ship around. The year 2030 has long been bookmarked as the deadline for decarbonisation and halting environmental destruction, meaning the decisions made in this term of government are absolutely crucial.

Wildlife champion Greg Irons reminded me a few weeks ago that the people in this House like to state that a fair percentage of this state is locked up in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA), and our national parks. Indeed, much of Tasmania is protected and that is because so much of this island is irreplaceably special. Our wild places are of outstanding universal value. Amid the climate and biodiversity crisis, we here today have a duty to ensure the proper protection of all important landscapes, places like the mystical Spero-Wanderer wilderness, which is presently underprotected as a south-west conservation area. It should be part of the TWWHA. I have walked in this country and rafted the rivers. There is nothing else like it in Tasmania. The rivers have giant Huon pines bigger than anywhere else, and the wild west coast shoreline houses geological features that are absolutely on steroids.

Protecting the cool temperate rainforest of takayna is longstanding unfinished business for the Greens. These forests are constantly under threat and right now there is a road being forged to facilitate logging of ancient native trees by the Frankland River. When will we stop robbing our children's carbon bank and understand that these forests are invaluable if left standing and protected?

Beyond traditional land tenures, our dark skies, sky country also needs protection. Around 80 per cent of people on Earth cannot see the stars for the light pollution, but here, in south west Tasmania we have some of the darkest skies left on the planet. It is a place of cultural significance. How many cultures can still sit under the stars and tell the ways of their old people? Here, in Tasmania's south west, the palawa still can.

The statement I began with by Olegas Truchanas was made in 1971 during the plight of the Save Lake Pedder campaign, and it is thanks to the enduring work and infectious hope from the original Pedder people that today a new generation has been inspired to take action to restore this extraordinary place, despite being too young to have known it personally. I want to acknowledge two of the Pedder women who have recently been lost to us, Melva Truchanas and Hilary Bennell. Respectively, Melva and Hilary were two of the state's leading adventurers. They paved the way for Tasmanian women in environmental conservation. Melva and Hilary would have taken great heart in being here today and the present composition of this parliament.

Madam Speaker, Lake Pedder's day is coming; its restoration is inevitable. The question is merely will we be the ones to right this past environmental mistake, or will nature take her course and do it for us? The flooding of Pedder initiated a global conservation movement. Its restoration amid a climate and biodiversity crisis will have even more profound effects, including making Tasmania a global leader in restoration, creating a new industry and well-paid, meaningful work, a fact that was recognised in Australia's otherwise damning 2021 State of the Environment report.

Protecting and restoring nature are just two of the many spaces requiring action from Tasmania. Pedder leads to the nuanced, necessary debate on the future of renewable energy. In this state, we are in both a climate and biodiversity crisis. Renewables are one part of the solution, but if they cannot coexist with Tasmania's endemic biodiversity, they are counterproductive to the cause. Let us strive for island-appropriate scale projects like an uptake in rooftop solar on energy-efficient homes, suburb by suburb, with community batteries and EV trading tech available.

Yackandandah, a Victorian town in the foothills of the Australian Alps, is leading the charge on localised electrification, so the blueprint exists. Tasmanian towns can follow suit and as renewable technology comes down the cost curve, let us be ready for more wave power and floating solar on our present empowerments to create a variety of renewable sources for greater resilience in the future Tasmanian grid.

In order to electrify, we require skilled Tasmanian workers, which is why I am proud to be the Greens opposition spokesperson for Skills and Training. During the election campaign I was proud to launch the Greens' Future Jobs Plan to ensure Tasmanians are readily positioned to take up well-paid careers in the industries of the future.

Inequality is the other crisis of our time, and it is well versed in this House. Be it low education, literacy and retention rates, poor access to healthcare services or unaffordable housing with decreasing availability, we are not seeing the improvements at the pace required to lift the quality of life in Tasmania to align with the rest of the country.

During the first week of parliament, many members raised the number of young people leaving our state, the equivalent to a planeload every four days, departing in pursuit of further education, a greater diversity of employment opportunities and well-paid jobs. Generally speaking, we absolutely should be encouraging Tasmania's young people to leave, but to go and see the world, to experience new cultures, to garner new skills and expertise. We must create an island home for people to return to, as so many inevitably will.

A future Tasmania where young people can share their newly created tapestries of abilities and perspectives; where they can return home to be with their family or raise a family of their own, without compromising on a liveable income or stable job. In a comparatively privileged, peaceful state like Tasmania, there is no reason we cannot have equitable opportunities right here.

The online era has arrived. Computer and internet literacy is as crucial for employment and education as reading and writing. Steps must be made to bridge the digital divide; we cannot see Tasmania slip behind on the digital front as we have with literacy. Ensuring Tasmania has greater digital connectivity is a necessity to secure our state's future prosperity in the digital world. It will ensure regional school students can connect and that tourism centres like Cradle Mountain and Port Arthur Historic Site can offer state-of-the-art virtual reality experiences. It opens the doors to innovate and transform our agricultural sector. The health sector will benefit from telehealth services being rolled out in rural towns. Is now the time to make Tasmania again clean, green and connected?

We must also further equality and not exclusivity in our democracy. I commend the decision by the Premier, Jeremy Rockliff, to strengthen Tasmania's democracy by finally restoring the numbers in the House of Assembly, a resolution the Greens have championed since the 1998 reduction to remove the Greens. Well, what a failure. Overworked staff and ministers suffered, carrying the extra workload of ten members and the Greens are still here, now with a record six members: five in the House of Assembly and one in the upper House.

I thank the Greens staff and all of the parliamentary staff for your tremendous, thoughtful work accommodating for the additional and new members coming into this Parliament, as well as finding the physical seating, offices and all of sundry that was associated with this increase. You have handled the change with utmost professionalism and made our journey so much smoother. Thank you.

Off the back of the restored numbers in the House, in the spirit of bolstering our democracy, I am proud the first bill tabled by the Greens is for stronger donation disclosure legislation; yet another space in which Tasmania should be leading the country. Tasmanians deserve to know who is funding the politicians elected to make the decisions on their behalf. We have minor parties and independents in this House who are capable of publicly naming their political donors. The highly resourced major parties should be doing the same.

Fundamental to a healthy democracy is peaceful protest. Tasmania's draconian anti protest laws must be repealed. A healthy government would be embracing and consulting with passionate protesters participating in the state's democracy, not locking them up in the present disproportionate legislation which is not working and will never work. Tasmanians have proven time and time again that bad legislation or hefty legal action will not deter them from taking a stand to protect our precious wild places. We saw this with the Franklin River, stopping the pulp mill, and we will see it again to save our native forests.

What a time to be a Green. We are here for climate action, equality, for a strong democracy. The Greens are here in force for Tasmanians; proudly standing by our party's pillars of social justice, ecological sustainability, grassroots democracy, peace and nonviolence. We are here representing a groundswell community movement of people rising up for a fairer, more peaceful society on a habitable, healthy planet. Thanks to the Greens, in the past we have seen the TWWHA declared and subsequent boundary extensions; the Douglas-Apsley National Park protected; freedom of information legislation, and gun law reform. Will it not be wonderful on the day when we add to that list of green achievements, legislation on ecocide, rewilding and restoration and a human rights act.

It has been a decade too long since the Greens have had a representative in Lyons. I am proud to stand here as the third Green to represent this stunning electorate. Tim Morris was our last representative. He was proudly the first Green to be in the Deputy Speaker's role and he was a linchpin during our election campaign. Our other member for Lyons left a political legacy of a generation: Christine Milne is one of the most intelligent, relentless and selfless individuals to ever walk the halls in this parliament. She was the first female leader of a Tasmanian political party and went on to be elected

in the Australian Senate and become leader of the Australian Greens. Somehow, between her ongoing innumerable campaigns, Christine made an enormous amount of time free to help during our election campaign. Without both Christine and Tim, we would not have a Green here today.

As any member of Lyons, past and present, can appreciate, the logistics of covering this grand electorate are an equally exciting and daunting challenge. Thanks to the groundswell of volunteers and caring people right across this state, we managed, almost seamlessly. Kudos to our core Lyons members who have been the stalwarts of our green community over the past few years when we did not have a member of parliament. It was their work behind the scenes that ensured we were ready for an election, long before this one was even called. Gary, Glenn, Helen, Neil, Heather, Elizabeth, Paul, Hannah, Tobias, Jill, Craig and our honorary Lyons members and friends, Paul Thomas and Bob Brown, thank you.

It is to my family I owe the greatest debt. They have been a source of unwavering love, support and, too often, unsolicited advice. From childhood, they showed me the enrichment that comes from community engagement and the fulfilment of volunteering. Perhaps most importantly though, they shaped my lens of appreciation for the natural world through photography and bush walking.

It is a long way from growing up in a humble, hardworking family around Table Cape to the Tasmanian parliament, although I acknowledge more and more of us are doing it now. Fay and Dennis and the entire Hulme clan, thank you for supporting me in following my beliefs, even when they challenged your own. To my mom, Lorraine, who is here today and is the hardest working person I have ever known, please take a holiday. Thank you for your enduring support in whatever journey I have embarked upon, especially the sketchy adventures I did not tell you about until I got home.

My friends, who are also family, are here today. They are wondering where it all went wrong. How did we go from teenagers undertaking automotive at TAFE to become mechanics, spending every weekend kart and car racing with aspirations of career in motorsport, to becoming a Green MP in Lyons? It was not for the novelty of clean fingernails. As much as I have been enjoying it, I can contest, it is far less embarrassing doing media without grease all over your face. Indeed, I never aspired to become a Green politician, or a Green at all. After all, I have always had a job and I wear shoes.

I have always been curious about how things work. A view that started with cars and engines, and it soon spread to the creation of the geomorphological features of the mountains that I climbed and the ecological composition of the wilderness that I photographed. I soon went on to study environmental science and land management, which then became a career working in conservation. I found the complex and extraordinary relationships in the natural world astounding. For its simplicity, it is best summarized by John Muir, who said, 'When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world'. With an increase in guilt over carbon emissions, and a now growing informed awareness of our impacts on the natural world, I was increasingly motivated to join community campaigns, to protect Tasmania's greatest intergenerational assets, and to ensure our public parks and lands remained equitably accessible and free from exclusive development.

In 2019, after I had spoken at a town hall campaign event, Senator Peter Whish-Wilson put to me that the cause and solution of all the issues we are fighting was politics: that, perhaps, after a few years of advocating on committees and in campaigns, it was time to put my hand up and to be accountable; to uphold a voice for wild places and people within the parliament. I want to thank Peter for seeing in me a confidence and contribution that I took some time to see myself.

In the coming 12 months, COVID closed my tourism dependent business, as it did so many others. I returned to university to complete a Masters in tourism while setting up a new business in the sadly growing industry of restoration and land management. It had been a year since bush fires had ravaged parts of the south-west. Ecosystems that should simply not have burnt as they did that summer were incinerated. They were not rehabilitating as they should. That year I saw a glimpse of the planet collapsing around me, and so I joined the Greens.

I joined the Greens because we cannot continue with an infinite growth agenda on this precious, finite planet; and because if trees could vote, the world would be a far wealthier place. I joined the Greens because, if we are to leave Tasmania more beautiful on the day that we leave it than on the day we came, we need bold political decisions that genuinely consider the wellbeing of future generations, not the short-term profits of the elite few. That is what the Greens are here to do.

Madam Speaker, the climate and inequality crisis that I have spoken about today, the greatest threats to modern society cannot exclusively be solved by myself or the Greens, or indeed this Tasmanian parliament. They require action from all levels of government, industry and organisations. We, as elected representatives, have a generational obligation to do all in our power to mitigate both of these crises. I can personally commit to doing so with passion, humility and hope.

Members - Hear, hear.