



Guy Barnett MP

LIBERAL MEMBER FOR LYONS

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA – HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY – ADDRESS AND REPLY SPEECH 2018

Tuesday 22 May 2018 [3.54 p.m.]

Mr BARNETT (Lyons - Minister for Resources) - Mr Deputy Speaker, it is a privilege to again serve the people of Tasmania in this place. At the outset I congratulate the two members who gave their inaugural speeches this afternoon, Jennifer Houston, member for Bass, and Alison Standen, member for Franklin. Congratulations, they were excellent contributions.

It is a wonderful honour to be in this place. It is true we have differences of opinion in a range of areas but they were certainly genuine and heartfelt messages shared with the objectives to advance Tasmania's interests.

It is a great honour and responsibility to be here and I have taken it very seriously during my public life, first as a senator for Tasmania in February 2002, then as parliamentary secretary and then from July 2016 as a minister in the Hodgman Liberal Government.

At the state election on 3 March Tasmanians delivered a clear message that was convincingly in support of a stable majority Liberal government and the plans we have for Tasmania to take Tasmania to that next level. Tasmanians voted for a continuation of the growth, progress and opportunity of those past four years.

As Her Excellency Professor Kate

Warner, mentioned in her speech some weeks ago at the opening of parliament, it was the first time since the 1970s that any political parties surpassed 50 per cent of the primary vote in consecutive elections and indeed the first time in over 100 years that a conservative party

achieved that result. It is a great achievement and many congratulations to our leader, Will Hodgman, for his efforts in all those years of opposition and then our time in government. We have come a long way as Tasmanians and as a state in the last four years. Much of that is as a result of the decisions this Government has made. Tasmania is definitely in a stronger position relative to where we were when this Government won office back in 2014.

When we came to office more than four years ago the budget was in deficit and red ink as far as the eye could see. Now it is black ink as far as the eye can see, with surpluses over the forward Estimates.

Members interjecting.

Mr BARNETT - I heard an interjection about it being lucky. It is not luck, it is hard work. Many challenges were presented to this majority Hodgman Liberal Government and we accepted the challenge because Labor and the Greens had wrecked the budget and presented deficits as far as the eye could see. There were cumulative deficits of \$1.1 billion over the forward Estimates when we first came to government more than four years ago.

They lost more than 10 000 jobs and we have created more than 11 000 jobs, so I am happy to take those interjections and respond with facts on the record. Res ipsa loquitur - the facts speak for themselves: a Latin maxim from my law school days recalled for the member for Franklin.

We can see that business confidence is up. In fact it is at record levels. We have seen the NAB report, we have seen the Deloitte report, with business confidence the highest in the country here in Tasmania. That is fantastic and on the record for all to see. We can see the building construction sector is booming with cranes dotting the Hobart and Launceston skylines. On almost every economic indicator, we are doing better than we were a few years ago.

As I travel around the state, across the electorate of Lyons and the rural and regional parts of this great state, I hear story after story of Tasmanians making the most of the new opportunities resulting from our growing economy, the new jobs that are being created, the new enterprises creating new opportunities. There is a sign of confidence and a spirit of optimism in the air. This is good news.

Quorum formed.

Mr BARNETT - Confidence is in the air. You can feel it when you are in the community. You feel that spirit of optimism around the state of Tasmania. It is encouraging. Our economic growth is increasing our population and more people see the opportunity to work, to raise their families, and this is providing an opportunity not seen for years and perhaps decades. As it has been said before, there has never been a better time to live, to work or invest in Tasmania. I look forward to playing my part in this Government to further build this state over the coming four years.

With respect to some of my ministerial roles, I thank the Premier, Will Hodgman, who has invited me to continue to serve. I look forward to continuing to work with him, my Liberal colleagues and the team to take Tasmania to next level. In this capacity I will continue to serve as Minister for Resources, Minister for Energy, and Minister for Building and Construction. I am delighted to build upon the work we have already done in these important areas; the jobs and opportunity growing sectors of the state. Alongside these roles, the Premier has asked me serve as Minister for Veterans' Affairs. It is a deep and personal interest of mine. It has been for a number of decades - supporting veterans and Tasmania's military heritage. It is important to acknowledge their service and sacrifice. As many members here would know, this appointment is a dream job for me and I look forward to working with our veteran community to promote and support their needs, and their families.

I will share different aspects of these portfolios and start with Energy. My focus on the ensuing period is that Tasmanians come first, that is the Tasmania First energy policy. The availability of secure, reliable and affordable energy is essential for Tasmanian households and businesses and to create Tasmanian jobs. This Government is committed to delivering the lowest regulated electricity prices in the nation by 2022. That is our target and objective. Along with that, we are aiming for 100 per cent self-sufficiency with fully renewable energy by 2022. We saw yesterday with the Cattle Hill Wind Farm announcement, which is on track; \$300 million, 48 turbines, 150 jobs during construction, 148 megawatts added to our growing renewable energy powerhouse as a state. It is all putting us on track toward 100 per cent fully self-sufficient renewable energy by 2022.

As the central initiative of the Tasmania First energy policy, the Government will move to de-link the Tasmanian wholesale electricity prices from the mainland price. Why should Tasmanians be paying mainland prices for Tasmanian energy? We should be paying Tasmanian prices for Tasmanian energy. We will de-link from the Labor/Greens linking that occurred in 2013. We will move away from that and we have already acted. Today, the Treasurer tabled legislation to cap regulated electricity prices to CPI.

Mr O'Byrne - What happens when the cycle moves and it is cheaper on the mainland?

Mr BARNETT - You do not support the capping, Mr O'Byrne?

Mr O'BYRNE - Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. He sought to -

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Mr O'Byrne, which standing order are you referring to?

Mr O'BYRNE - Standing order 44, on relevance. I did not make any reference -

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - That is not a point of order.

Mr BARNETT - The Labor Party has been caught out because they do not have a position on the capping of electricity prices at CPI.

Ms O'BYRNE - Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, standing order 144, offensive words against a member. The minister has implied we took a position on the bill when he was genuinely asked a question. He regularly misrepresents members in this House and he should cease and desist.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - That is not a point of order.

Mr BARNETT - The Labor Party has been caught out. They can state their position as to whether they support or oppose the CPI cap on electricity prices.

Quorum formed.

Mr BARNETT - I am pleased the member for Franklin has interjected with respect to the CPI capping of power prices. All Tasmanians want to know if they support the capping of power prices at CPI maximum for the next three years under the legislation introduced today. The Labor Party has not declared their position. We want to know. The Tasmanian people want to know whether they support higher power prices. Let us remember under the Labor Party, under Mr O'Byrne and when he was minister for economic development, he was the minister for recession here in Tasmania during that time. The minister for 10 000 jobs lost under his watch. In fact, he promised 15 000 jobs and lost 10 000 jobs.

The power prices under Mr O'Byrne and the Labor-Greens government, when he was in power under the Labor government, saw a 65 per cent increase. They have the gall to interject in this debate with respect to power prices and the importance of low power prices for Tasmania and they would not declare their position. Do they support the capping of the CPI? Yes, or no? It is that simple and the Labor Party has been caught on a barbed wire fence and it is becoming very uncomfortable. Dr Broad is moaning and groaning. He will not declare his position as to whether he supports lower power prices and the CPI cap, or whether he wants a higher power price.

That is our policy. That is what we are doing. We are delivering the lowest power prices in Australia by 2022. That is our target; fully renewable and reliable energy. That is what the rest of the country wants. We have it here in Tasmania. It is our competitive advantage and we want the Labor Party to come on board rather than knock, criticise and be a sideshow alley. We are in the main game here. We are delivering for Tasmanians and it is high time they came on board.

Part of our Tasmania First energy policy is Hydro actively investigating a substantial expansion of the on island generation through the Battery of the Nation project. Simultaneously, TasNetworks is exploring the feasibility and business case for the second Bass Strait interconnector. Under our Tasmania First energy policy we will be capping electricity prices, as in legislation introduced this morning. We plan to move Momentum Energy call centre jobs to Tasmania from Victoria; more jobs for Tasmanians. We will be keeping the natural gas flowing freely and at fair prices for industrial, commercial and residential customers. We are reviewing the solar feed-in tariff. We are establishing a farm energy advocate in Aurora and delivering the other elements of the energy on farm policies, such as the review of irrigation tariffs and the energy and irrigation audit program and loan facility. We are delivering the Community Solar and Energy Efficiency Package, a cost neutral transition for PAYG customers to new PAYG system and promote large-scale renewable development.

There is much to be done. That is our job and we are doing it for the benefit of all Tasmanians. We are driving the development of our renewable energy generation opportunities. We are the renewable energy power house here in Tasmania and we are making the most of it for the benefit of Tasmanians because Tasmanians come first.

We are encouraging private sector developments. I have mentioned Cattle Hill. I have mentioned Granville Harbour wind farm on the west coast, a \$280 million wind farm underway. That is contributing to our capacity to deliver a 100 per cent renewable energy self-sufficiency by 2022. I have recently announced the one year extension for the highly successful Tasmanian Energy Efficiency Loan Scheme. It is a terrific partnership between the Government, Westpac and Aurora Energy. It has already helped nearly 2300 Tasmanian homes and businesses to purchase energy efficiency products such as solar panels, heat pumps and double glazing by providing that three-year interest-free finance, and an additional \$20 million in finances is being made available with that recent announcement. We are very pleased about that because it will help many Tasmanians in need. Of course it will be a boost in energy efficiency right around the state, not just for retailers and small businesses.

The resources sector is a key economic driver in Tasmania. I am proud of it and proud to be in this role. Forestry and mining is creating thousands of direct and indirect jobs, particularly in rural and regional areas, and provides the lion's share of Tasmania's exports earnings every single year. This Government recognises the key role that our resources sector plays in Tasmania and is committed to backing it to the hilt because there is no better friend of the resources sector than the majority Hodgman Liberal Government. We are very proud because it is on the back of the Labor-Greens government where confidence plummeted to amongst the lowest levels across the country and of course the resources sector was hit for six under them.

Production is up and there are exciting new opportunities opening up. For example, mining and mineral processing is a key pillar of Tasmania's economy. Across the state the sector employs more than 6300 people and accounts for 55 per cent, or \$1.53 billion, of the state's exports in the last financial year. There has been some good news in the mining sector in recent months. In the last 12 months, for example, there has been the return to operation of the Henty Gold Mine near Queenstown, creating more than 100 new jobs. There has been a significant increase in the mineral royalty revenue collected in the financial year, with \$39.4 million during that 2016-17 year, up from the \$17.8 million collected during the previous year. That is really encouraging and says there is more turnover, more activity, more production and more exports.

The granting of the mining lease to Stellar Resources for the Heemskirk Tin Project could eventually see a mine employing up to 180 people and we hope that continues. The positive news from Renison tin mine regarding the feasibility of the Rentails tailings project would see a capital investment of over \$200 million and the employment of up to 160 people. We have seen a surge in mineral exploration spending, with the latest figures from the ABS for the December 2017 quarter showing a 23.7 per cent increase in spending over the previous quarter and a more than 140 per cent increase over the December quarter in 2016. We would still like to do more and we are doing more. The Government also continues to work closely with CMT - I have mentioned this in this place and publicly - in terms of the progress with respect to a possible restart of the iconic Mount Lyell copper mine.

Last year we invested \$9.5 million to enable key works at the mine, each of which is essential to the restart of the mine. This investment is already creating jobs with a restart of operations at the mine estimated to create hundreds of direct and indirect jobs. A restart would also allow legacy environmental issues to be addressed and the best form of mine in that regard is an operating mine. During the election of the Government, we committed \$2 million towards a new mine exploration grant program for mining exploration drilling within Tasmania. This latest commitment comes on the back of existing programs driven by the Government including our \$1 million mining sector innovation program committed to last year, which is aimed to help keep the industry at the cutting edge of technology and best practice.

A \$1.4 million geoscience initiative program was introduced last year and is designed to improve our capability to attract exploration investment through providing new geoscience data and mapping. Our mineral exploration investment attraction plan and the relocation of Mineral Resources Tasmania to Burnie will increase the linkages between the Government and the industry where we can work in partnership. It would be so good if the Opposition could support and put on the record their support for that move of MRT from Hobart to Burnie. It has been underway and in operation for all those years now. Of course, the former leader opposed it and now we just hear a muted sound from the other side.

I would love to hear an interjection on whether you have a position, member for Franklin - through you, Madam Speaker.

Ms O'Byrne - You can't ask Madam Speaker to approve an interjection. Don't be ridiculous.

Mr BARNETT - I hear muffled noises, I hear shuffling, but he won't say whether he supports the MRT's move to Burnie. Does he support the view of his former leader, who opposed it, or doesn't he? He will not declare a position. Isn't that interesting? This job application process is really hurting for him.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER - Order. Minister, you have stirred them up.

Mr BARNETT - There are many interjections coming from the other side.

Forestry is the life blood of many communities across rural and regional Tasmania since our early days. It has been a well-run and sustainable industry and it is getting better. It is creating more jobs and providing opportunities for Tasmanians, particularly in those regional areas. For one tree harvested, we plant three. We are proud of our forest industry. It was brought to its knees under the Labor-Greens government and is now on its way back. It is rebuilding.

Under the Labor-Greens government, more than 4000 jobs were lost. Two out of three jobs in the forest industry went out the door, lost. Families were torn apart. Families with fly-in fly-out workers, very sad. We are now rebuilding. Production is up, exports are up, jobs are up and confidence, importantly, is up. There is no more exciting development than the announcement of last Friday with Hermal Groups \$190 million development of Australia's largest hardwood plantation sawmill in Australia out the back of Burnie. The first and largest cross-laminated timber hardwood manufacturing facility is planned for the back of Burnie.

It was great to be there last Friday with the Burnie mayor, Alwyn Boyd, and also Brett Whiteley, the federal Liberal candidate for Braddon, to support that announcement. It has the full support of everyone on this side of the House today. It has every opportunity of being a game-changer and providing value-adding downstream processing jobs for Tasmanians.

With respect to the Government's support for the industry, there is no better friend of the forest industry than our majority Hodgman Liberal Government. We have \$4 million back in the strategic growth plan for the forest, fine timber and wood industry here in Tasmania, a plan to double the industry value-add to \$1.2 billion by 2036, and we are on target for that.

The National Institute for Forest Products Innovation is based in Launceston. Here it is in Tasmania - terrific news for us. We have the Regional Forest Agreement signed by the Prime Minister and the Premier last year, a 20-year rolling agreement providing resource security underpinning economic, social and environmental values in the industry going forward, providing that confidence. We also have the wood encouragement policy. We were the first state to institute that under our leadership here. The Government promulgated that. It has now been taken up by the University of Tasmania and other entities around the state, promoting Tasmanian timber and Australian wood here in this state.

The building construction sector is definitely on the up. You can see the cranes around the Hobart skyline and elsewhere around the state, including in Launceston, the north-west coast and the rural and regional areas.

Regarding jobs, when we started more than four years ago there were a little over 16 000 jobs, a few months ago there were 23 800 jobs and the latest statistics are saying more than 25 000 jobs. It is on the up. It is on the back of nation-leading building reforms. They are not my words. They are the words of the Master Builders Australia and the Housing Industry Association. They are nation-leading building reforms to make it easier, faster and cheaper to build. This is one of the reasons underpinning the confidence. I was pleased to be at HomeFest on Sunday to announce the \$20 000 boost for the first home owner for those young families to get their first home built and provide a boost for the building construction sector, particularly the housing sector. On top of that, we have a target to increase the numbers in the industry by 25 per cent in the next five years. We have a target to increase the number of apprentices and trainees by 40 per cent by 2025. We also have the payroll tax rebate scheme to encourage jobs. For new apprentices and traineeships we offer a funding grant of \$5000 per apprentice or trainee for small and medium size businesses. We have policies in place we want to deliver and we are getting on with the job.

In the building and construction sector, a report and recommendation by Professor Peter Shergold AC and Bronwyn Weir for the Building Ministers' Forum confirmed Tasmania's approach is in line with the recommended national best-practice model. Have a look at it and you will see

that Tasmania is leading the way in this country. That is why they say we have delivered on nation-leading reforms. It is a clear endorsement of the Government's approach.

Workplace Tasmania is delivering on its objectives with a reduction in workplace injuries in Tasmania of 16 per cent in the past four years. There was also a reduction in red tape in the worker's compensation scheme for workers, businesses and medical staff last year. There has been increased access for volunteer firefighters to compensation for cancer that would be linked to occupational exposure. You have seen investment in an asbestos awareness campaign that was nationally recognised and awarded for its impact. We will continue to build on the work already done through initiatives such as legislating to investigate recognising post-traumatic stress disorder for certain occupations and the annual Worksafe Month campaign coming up in October. Safety is everybody's responsibility and I intend to build on the work already done to help make Tasmanian workplaces the safest in the nation.

In consumer affairs, in the past four years we have streamlined regulation for property agents and strengthened consumer protections through reform of the Property Agents and Land Transactions Act. We have improved petrol price transparency by funding the GasBuddy app and the code of practice to ensure fuel price boards only show undiscounted fuel prices. We have reduced the red tape and delivered savings for incorporated associations through amending the Associations Incorporations Act. We have reduced the red tape and compliance cost by streamlining the residential tenancy bond system to allow property agents 10 working days to lodge bonds in lieu of the current three days and introducing electronic bond lodgement. We have worked with other jurisdictions to amend Australian consumer law and provide consumer protections so that they can be strengthened through enhanced price transparency in online shopping, stronger voluntary recall requirements and increased penalties for those caught doing the wrong thing. I am very pleased as chair of the Consumer Affairs Forum we will be having a meeting later this year of all consumer affairs ministers in Hobart. It is pleasing to see the introduction of the ACL has, among other things, lead to a \$3.5 billion decrease in business compliance costs. This week is Scams Awareness Week. There is much to learn and much to be aware of when protecting consumers.

I thank those in the public service for their support in all of those portfolio areas.

Finally, it is a great honour to be involved with Veterans Affairs. We have 10 500 veterans and ex-serving personnel in Tasmanian and we want to deliver for them. We have committed \$750 000 to support our veterans' peak body funding status and indexation for RSL Tasmania, to help Parks Tasmania deliver a health and wellbeing program for returned service personnel, grant funding for RSLs, the funding of centenary armistice events in 2018, the Teddy Sheehan grants, and continuation of the Frank MacDonald Memorial Prize. I welcome home all those Frank MacDonald Memorial Prize group participants.

As a member for Lyons, I congratulate Jane Howlett on her election. Today is the day she was sworn in as a member of the Legislative Council and I congratulate her for her great success. I know she will do a terrific job. It has been a great pleasure working with Rene Hidding, Mark Shelton and a special commendation to John Tucker during the campaign. I thank all those involved in the campaign for their terrific support, especially my family, Kate, my loved ones as well as my volunteer supporters.

6 June 1981