



Guy Barnett MP

LIBERAL MEMBER FOR LYONS

PREMIER'S ADDRESS – DEBATE MINISTER BARNETT CONTRIBUTION – 21 March 2019

[5.26 p.m.]

Mr Barnett (Lyons - Minister for Primary Industries) - Madam Speaker, as Minister for Primary Industries and Water, Minister for Energy, Minister for Veterans Affairs and as a proud member of the Hodgman Liberal team, it is terrific to be able to stand here to support the Premier's vision and the strategy for a strong economy and a balanced budget. Tasmania's economy is at record levels in terms of our economic growth, there good news in terms of employment growth, with the unemployment level as low as possible.

I want to make a point that was made by John Howard during those years when I was in the Senate about the importance of good economic management. You need a strong economy to deliver good health, education, police and other services and you need to reinvest the dividends of a strong economy. You cannot reinvest those dividends if you do not have a strong economy, a growing economy and are able to properly balance your budget. That is a principle I have held to all of my political career - whether it be in the federal parliament or state parliament. It is important that we have a strong economy to be able to reinvest those dividends back into health, education, police, infrastructure and those important services that Tasmanians need and deserve. That is why it is so important to have a framework, a vision, as the Hodgman Liberal Government has, for a strong economy. Of course, it will have its challenges. We have our challenges, but as the Premier has indicated in his Premier's Address just a day or two ago, Tasmania's economic growth is higher than other states and growing faster than it ever has over the past decade, at almost twice the national average.

We can be proud and pleased about that. It is something I am pleased about as a member of the Hodgman Liberal team, as part of a Cabinet to deliver on those plans. A strong economy means more job opportunities, more support for families. I am proud to be in charge of portfolios that are playing a key role in achieving this exceptional growth in energy, planning and across a range of primary industries and water. A very important and honoured role I have is Minister for Veterans Affairs. I will share more about those portfolios over the coming moments in this Chamber.

I am particularly honoured to be managing initiatives supporting our veterans, such as our community building, state RSL branches and sub-branches, maintaining and creating regional memorials like the new Soldier's Walk at the Hobart Domain. I was there this morning at the Hobart Cenotaph and put up a beautiful photo of the sunrise at the Eternal Flame. I had wonderful feedback on that photo this morning. I wanted to visit to pay my respects and to show honour to our veterans and their families. There are more than 6000 veterans in and around Tasmania and of course all their families and those connected. A wonderful part of Tasmanian history and heritage is the Hobart Cenotaph with the Remembrance Bridge now funded and supported thankfully by the Australian Government. I am looking forward to being there with Darren Chester in a few weeks' time for the official opening. It will be terrific. I will share more about it shortly but we are also seeking proper recognition of our heroic fallen hero, Teddy Sheean.

In terms of energy, Tasmania is not only playing its part but we are leading the nation as a renewable energy powerhouse. It is encouraging and positive to have that opportunity to give back and be generous in the opportunities going forward. Our part in the provision of energy in Australia is unprecedented and is well recognised by the Morrison Liberal Government and the Government's energy policies are a cornerstone in the strategy to strengthen our industrial development for years to come. As Minister for Energy I sometimes feel like I am standing on the shoulders of Eric Reece and Robin Gray, former premiers and ministers for energy, in terms of what they did in building industrial development and hydro-industrialisation in attracting industry, development, growth and jobs to Tasmania in the previous 100 years or more. It has been terrific and I am a proud Tasmanian to recognise the history and heritage and that contribution of decades past.

Now we are on the train heading forward into history where under the Tasmania First energy policy we can deliver for the rest of the nation. We are achieving our key objectives of being 100 per cent self-sufficient in renewable or clean energy by 2022. What a wonderful objective. We made that commitment prior to the election, we are delivering on that commitment and that is coming to fruition through the Cattle Hill Wind Farm development in the Central Highlands. I was there just a week or so ago with the trucks with the turbines and the 76-metre blades going through Bothwell. It was a wonderful day of celebration for the people of Bothwell and the Southern Highlands as those trucks went through. In fact there were three trucks required to get the base of the tower up the hill from Bothwell into the Central Highlands at Waddamana and into Cattle Hill. It was amazing. This is a major feat and a fantastic objective; \$300 million, 48 turbine wind farm development and it is something that as Tasmanians we can be very proud of.

Then we have Granville Harbour that is under construction, a \$250 million-plus development. Those two projects will get us just about to 100 per cent fully self-sufficient in renewable energy. We are way ahead of the game when it comes to mainland states and most other countries in the world. Tasmania is a standout in terms of being 100 per cent renewable or clean energy and it is something to be proud of. Many other states are struggling to reach 30 per cent, 40 per cent or 50 per cent in terms of clean energy.

The other key objective is having the lowest regulated residential and business prices for electricity by 2022. That is our target. We have what the rest of the nation really needs - low-cost, reliable, clean energy and we have plans to deliver that through the second Bass Strait interconnector, the Marinus Link, that will allow Tasmania to expand the amount of renewable energy provided to the national grid, thereby not only increasing energy security but putting downward pressure on electricity prices.

John Tucker, the new member for Lyons from the east coast, mentioned in his first speech the importance of electricity prices and keeping them as low as possible because it deals with the cost of living and the cost of doing business. It is important, not just for rural and regional Tasmania but all Tasmanians. That is what we can deliver and what we are planning to deliver. That Marinus Link will enhance greater investment in wind and pumped hydro initiatives. I will talk more about pumped hydro shortly. Overall, do not just ask my opinion but this is the opinion and advice that came out with the report on the Marinus Link just a week or two ago, that is \$5 billion of investment into Tasmania and thousands of jobs.

This is very encouraging. This is the pipeline of prosperity that could be delivered to Tasmania all being well with those projects continuing to be implemented. Marinus will enhance greater investment in wind and pumped hydro and we now have the Australian Government's commitment of \$56 million to fast-track the Marinus Project. I am very thankful to Scott Morrison, the Prime Minister, and Angus Taylor for their wonderful support for Tasmania and that Australian Government commitment of \$56 million. Likewise, their commitment to work with the Tasmanian Government to underwrite the first phase of Tasmania's Battery of the Nation project involving pumped hydro project schemes. That is where the Hodgman Liberal Government would spend up to \$30 million through Hydro Tasmania to progress phase 1 of the Battery of the Nation project.

Madam Speaker, I mentioned those three shortlisted sites earlier today - Lake Cethana, Lake Rowallan in the north-west, the beautiful Mersey Valley, and then of course the Tribute power station on the west coast just south of Tullah. They are the sites that will undergo that assessment and business case and they are the frontrunners. By the end of next year we will know the frontrunner of those three which we hope will progress to being shovel-ready by 2021 with a multimillion-dollar investment and hundreds of jobs, direct and many indirect. The opportunities for Tasmania are fantastic.

Our energy strategy is comprehensive. It will spearhead industrial development for many years to come, just as hydroindustrialisation did years ago. We are not talking about a quick fix. This is a decades-on-decades plan and we can have a measured, sensible, professional approach and work on and implement that plan delivering investment here in Tasmania and jobs galore for Tasmanians.

It is very encouraging and part of our vision, as the Premier indicated in his address a few days ago. It is a clean, green strategy and because we know it will be delivering low-cost, reliable energy, we hope we would have the support of everyone in this Chamber for these objectives and business plans that we have on the table. I challenge the other parties in this Chamber to get on board and if they are serious about wanting to create a prosperous economic environment in Tasmania to commit to this objective and these plans and say they are backing us 100 per cent because it is in Tasmania's best interests.

In addition to that we have Tasmanians needing assistance with everyday cost pressures and we are delivering more than \$40 million in concessional tariffs this year to lower people's electricity bills. We are investing \$6.25 million in renewable and efficient energy technologies on farms. We are also reviewing irrigation electricity tariffs to lower farm energy costs, and that is ongoing. We also have \$750 000 committed through the on-farm energy audit and capital grant program, and I have been on farms at Selbourne and elsewhere in recent times talking more about those projects; that is to review the farm energy use infrastructure, identify savings strategies and support capital works.

We have \$5.5 million for a new Tasmanian irrigation renewable energy program to incorporate the hydro systems. That is good news. John Tucker knows that and so does Mark Shelton, my colleagues from Lyons, because they understand the importance to rural and regional Tasmania of water and irrigation and why not have those energy-producing opportunities in and around regional and rural Tasmania? It is a fantastic thing that will reduce irrigation energy costs, we hope, and its aim is to ensure that those irrigation opportunities generate electricity and reduce those energy costs.

On that score, we have created the Farm Energy Advocacy Service to help guide our farmers through Aurora Energy.

To date I have not heard of an alternative defensible and sustainable energy policy from those on the other side but I would be interested to hear from them and I am encouraging them to do so and stand up and express what policies they have. They have a duty to do so but I would be thrilled if they would come on board 100 per cent and back all of these initiatives we have rolling out across Tasmania. It has been a busy time in the energy space.

I comment in terms of primary industry and water, one of the most productive and big contributors to the Tasmanian economy, the Tasmanian Lifestyle. Lyons electorate is rural and regional Tasmania to a tee. Nearly half the state. I love it. I was born at Hagley in the Meander Valley, raised on a farm and I know what it is like. We heard from our cocky farmer and friend from the east coast, John Tucker, today about his life story and his history. There are so many people who have many generations who have lived and worked on the farm or in rural and regional Tasmania. We all know people and we have connections. That is the life blood of much of Tasmania. It will be great having the wonderful advocacy of John Tucker in the months and years ahead, particularly for rural and regional Tasmania.

We have been steadfast on delivering on our target to grow the farmgate value of the agriculture sector to \$10 billion by 2050 and that is a great objective.

Government members - Hear, hear.

Mr Barnett - We are getting hear, hear's from Mark Shelton and John Tucker because they know how committed we are. I do recognise and thank Jeremy Rockliff because he spearheaded this initiative some years ago and has been a wonderful advocate for our rural and regional communities in primary industry and Sarah Courtney is my former minister.

That is why we are investing more than \$150 million to grow a competitive, innovative, sustainable and profitable farm sector and we are doing it. A strong agricultural economy, a vibrant seafood sector delivers jobs and opportunities across rural and regional Tasmania.

In short, our agri-food plan is based on three planks of grow, make and protect. We are working with the Tasmanian farmers, big and small - agri business processors, food businesses and the rural and regional stakeholders across Tasmania including local government. We are working with them so we can continue to grow and make more products.

We have heard recently the Premier has come back from Japan as the minister for Trade and the focus of our new trade strategy is to collaborate across our horticulture, fruit, wine, seafood and other primary industry sectors to sell more of Tasmania's high quality and safe products to the world - develop new markets, promote our valuable brand, the Tasmania brand. We are proud of it and we want to do more with it. We are doing that to facilitate investment in local agri-business and create more jobs.

As it stands, exports are up 11 per cent only in the last 12 months. That is good news. What is so good about exports? Exports means more jobs. We are pleased with our export industry and the Premier's leadership and the minister for Trade is delivering.

We are making an investment year on year in strengthening our biosecurity system and I will have more to say about that.

We are increasing funding for Landcare and natural resource management programs and last week I was with Mark Shelton at the back of Westbury and we had a good time launching the doubling of this government's funding to Landcare Tasmania, short of the doubling of that commitment.

We are pleased to be working with Landcare Tasmania because they have thousands of volunteers. Hundreds of groups around Tasmania that they support and in terms of getting bang for your buck it is fantastic. I have been a big supporter since I was in the Senate of Landcare Tasmania and what they do.

Mr Shelton - Another sixth-generation agricultural family, the Mitchelsons.

Mr Barnett - Yes, the Mitchelsons: six generations they have been at it and Ian Mitchelson was there with his wife and family - it has been fantastic to be supporting them and launch the Landcare Tasmania announcement in the last week.

I would like to mention our Weeds Action Fund. We have \$5 million in our budget for this, committed over the Forward Estimates. This is important because we want to kill off those pests and diseases and the weeds and the Weeds Action Fund will help us do that. I have just announced Ian Sauer - I congratulate him in taking on that role as chair for the Weeds Action Fund. He will be an excellent advocate for that fund and to ensure that over time there will be a change of culture in terms of weeds because it is everybody's problem, not just

the Government's problem, not just the farmers' problem; it is everybody's problem, everybody's challenge and everybody's concern.

I am pleased to be working with the farmers, agri-business and processors to develop a white paper on the competitiveness of Tasmanian agriculture and we back the TFGA with a new Living Next Door to a Farmer Campaign. It was great to launch that not so long ago with Frank Archer and Peter Skillern just north of Launceston. The Living Next Door to a Farmer Campaign will improve neighbourly relations and understanding of farming activities - that is important to farming and agricultural education.

We are investing in the future and indeed the fabric of our rural communities with increasing funding for Rural Business, Tasmania's counselling services and farm business mentoring and the rural youth and the Tasmanian Women in Agricultural Leadership Programs. We are investing in these programs because they are important and they are delivering on the ground results for Tasmania. We are delivering on our comprehensive Agricultural Research Development and Extension white paper, released in 2017 with \$28 million over five years to the TIA, the Tas Institute of Agriculture, and an additional \$7 million will upgrade our state-owned research farms - huge commitments and again I thank Jeremy Rockliff for his support. Likewise, in terms of Jeremy Rockliff, our Deputy Premier, minister for Education, we are continuing to develop the agricultural education framework and investing in that. We are investing more than \$16 million into our school farms, employing 10 new school farm teachers and upgrading infrastructure at school farms at the Jordan River School and Sheffield School. As a former student of the Hagley Farm School - a very proud former student - I visited there last month and met some of the new school farm teachers. It was terrific. I am very proud of the Hagley Farm School and what they have achieved. Thank you, Jen Butler, for that endorsement.

At the higher education level, we have extended our contribution to scholarships that encourage Tasmanians to study agri-business at the University of Tasmania and ultimately take on a career in agriculture. Dairies are a key part of that. It is the largest contributor to the farm gate value in Tasmania, worth over \$325 million per annum in 2016-17 and I am very pleased - I have just made a statement in the last 24 hours to say I am pleased that the price of milk has gone up 10 cents. That is important - dairy farmers and those who support our dairy farmers deserve a fair go. I am very pleased with that result. It is because of community pressure that the major chains and others have increased the price of milk in those supermarkets.

Confidence in the dairy industry has rebounded strongly since the difficulties of 2016 and now we have got new production records of over 900 million litres in the last years and we have extended the Stock Underpass Program to assist farmers to construct road underpasses and we have committed \$900 000 in dairy industry development over the Forward Estimates - it is good news.

A very strong and competitive red meat industry is a key part of the Government's plan to grow the farmgate value to get to that \$10 billion by 2050. Like the industry nationally, our meat sector is facing some challenges and we are working with the industry to address those challenges and the Government acted decisively following the JBS decision to close the Devonport City Abattoir. I could go more into that but we have established the Tas Red Meat Industry Working Group and I thank all those members for their support and appreciate their work to deliver a report and recommendation by 30 June as well as looking to the feasibility study which is well advanced, to identify ways to improve commercial viability of on-island processing options. We have committed \$1 million in this year's budget to meet industry development and we have \$648 000 for pasture and livestock productivity project improvement.

Biosecurity is important to Tasmania's reputation, the Tasmanian brand. As a premium producer of agriculture and seafood products, and a tourism destination, we rely on a rigorous and effective biosecurity system. We formed Biosecurity Tasmania to better support and protect our primary industries and our environment. We have invested more in biosecurity in each successive budget. I hope to be tabling the biosecurity bill in this parliament very soon. We have had a lot of consultation with key stakeholders. Prior to Christmas, I

proactively said let us put an exposure draft out and take feedback. We want to do what we can to improve it and that is what has been happening. That will be finalised tabled in this parliament soon.

The fruit fly problem has been tough but the fruit industry is worth \$154 million a year at the farm gate, three times more with processing. The fruit fly response last summer was the single largest biosecurity action of its kind in Tasmania. I acknowledge and sincerely thank all those involved. The Queensland fruit fly was successfully eradicated from mainland Tasmania on 9 January this year, assuming no further detections on Flinders Island. The response will be completed by the end of the month. We must remain vigilant and there is always a danger of incursions in Tasmania while the pest remains active elsewhere. We need to do everything we can to be in the best position possible to combat that. We want to do everything we can to promote our horticulture and fruit industries and that is what we are doing. The domestic fruit markets have been restored and the key export markets of South Korea, Japan, New Zealand, have been restored. There is more work to do. I recently announced a review into the Queensland fruit fly response by the highly regarded Mike Blake. We have done many good things well and if we can improve, that would be great.

In terms of GMO, I have recently announced a review of Tasmania's moratorium on GMO. Previous reviews have found no reason to change Tasmania's moratorium and the Liberal Government has strongly supported this position. That report will fall due in second half of this year.

Water is liquid gold, with 8 per cent of Tasmania's agricultural land irrigated and produces over 50 per cent of the gross value of Tasmania's agricultural production. We are working the Pipeline to Prosperity irrigation scheme, a third tranche, and that will help us achieve the \$10 billion a year agricultural target by 2050. That Pipeline to Prosperity, with a potential \$500 million long-term infrastructure program will, when fully implemented, deliver an estimated 3900 jobs and return an estimated \$114 million each year to the agricultural sector and our economy more broadly.

The Hodgman Liberal Government already has \$70 million in our Budget over the forward Estimates to support Tasmanian Irrigation to deliver that. Infrastructure Australia has identified it as the priority project. It means we are on the right track and we are encouraged by that. I have recently announced a new Tasmanian Rural Water Use Strategy that will guide Tasmania's future water management arrangements to ensure the state's rural water management framework reflects current best practice in the modern operating environment.

Tasmania has a world class wild-catch and farm seafood sector worth just under \$1 billion and the Hodgman Liberal Government is investing more in the years ahead. We are modernising fisheries management through the Fisheries Integrated Licensing and Management System, funding support for IMAS and so many opportunities, whether it be in abalone or rock lobster, and it is great to be working with some of those key stakeholders. In terms of salmon, likewise, sustainable industry growth. We want to support the industry's plans to achieve a \$2 billion per year growth target by 2030. I recently released that one-year review of the Sustainable Industry Growth Plan. I look forward to working with the industry to grow in a sustainable way.

I will conclude with a few remarks regarding the fires. In my electorate, an enormous debt of gratitude is owed to all our Fire and Emergency Services and volunteers for the amazing job they have done in fighting this season's bushfires and containing damage to property. A specific thank you to TFS, Parks and Wildlife, Sustainable Timber Tasmania, all those involved across government and the volunteers. To my own department of Primary Industries and to all those involved including at TasNetworks, I thank them for the fine work they did and their terrific support. Across the Lyons electorate, in the Derwent Valley, Maydena, Central Highlands and the Huon Valley, it has been fantastic. I offer my sincere thanks to those involved.