



THE PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA - HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

BUDGET 2016-17 SPEECH

31 May 2016

Mr Deputy Speaker, it is amazing what a change two plus years of united, sensible, prudent majority Liberal Government can make. The Budget sets out a plan for our future. I agree with the statement made by the member for Denison, Ms O'Connor, where she said it sets out a statement of values.

Before we can know our future we need to know our past. We inherited a budget mess from the Labor-Greens government. We inherited a projected net debt of \$400 million and \$1.1 million cumulative deficits over the forward Estimates; sixteen long years of Labor and the last four of Labor-Greens mismanagement and maladministration with rolling crises resulting in the loss of nearly 10,000 Tasmanian jobs. It impacted their families leaving us with the highest unemployment in the nation and a stagnant economy.

The Hodgman Liberal Government's third budget - and I congratulate the Treasurer, Peter Gutwein, on his leadership - is now in surplus for the first time in seven years. That is almost \$80 million in the black for the first time. It is good news. I have been to many parts of the Lyons electorate and in Hobart last week for the TCCI Budget breakfast and the feedback was very positive.

We now have 237,300 Tasmanians in work and the state's unemployment rate has fallen 0.9 per cent since the election. There are less people on the unemployment queues and more people enjoying the dignity and self-worth that comes with work.

The Tasmanian economy is growing at its fastest rate in six years and business confidence is at an all-time high. I refer to and thank Michael Pascoe, respected business economist, for the confidence he has in the Tasmanian Government and the Tasmanian economy. The NAB business survey last month put Tasmania at the highest level of business confidence in Australia. We have the TCCI Survey of Business Expectations from March that showed Tasmanian businesses were more confident in the local economy than the Australian economy. Tasmania's small- and medium-sized enterprises are the second most confident in the country, according to the Sensis Business Index from March this year. The CommSec report last month confirmed that Tasmania's economy is heading in the right direction, currently experiencing 'a lift in momentum.' The report notes that Tasmania has moved up the rankings and has caught South Australia.

I give credit to the state Government for the efforts that have been undertaken and likewise to the federal Coalition government for their contribution to support Tasmania and pull it out of the mire and drudge of the previous Labor-Greens government - and the malaise that encompassed all of us during that time. When doorknocking in New Norfolk, Campbell Town and Launceston recently the feedback was positive, as it has been from the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Tourism Council of Tasmania, the Tasmanian Small Business Council, the Master Builders Association for Tasmania, and a range of other organisations. I will touch on those as we proceed through this

contribution. The building and construction sector, particularly in the south, is growing rapidly. The value of work is up 25 per cent.

Retail spending is at record levels and tourism visitor numbers have increased by 8 per cent. This is encouraging for Tasmania. Retail spending has gone up 7.1 per cent since the last election. Our exports are also up by 9.9 per cent in the 12 months to February.

You cannot put it all down to a softening of the Australian dollar. We can put it down to the work of getting the Budget back on track, fixing the budget mess, implementing the promises that we made to the people of Tasmania at the last election, and then setting on course the plan that we have for Tasmania. It is a long-term plan to get Tasmania back on track and we are now heading in the right direction.

Budget disciplines enabled us to reinvest in essential services and help us all share in the state's growing strength. These investments include 100 new buses, an extra \$50 million for frontline health services, \$90 million for irrigation projects, and more than \$650 million for road and bridge infrastructure. Against this positive backdrop, we see the laziness of a spendthrift Labor opposition. The contrast is stark.

Yet again we see that Labor has deliberately avoided the opportunity to provide an alternative budget; they have taken the easy road. Rather than present a credible, costed alternative to the Liberal Government's commonsense prudent budget, Labor has again chosen to avoid scrutiny. Why would they not, with nearly \$1.5 billion in promises and no plan to pay for them? It is no wonder Labor are again ducking and weaving. Let us face it; they have had this form with respect to the budget mess in the past. All Tasmanians were left with it after 16 long years of Labor.

We were left a net debt of \$400 million and \$1.1 billion in cumulative deficits. Instead of a sensible costed alternative, all Labor can cobble together is a half-baked, un-costed, unfunded hodgepodge of thought bubbles and ideas. Without a costed plan on the table, Labor lacks credibility. At least the Greens have attempted to put together a costed alternative budget. It reminds me of my time in the federal Parliament as a senator, particularly during the Howard- Costello years when we did the hard yards to pay off the \$96 billion of Labor debt they left the Government and people of Australia with.

It took 10 long years for the Liberal National Party to work hard and pay back that debt on behalf of the Australian people. Labor has a 'tax and spend' mentality. They cannot help it. It is part of their DNA and their ideology. When Labor was in government, I was appointed as the Coalition spokesperson for the scrutiny of Labor government waste. It was a very busy time because we found so much waste under Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd. Notwithstanding that, it is part of their DNA; Labor does not know how to manage the Budget.

The Hodgman Liberal Government has put forward a sensible Budget with decisions to return us to surplus. It boosts business confidence, helping to build on the momentum within our economy to support further jobs, growth and development. There is still a long way to go and we have been continued to invest in health, education, public safety and supporting vulnerable Tasmanians.

I want to address some of my remarks to the Lyons electorate and the impact the Budget has had on the constituents I represent. The Lyons electorate is more than half the state. Primary industries are the powerhouse of Tasmania, producing a significant proportion of our world-renowned agricultural produce. It is an electorate of doers, makers, farmers and timber workers, fishermen and tourism operators, and small business people, young and old. It is full of salt-of-the earth characters who

quietly service and build their communities. There is plenty of good news in this Budget for the electorate of Lyons.

I am pleased to again note the joint federal and state Government commitment to irrigation projects in the Lyons electorate. I commend the work of our federal member, Eric Hutchinson, for lobbying to get funding support at a federal level. He has worked hard and he has delivered for the Lyons electorate. He has also secured support for those rural and regional areas for mobile black spot programs. More than \$12.6 million is to be spent on 19 mobile phone base stations around the Lyons electorate to fix mobile black spots, helping 50 unique locations and 15 different sections of roads and highways.

The Freight Equalisation Scheme of \$203 million over four years will significantly expand this vital scheme. It is an increase of more than 40 per cent in the federal government's previous annual investment, giving Tasmanian producer's surety about the costs of doing business interstate and overseas.

The Midland Highway upgrade of \$500 million is a 10-year action plan to help bring this critical road corridor up to a minimum three-star AusRAP safety rating. We have all been affected by it in recent times and we are thankful for the opportunity to upgrade that important highway.

In irrigation funding, there is \$60 million towards tranche 2 scheme, which will allow our farmers to diversify and expand, creating new jobs and opportunities. We know in our rural communities that water is liquid gold. These schemes are game-changers for Tasmania's regional areas. Three of the schemes are in the Lyons electorate including Southern Highlands Irrigation - and I commend Richard Hallett and his team near Bothwell - Swan Valley and North Esk, all bringing opportunities to rural Tasmania.

I note that the federal member, Eric Hutchinson, has delivered a recent commitment of \$400,000 to help the Brighton Bowls Club transition to a community centre after the upcoming election. It is a good initiative that the Hodgman Liberal Government has also supported with \$50,000 provided in 2014-15 year. Thanks to Eric Hutchinson there is also a \$300,000 commitment for upgrading the Westbury Recreation Ground, if elected. He deserves to be because he is one of the hardest-working members I am aware of in federal parliament. Alongside are the tremendous efforts of our other federal representatives, Andrew Nikolic, Brett Whiteley and the Tasmanian Liberal Senate team.

Other commitments in the state Budget, I have mentioned are the Midland Highway upgrade; the St Helens Hospital redevelopment, with an \$8.1 million commitment; and the \$6.3 million commitment to the Great Eastern Drive. The Great Eastern Drive is part of a national icon now. It is good for tourism, small business and the east coast of Tasmania. I know the Break O'Day and Glamorgan-Spring Bay councils are very supportive. I enjoyed my time in the Tasmanian Pollie Pedal this year riding from St Helens to Richmond, down the Great Eastern Drive. It was a wonderful time; hard work for a good cause, supporting and raising awareness for diabetes.

There is \$3.9 million to continue the work on the already iconic Three Capes walk. There has been a lot of debate and discussion about the Three Capes walk but that is an attraction and it will be an iconic walk for Tasmania. I commend the Government for the \$220,000 commitment to explore the Maria Island National Park management model. That is a project I have been pleased to work on as chair of a working group exploring the future of this part of Tasmania, which I consider a jewel in the crown of Tasmanian national parks and tourism. I thank you for the \$219,000 commitment to

infrastructure upgrades at Eagles Eyrie near Mount Field, an initiative I am keen to support having visited this spectacular site with representatives of the Maydena Community Association.

There is an additional \$30,000 in new funding over two years to all of Tasmania's Neighbourhood Houses. I thank the minister, Jacqui Petrusma, for her initiative to secure additional funding for neighbourhood houses because in many respects they are the glue that helps hold those communities together, whether it be in Dunally, St Helens, Fingal, Deloraine, Beaconsfield, Exeter, Gagebrook, Dodges Ferry, Pittwater at Midway Point, or the Derwent Valley Community House where I visited on Friday and announced the funding. They were very pleased indeed and I enjoyed visiting one of their art classes and had conversations with some of the participants. I was able to brag a bit about my eldest daughter, who won the art prize at school, and my mother and other members of my family, other than myself, who are fine artists.

I want to mention the extension of a number of the regional schools to years 11 and 12 within the Lyons electorate, including Cressy District High, Sheffield School, Sorell, Tasman District, Oatlands District, Campania and Jordan River Learning Federation. Statewide there are 12 schools this year signed up to move into grades 11 and 12 and 18 next year. The minister has led the way in this regard; I take my hat off to Jeremy Rockliff. This is such an important initiative and a key stark difference between the Labor Opposition and the majority Liberal Government. We support this record spending in education of \$1.48 billion while Labor wants to roll back to a failed system and roll back this move to years 11 and 12.

As a government we want, and I support 100 per cent, students staying at school longer, learning more and reaching their potential. We want young Tasmanians to reach their potential and to be the best they can possibly be. What we have seen already in the last 12 months is a 57 per cent increase in enrolments. That is good news. We have seen a record retention rate of 73.8 per cent and that is also good news. We are reducing the age of children attending school in the first place. We want to ensure children and students achieve their potential, learn more and stay at school longer. The system is working and for Labor to want to roll back to a failed system when numeracy and literacy rates were at the bottom of the pile across the nation is where we do not want to go, so there is a very stark difference.

I am proud to be part of a government that is getting the budget back on track and reinvesting those dividends in support of vulnerable Tasmanians. There are 900 new affordable housing homes across the state; great news state-wide and a boost for the building and construction sector and jobs while helping those Tasmanians in need. With the child protection initiatives Jacqui Petrusma, the minister, has done a great job, and with the initiatives on family violence the Premier has led a consortium of ministers leading the way.

As Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier I am privileged to support the Premier in a range of areas in community development. That covers a broad spectrum of groups in our society including seniors, youth, veterans, carers, multicultural communities, emergency food relief, volunteers and Men's Sheds. More recently I have been appointed Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business. I am very pleased to support the Minister for State Growth and be an advocate for the small business sector which is absolutely vital to our future in Tasmania.

I am proud to be supporting the Premier with respect to the centenary of Anzac. This is a most important commemorative period in our nation's history and Tasmania has a lot to offer. In terms of our military history and in our contribution we are definitely punching above our weight. Highlighting the Anzac story of courage, mateship and sacrifice and defining the threads is all now part of our

national and Tasmanian identity. Last year, 2015, was the 100-year anniversary of the original Gallipoli landings and there were record crowds in attendance at the dawn and main services in towns and cities all around the state. We saw the Flame of Remembrance being lit for the first time by our Premier, together with the support of the Tasmanian RSL and the Hobart City Council.

I was pleased to be part of this lobbying effort of our federal counterparts to secure funding for that important initiative. Likewise, we secured funding for the upgrade of the Soldiers Memorial Avenue in Hobart - \$1.1 million - and \$8 million for Tasmania's memorial precinct where there will be a footbridge across the Tasman Highway, unifying the memorial project so that we have the Soldiers Memorial Walk from the Domain linking to the Cenotaph. I am pleased to be part of the project to make that happen and it is due for completion by the end of our centenary of Anzac in 2018. We know this year will be the 100-year anniversary of the Battle of Pozieres and Fromelles. We will also see the seventy-fifth anniversary of the battles of Greece and Crete and the Siege of Tobruk, and the fiftieth anniversary of the battle of Long Tan. It is a very special year for all Tasmanians.

As government we are putting record funding in support of Tasmania's veterans and ex-service community, whether it be \$100,000 additional to the \$100,000 per annum in recurrent funding for the RSL or the \$100,000 per annum this year for the Teddy Sheean memorial grants. We had the book launch today of *Honour Denied*, the story of Teddy Sheean written by Dr Tom Lewis. I congratulate Dr Lewis on his effort and initiative. This was the first book launched by the Premier today in Parliament highlighting the story of bravery, service and sacrifice of a young man who was only 18 when he died on 1 December 1942, going down with the *Armidale*. It is a wonderful story and congratulations to the Premier and thanks to him for launching the book in Parliament House today.

There is \$50,000 for the Centenary of Anzac grants program which is so important to our veterans and other ex-serving community. We have the Frank MacDonald Scholarship, the Harry Murray scholarships, and there are more.

I am very pleased to note our volunteers in Tasmania. I am a keen supporter and in the Senate my first submission to the Prime Minister was looking at ways to help and support volunteers. The Hodgman Liberal Government is continuing their support with the provision of \$260,000 a year for Volunteering Tasmania. We are looking at other initiatives to grow volunteering and acknowledge the wonderful worth and value of them, noting that a recent report put a value on that at \$4.9 billion a year. It is fantastic. I was pleased to co-host, with the Premier, a thank you morning tea for our volunteers in Launceston in National Volunteer Week. It is a big thank you to each and every volunteer in Tasmania. They deserve a grateful thanks from the Government and our community.

For our seniors there is new funding of \$125,000 for COTA, Council On The Ageing, and funding for Seniors Week activities. There is support for YNOT and the Tasmanian Youth Conference. There is also new funding of \$50,000 per annum for three years to Carers Tasmania. It is very important to continue the hard work in supporting the Carers Advisory Council. We have 74,000 carers in Tasmania - more carers per capita than any other state or territory.

In terms of multicultural affairs we are very pleased to support the Multicultural Council of Tasmania, the Harmony Day events and the Harmony Day Week this year, and the Multicultural Grants Program, which is so important.

The Men's Sheds are important and do much good work. We now have very well resourced Men's Sheds resources, with nearly 50 around Tasmania. I take my hat off to the Tasmanian Men's Shed

Association for what they do and thank Peter Shelley as chair and Geoff Marsh for his wonderful work as executive officer. My motion just a few weeks ago acknowledged the wonderful work of Men's Sheds. They give support in terms of health, mental health and wellbeing in every nook and cranny in Tasmania.

For small business I am very proud to advocate and support the engine room of our economy, the lifeblood of our rural and regional communities. Ninety-seven per cent of all of our businesses are small businesses employing over 100,000 people. It is fantastic to be involved with them, knowing that the ingredients to their success are that they are self-reliant, innovative, responsive and entrepreneurial by nature. They inject into our community the spirit of enterprise and reward for effort. We are so thankful to our small businesses and the mums and dads and all the families involved. They put their neck on the line to support their businesses and they live and breathe it. As someone who has a background in small business, born and raised on a farm, and an award winning small business many years ago, I am proud to be associated with and supporting small business in our community.

Our Budget supports our small business people through Business Tasmania, the Enterprise Centres, the Tasmania Network, the Tasmanian Retailer Development Program, Winning Government Business and the Digital Ready for Business program. There are new initiatives with \$400,000 over two years to grow small business in Tasmania and improve the state-wide small business assistance program. We have a further funding of \$600,000 to support small business with apprenticeships and traineeships and that is important. Likewise, \$900,000 over two years is new funding allocated to support growth industries to give young Tasmanians an opportunity to develop technical and work ready skills. Those growth industries at the moment are building and construction, tourism and hospitality, advanced manufacturing, agriculture, aid services and disability, with the latitude to consider funding in other industries as appropriate.

In conclusion, it is a good state Budget. I met with the ACCC Deputy Chair, Dr Michael Schaper, to discuss more business initiatives last week and that was most productive.