

Tuesday 4 July 1995

Legislative Council

Mr PRESIDENT - and I know I have no need to remind honourable members that this is the honourable member for West Devon's first address in this Chamber and I am sure he will be afforded the usual courtesy of no interjections. The honourable member for West Devon may continue.

Mr HISCUTT (West Devon) - Thank you, Mr President and fellow honourable members. Let me say how pleased and honoured I am to join you gentlemen in this august Chamber. I intend to work very hard during my term of office and to represent my electorate of West Devon assiduously and endeavour to make wise decisions on behalf of all Tasmanians to see this wonderful State of ours prosper and move into the future.

PRESIDENTS FROM NORTH-WEST COAST

Mr President, I offer you my congratulations and best wishes on your appointment to that position. I am sure you will carry out your duties fairly and impartially. You are the twenty-sixth President of this Chamber since 1856. You are a credit to the north-west coast and to Tasmania. You join other venerable north-west coast gentlemen who have been President of the Legislative Council. The first to be President was William Moore from Russell, from 1889 to 1894. Then there was a gap of over 75 years to 1968 when Mr W.J.T. Davis from West Devon held the position for three years. He was followed by Mr Hector McFie from Mersey who had one year in office and was then followed by Mr C.B.M. Fenton from Russell. He was President from 1972 to 1981. Finally, Mr H.W. Braid from Mersey was President for one year from 1983 to 1984. All these coastal predecessors were highly regarded and respected public figures. You join their ranks. In life most people require a reference to be written. You, Mr President, by your deeds and actions have forged your own reference, one that you, your wife and your family can be very proud of.

I wish to thank all the honourable members who have congratulated and welcomed me and other new members to this Chamber - and my best wishes to them this evening as well. It has been very kind and gracious of you all. I already knew the northern members of the Council and now I have become acquainted with the southern members, and I have found them all most friendly and helpful and I ask them to please continue to be so, as I have a lot to learn as a parliamentarian. I have had considerable experience as a councillor in local government and I have often taken opposing sides to other councillors, but when the business of the table is over, win or lose, the differences are forgotten and friendships are renewed. You will find I am the same here. A difference of opinion in how I vote or who I support will end

in the Chamber and no animosity will exist. I hope my friendship with you all will be the same in six years as it is now.

MEMBERS' DEBATING STYLES

I have had a few days sitting and listening to various debates and I have enjoyed the intellectual and logical reasonings presented. I have watched honourable members and noticed the body language and stances assumed. I have not decided on my technique but it may be an amalgam of the various styles: we have the arms outstretched like the colonnades of St Peters Basilica around you all; we have the use of the pen to emphasise a point; and we have another member who stands erect and gives us the old - I am not sure whether it is clockwise or anticlockwise - that is another stance. Then there is the hands in the coat pocket - I am not quite sure what is being looked for but every so often the hand goes in the pocket. Whatever is being looked for is never found. Then the glasses come off and the glasses go back on again; I do not know whether that is possibly to see the problem in the debate more clearly. Then we have the comfortable position; one gentleman stands on one leg and leans on the podium and goes on for quite a while -

Members laughing.

Mr HISCUTT - and another member has managed a full pirouette; he does a full circle while addressing all.

WEST DEVON ELECTORATE

I will get on to something more serious now, Mr President. I wish to speak about my electorate of West Devon. It came into being in 1946 and has had four incumbents: Mr A.W. Tattersal, Mr W.J.T. Davis, Mr W.T. Young and my brother, Mr Hugh Hiscutt. I have had the pleasure of knowing all these gentlemen personally and, in a contradiction of terms, I am humbled and yet proud to follow in their footsteps.

West Devon has about 17 500 electors. It encompasses the City of Burnie, the town of Penguin and the hinterland that makes up the municipal area of the City of Burnie and what was the old Penguin Municipality, now a part of the Central Coast Council. There were five candidates on 27 May in this year's election and I want to emphasise to you the quality of the nominees who stood. Irrespective of who had won the election this House would have gained a fine member. The runner-up was the Mayor of Burnie, Alderman Sandra French, a very hard-working and dedicated person, the interests of the area and the people being her foremost

goal. Alderman Steven Kons is a young Burnie businessman. He owns and operates a large seven days a week supermarket; he has developed subdivisions, he takes a keen interest in the civic affairs of Burnie and he is a hardworking and well-motivated man. The fourth candidate was Dr Alfonso Messieh, who has a busy medical practice. He also previously served on the Burnie City Council. He is a good family man with very high ideals. The fifth candidate was a Mr Richard Gibbs, a well-credentialed man who specialises in researching his subjects thoroughly. Mr Gibbs had only resided in the area for four years and suffered a disadvantage in that respect. So you can see that a quality field faced the barrier on 27 May. The election campaign was conducted most ethically and I wish to thank my helpers and supporters for their assistance in the campaign.

BURNIE PORT

I wish now to speak about the attributes of West Devon and also its urgent requirements. The Burnie port, run by the Burnie Port Authority, has had considerable expansion almost continuously since the Second World War and in those times cargo was loaded and unloaded by the ship's derricks. There were no forklifts, and to be a waterside worker meant hard physical labour. The huge potato trade to Sydney saw each bag placed on a four-steel-wheeled trolley with a rope sling along the top and about fourteen bags were placed on the sling. The trolley was then wheeled, pushed and pulled to alongside the vessel and the derrick hoisted the potatoes in the sling aboard, and then manual labour again restacked them in the hold. Nowadays most cargo is containerised unless it is in bulk.

The port is protected by an island breakwater and has two deepwater berths with two portainer cranes - one is an 80-tonne portainer crane; the other is a 65-tonne portainer - and it also is equipped with a 50-tonne container slewing train. It also has the ability to load bulk material such as west-coast mining concentrates, bulk tallow, acid discharge and woodchips.

The port has developed into the largest and busiest in the State and is around the fourth largest container port in Australia. Newsprint will be added to the exports commencing in January 1996. There is also a daily shipping service to Melbourne ex Burnie. A strong busy port means a strong busy city. Around the world, history shows us the two go together.

ROADWAYS ON NORTH-WEST COAST

This growth in both the port and the city shows up shortcomings in our infrastructure. The Bass Highway between Penguin and Burnie has only marginally improved on the Bass Highway of 1950 when we did not have containers, B-doubles, bulk carriers and road tankers. This is part of the National Highway and I urgently

request Federal funds for a rebuild. There is a dual carriage expressway for most of the distance from Ulverstone to Penguin. There is a similar expressway exiting Burnie east of Chasm Creek for approximately six kilometres. The remaining Bass Highway from Penguin to Chasm Creek is single land and winds as it follows the coastline. The distance is around 14 to 16 kilometres.

The highway has many residential houses built along it, all with their own entry, as well as arterial roads from inland. There have been many accidents, with two places in particular seeming to be the most popular for semi-trailers to leave the road and tip over. Around fourteen years ago at a public meeting at Sulphur Creek, the then Department of Main Roads displayed plans for the highway and told us the new road would be commenced in two years, but it still has not started. Recently, Works Tasmania displayed plans for stage 2 - that is, from Howth to Chasm Creek again with the commencement of work to begin within two years. The expressway has been designed in two stages: from Penguin to Howth, which is an entirely new inland route, and Howth to Chasm Creek on the existing route with some realignment of the railway line required and a second bridge over the Blythe River. Each stage will cost in excess of \$30 million. My proposition is to do the two stages together working from both ends - in other words, get on with the job.

The Penguin to Howth route will not be of much benefit until it is completed as it is an entirely new route. On the other hand, work will progress quickly as there will not be any public traffic to impede it. My major wish for the coast is for an expressway for fast, safe travel between Latrobe and Burnie - and I also support you, Mr President, in your desire for Metro to operate, or for some assistance at Devonport, so that people may be able to take a bus trip from one end of the coast to the other at a reasonable cost and at convenient times. If Federal funds were released to do these two stages it would have an immediate effect on our coastal economy. Contractors of all kinds would be required: draftsmen, surveyors, fencers, labourers, truck drivers and a myriad of others.

In the other direction from Burnie, the Bass Highway west to Smithton is a State government responsibility. This again is a 1950s road carrying 1995 traffic. Circular Head and Wynyard are prolific, productive areas producing timber, milk, vegetables - processed and unprocessed - and meat, both processed and on the hoof. Mostly this produce has to be carted east and the present Bass Highway is just not of sufficient standard to accommodate the traffic. I regard it as a matter of urgency that plans be drawn up and money allocated to improve this highway which is of such economic benefit to the State. The honourable member for Russell would agree on the need for that road to be upgraded.

Whilst I have painted a glowing picture of the port, unemployment in the area is high, especially in the younger age group. I think it is a blight on us and our society that good, eager young people cannot find work opportunities.

Road construction does two things: it pumps money into the local economy, and the public end up with a modern, safe expressway. Two thousand years ago the Romans realised the importance of good roads and some that they built in England are still in use today. Let us learn from history.

ELDERLY PEOPLES ACCOMMODATION

We are fortunate at Penguin that a thirty-place elderly-persons hostel is to be built very shortly by an experienced group of people - Eliza Purton Home for the Aged - who will build and run it. The land is secure, Federal funding is in place, and the plans have been drawn up. This is very pleasing as Penguin residents who have required this type of accommodation have previously had to retire to Ulverstone or Burnie. Now they will be able to retire on their home territory with friends and acquaintances and be near their close relatives.

Burnie has a wonderful retirement home, Umina Park, which was developed into a large establishment with a dedicated staff. Unfortunately it requires more beds and it has a waiting list. I hope more Federal funds will be available to ensure that the needs of the elderly there are met.

EDUCATION FOR NORTH-WEST COAST

As to the matter of higher and tertiary education, on Friday 23 June Senator Nick Sherry officially opened the new School of Rural Industries, a training complex at Burnie. This is under the control of the North-West Institute of TAFE. It houses two new laboratories, one dealing with soil and animal matters and the other with plant and chemistry microbiology. This will be a State training centre for all agricultural and horticultural trades. I commend the Federal and State governments on providing this increased access to quality education and training in regional Australia. However I am unhappy with the allocation of 5 850 higher education student places allocated in the 1995-96 Budget.

The University of Tasmania had made formal application for 20 to 30 of these growth places for planned university expansion on the north-west coast. The application was denied and the consequence is great educational deprivation facing the young people in that region. The university has been putting considerable resources into the development of the Burnie campus and will open its new north-west centre in September of this year. The university's commitment to the expansion of its activities on the coast will not diminish but the recent decision on the number of places will seriously retard the pace at which historical patterns of higher education deprivation can be altered.

The north-west coast is very much dispossessed of higher education facilities. Here we have a very low participation in tertiary education. The opportunities are not there unless young people are prepared to, and can afford to, live in Launceston or Hobart. It is recorded that we have a very low level of higher education access. It is time this was reversed. The future of Australia depends on a well-educated work force and education should not be denied to young students simply on the basis of where they live. Our coastal students are intellectually equal to those elsewhere in the State and they must be given the opportunities that are available elsewhere.

The future for West Devon and the north-west coast would be assured if a pulpmill were established. This would have to meet the high environmental standards that the public expect and I am sure that modern technology would accommodate this requirement. Behind Burnie there are huge forest plantations that are maturing for harvest. It would be shameful to export this timber in an unprocessed form such as woodchips. Let us value add and create employment and wealth for our State, but let us not repeat the mistakes of the failed Wesley Vale pulpmill.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS ENTERPRISES LEGISLATION

Last week we were debating the Government Business Enterprises Bill, a bill forced on us by the Federal Government following the Hilmer Report. I see it as inevitable but I do not think it is the right way to go. How can enterprises such as the Hydro-Electric Commission and other government business be made more efficient by paying taxes? Who in Tasmania will compete with them anyway? Taxes will be paid and the costs incurred will eventually return to the consumer or the ratepayer. It is another form of tax. Unfortunately it is not linked to the ability to pay. Why stop with the scheduled list? Why not include schools and hospitals who do have private competition? Will councils and their sewerage systems be the next to be added to the list?

The GBE legislation is designed to make businesses run better. It is like putting more lead in the saddle bag and expecting the horse to run fast. The Government Business Enterprises Bill was referred to as the 'child of SAFMA'. No one has mentioned the sire. There will be joy and sorrow at the birth of the Government Business Enterprises Act because at that time we will see the demise of SAFMA. In the stud book GBE will be referred to as: out of SAFMA, by that great sire, Desire for Money.

I have been surprised at the amount of politics in this Chamber. In my innocence I assumed it was non-partisan. I have never belonged to a political party and I regard

myself as truly independent, seeing good and poor policy in all political parties. I wish to see social justice for all Tasmanians, and as a practising Christian these would be my ideals: with careful nurturing and with wise decisions emanating from this building, I see a great future for this State and its people. We should all wish to leave Tasmania a better place to work and live for our children and their children ad infinitum. Thank you, Mr President.

Members - Hear, hear.