

SPEECH – STATE OF THE STATE REPLY 2021

The Hon Guy Barnett MP

[4.26 p.m.]

Mr BARNETT (Lyons - Minister for Primary Industries and Water) - Mr Deputy Speaker, it is a great honour, pleasure and privilege to stand here as Minister for Primary Industries and Water, Minister for Energy, Minister for Resources and Minister for Veterans' Affairs. I thank Tasmania's forty-sixth Premier, Peter Gutwein, for the ongoing support he has shown me in all my portfolios and in my role as a member for the Lyons electorate, which covers more than 50 per cent of the great state of Tasmania.

There is no doubt this past year has been a testing one, a year like no other for Tasmanians from all walks of life. I could not be more proud of the job our Government has done, led by the Premier, Peter Gutwein, during the most difficult of circumstances.

Tasmania is the best place in the world to live. We should all be proud of that fact, and the fact it is one of the safest places in the world to live right now.

I know all Tasmanians know that, and would agree with me, but we are going to require continuing leadership and steadfast, resolute efforts on the part of the Premier and our Government to take Tasmania forward as we work our way through the COVID-19 pandemic, as the vaccinations roll out, and as we rebuild our economy.

Our top priorities are to keep Tasmanians safe, to rebuild our economy to deliver a brighter and more prosperous future, and to keep Tasmanians secure. I think that key message will flow through everything I share today in support of the Premier's address, and in support of the Premier's plans for Tasmania.

It is fair to say that over the last seven years, we have demonstrated that as a government we are not only disciplined, united and responsible to the Tasmanian people, but we are also adaptable. During the last 12 months - and today is the 12-month anniversary of the declaration of the public health emergency was d - we have had to pivot: so P is the pivot word for 2020 through to 2021.

In the last 12 months we have had to pivot, adapt and be flexible. I remember in this place 12 months ago when the Premier, with a tear in his eye, said 'Look, we have to make this decision for the good of Tasmania, to keep people safe.'. It was a really tough day; it was a really tough week. It was one of the toughest weeks of my political career at a federal or state level, and it is one I remember well.

I look back on that with some level of pride, knowing that we worked our hearts out for the Tasmanian people. Fancy having a Cabinet meeting on Easter Sunday. It was incredible. The commitment given and led by the Premier, Peter Gutwein, to get through this difficult time was incredible. Now we have to rebuild, and that is our focus. You have seen the plans and we on this side back them in 100 per cent. I thank Don Challen, who chaired the Premier's Social and Economic Recovery Advisory Council, and all members of PESRAC for their work and contribution to the people of Tasmania. We have backed the recommendations made in the PESRAC interim report. They have been or are being implemented. We are backing in every single recommendation in that report, as the Premier outlined yesterday.

We are government of conviction, we are a government of compassion and we are a government that ensures that opportunity is there for the Tasmanian people and community. Certainly my objective

and that of those on this side of the House is to see Tasmania achieve its potential. We want communities to achieve their potential, business to achieve its potential, individuals to achieve their potential, families to achieve their potential - that is what we are on about. We want the best for Tasmania. These last 12 months have been a tough time but we have set our sails for the months and years ahead with those commitments, which I will touch on in my various portfolios, which are consistent with the PESRAC report and with our commitment to Tasmania and Tasmanians.

I want to say thank you to all those key stakeholders in government and in the community, for that effort over that last 12 months. It has been Team Tasmania at work. I often use that phrase, 'Team Tasmania'. We are so pleased and proud to have worked with various stakeholders on behalf of Tasmania and Tasmanians - working in partnership, Team Tasmania. Consistently during the last 12 months, I met regularly with the agricultural stakeholders, and had roundtables with the seafood industry. I am meeting regularly with the stakeholders in the forestry, mining and energy spaces. In terms of the primary industries, we have regular roundtables to ensure we get the job done.

One of those first ones was identifying agriculture as an essential service, and hasn't agriculture delivered in spades big time? I thank our agricultural stakeholders for the service they have provided to the Tasmanian people. Of course we produce 4.5 times more in Tasmania than we consume. Tasmania is delivering in spades in that agriculture space; I will have more to say about that shortly.

I want to thank all Tasmanians for their perseverance and positivity - another couple of 'Ps' that I talk about a lot - in coping throughout this coronavirus pandemic, but now it is time to rebuild. We will continue to work through the pandemic. Thank you to Sarah Courtney for her leadership in the health space and to those on the front line - the frontline workers, thank you on behalf of the Tasmanian people.

With respect to the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council, I have indicated my thanks to the chair and to its members. It is helping shape Tasmania's short-, medium- and longer term planning and the rebuilding of our economy and our community. We have accepted all of the 52 recommendations in the final report. The Premier outlined the immediate steps the Government will take in each of the five priority PESRAC areas. These are important actions that are material points of benefit for the Tasmanian community. What is even more impressive about those steps is that they will work hand in glove with our productive industries such as agriculture, forestry, seafood and mining and the mineral processing sector as well as with our nation-shaping renewable energy vision.

We heard from the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and Training this morning about the commitment to TasTAFE. This is fundamental and one of the key recommendations that we strongly support. The Premier has made it clear. We could not be clearer. This will be a government business enterprise. It needs to be flexible, adaptable, to deliver for young Tasmanians to get them into a job, build capacity, build their skills, give them training, give them support. We need to build that part of our economy to give young Tasmanians and their families the best chance going forward, and this is going to be so important for the productive industries that I represent and the rest of our economy.

It is not just building and construction, this will benefit all of our economy across agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining and the works. I say thank you to the Premier and Deputy Premier for their leadership in backing in this recommendation, and on behalf of the Government I can assure you my stakeholders will welcome that initiative to ensure that training is available to deliver jobs for young Tasmanians and to give them the training they need, which is so important.

Under our jobs priority, Tasmania should be immensely proud. There are now 22 000 more Tasmanians employed since coming to government in 2014. Our economy is one of the strongest in the country and we have the lowest unemployment rate of any state in the country. Shouldn't we be

proud of that? Of course we are. We can back it in. The predictions were much more dire than that over 12 months ago and soon after the pandemic hit. Those predictions were much worse but we have recovered with a much better situation now. We are backing up our excellent work on the jobs front with a \$20.5 million package to help more Tasmanians workers into jobs with a range of initiatives to strengthen links to job opportunities and ensure more Tasmanians have the opportunity to live and work in the place they call home.

PESRAC clearly notes the challenges inherit in our housing market at this time, with Tasmanians saying that access to affordable housing was one of their concerns for their future. They got feedback from more than 3500 Tasmanians and that is one of the key ingredients to the success of that report, and that is why we are backing it in. We know the Tasmanian people support what we want to do here and that is why we are looking to communicate that further with the Tasmanian community and we will do that uphill and down dale. We will do what is required to ensure the Tasmanian people fully understand the benefits of these policies we are putting on the table and delivering. We will do that.

The critical actions outlined by the Premier included the \$10 million headworks holiday for new residential subdivisions to support landowners who wish to activate residential zoned land that is not currently being developed. Good news - development, growth, jobs, opportunities - it is incredible. It is going to be great. That will include \$5000 per residential lot for power connection, which is important, and up to \$5000 per lot delivered for water and sewerage infrastructure.

I want to touch on energy and speak to one of the most compelling twenty-first century competitive advantages that Tasmania has and it is two words: renewable energy. We are already the powerhouse for Australia and we have big plans to attract investment, create more jobs, and support Australia in its transition to the renewable energy supply in the years and decades ahead. Tasmania is now 100 per cent fully self-sufficient in 100 per cent clean electricity and renewable energy. It confirms Tasmania as a world leader in renewable energy generation. I am so pleased and proud of the fact that Tasmania in November last year hit that target and we are doing better every day. It is so encouraging. I know that Tasmanians, young and old, are very pleased with that result to be 100 per cent.

Of course we have the trifecta, the affordable, the reliable, the clean electricity, which the rest of the nation and the rest of the world wants. We have big plans to continue to be a world leader in this space and deliver even further. We made those commitments back at the 2018 election with the former premier and myself at Lake Gordon. I remember the day. It was a pretty windy day, but it was a special day to be able to make that commitment and to deliver on that commitment in fact, two years early, November last year, in advance of the 2022 deadline. In December 2020 we also released the Tasmanian Renewable Energy Action Plan, our plan to transform Tasmania from being Australia's renewable energy powerhouse into a world-leading provider of affordable, reliable, clean energy. Underpinning that plan we have legislated the Tasmanian Renewable Energy Target, or TRET, to double our renewable energy generation to 200 per cent of our current needs by 2040. This is unmatched globally. We cannot find any other jurisdiction that is anywhere near that. We are clearly leading the world. We have legislated that. I thank both Houses of parliament for their strong support for the Government's leadership and legislation in that regard.

We have what the rest of the world wants and needs - low-cost, reliable, clean electricity. This is helping to keep the lights on and the prices down. We will do a whole lot more. We welcome the recently signed memorandum of understanding, the Bilateral Energy and Emissions Reduction Agreement between the state and the Commonwealth, signed by the Premier and the Prime Minister in December regarding our plans for Marinus Link and Battery of the Nation. I am excited that Lake Cethana has been identified as the preferred pumped hydro site. We are progressing work to better harness our existing power stations, in particular, Tarraleah. Tarraleah is in the Central Highlands and

it has massive potential. We are talking \$600 million to \$700 million-worth of potential for a new power station at Tarraleah with plans to double our energy output there from 110 megawatts to 220 megawatts. This is not just good for Tasmania, it will be good for the nation. It will deliver jobs if we can secure that project. That is the potential. We are working hard to make that happen. We have listened to the national market expert, the Australian Energy Market Organisation, and it has confirmed in its 2020 integrated system plan that deep storage solutions are needed, that Marinus Link is needed. It is part of its plans for the future and that is encouraging.

It is strategic national infrastructure, one of three critical transmission infrastructure investments for which the federal government is locking in its support. I thank Angus Taylor, I thank the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, and the federal government for their support, together with the Liberal Senate team, Gavin Pearce, Bridget Archer, not just in the energy space and for progressing our plans but across all my portfolios and for the state more generally, especially with respect to water. I will talk more about that in a minute. Water is liquid gold. We acknowledge that the global supply and use of energy is dramatically shifting. The world is looking for cleaner renewable forms of energy and we are on the right side of history.

I encourage the Opposition to support these projects rather than their relentless negativity, their relentless criticism and their relentless knocking. It becomes debilitating and disappointing when they cannot get on board these job-creating long-term visionary projects that will deliver for Tasmania. We will deliver thousands of jobs, billions in investment, improved energy security, and downward pressure on electricity prices.

I wanted to refer to renewable hydrogen in Tasmania. It is Tasmania's super power. Tasmania can produce reliable, cost-effective, large-scale emissions-free hydrogen. It is green hydrogen and renewable hydrogen. It is going to give us an unparalleled advantage over other states and other jurisdictions in the world, including using coal-fired energy to produce hydrogen. The centrepiece is backed by the Tasmanian Renewable Hydrogen Action Plan. Our state has the biggest support package of any state or territory in Australia, \$50 million, and it sends a message that we are serious. We have not just expressions of interest but serious players in the marketplace. Woodside Energy signed an MOU with the Premier a month or two ago and is seeking to secure federal government funding support, based at Bell Bay. Fortescue Metals, big plans. Origin Energy, big plans. Abel Energy has special plans to be established at Bell Bay. In addition to that, Grange Resources on the north-west coast, Tasmania's largest mining company, announced very good results today - a big increase in income and profits. Congratulations to Ben Maynard and the team at Grange Resources for the results. They are part of the plans for renewable hydrogen in their project and feasibility study on the north-west coast at Port Latta. Tasmania is well placed to progress that.

We have shown our commitment to not just those major projects but also easing the cost of living. Power prices dropped by 1.38 per cent last July. There are nearly seven years of downward pressure on electricity prices. Regulated power prices have only increased around 2.2 per cent in nominal terms compared to the seven years on Labor's watch. What happened there? There was a 65 per cent increase. In real terms that is a reduction. Regulated residential prices have decreased by 12 per cent on our watch. For small businesses, prices decreased by 19 per cent in real terms. The \$45 million electricity concession scheme is regarded as one of the most generous in the nation. That is because we support those who are doing it tough, support those in need. We focus on maintaining that downward pressure on the cost of living.

Aurora Energy has invested \$5 million to assist customers with bill relief, waiving fees, charges, and a range of other support measures. Over the past 12 months Aurora has provided about 2200 customers with financial support through the COVID-19 customer support fund. It is currently supporting about 6000 customers on its nation-leading Your Energy Support program, the YES

program. I have talked to members of the Aurora Energy team. They do a great job and the YES program is really effective. The success of the YES program is demonstrated by the fact that 97 per cent of customers participating in the YES program are meeting their usage costs compared to the national average of just 53 per cent. There is over \$3.7 million left of that fund so for anyone struggling with their bills, I urge them to contact Aurora Energy as soon as possible so their situation can be properly assessed.

While it is clear that COVID-19 has had an impact on Tasmanian energy bills, it is clear that we are recovering. Since December 2020 Aurora has seen a decrease of approximately 24 per cent in the number of residential customers on payment plans, excluding those YES customers. With a strong focus on our most vulnerable Tasmanians we have committed \$1 million over four years to the Energy Saver Loan and Subsidy Program providing low-income families with access to funds to invest in energy-saving appliances for their home. We are certainly leading in so many respects.

As the Premier highlighted in his speech, Tasmania is a leader in climate change action and we will continue to be. We have the lowest per capita emissions of all states and territories and are one of the lowest emitters of carbon dioxide on the planet. We have already achieved our net zero target by 2050 four years in a row.

There is much to be said about agriculture and water. I will not have time to outline all the wonderful and special initiatives. To the farmers, fishers, and foresters who work hard every day to produce premium goods renowned the world over, thank you for your service and your contribution to the Tasmanian people and community. We produce 4.5 times what we consume in Tasmania. We are proud of our premium products. During the pandemic we have been able to deliver for Tasmania, Australia and the globe with our exports up thanks to our trade action plan. I thank the Deputy Premier for his leadership in ensuring that we diversify and grow our exports around the globe.

We have set out our five-year Agri-food plan. We are working in partnership with our farmers and agribusinesses to achieve those important targets. The four key ingredients to our success in agriculture: we have a cool climate, fertile soil, access to reliable water - water is liquid gold - and we are delivering in spades there - and enterprising farmers and agri-businesses are the four key ingredients to success and we will back them in at every stage under this Gutwein Liberal Government.

We have much to say about our processed food value which is around \$4.86 billion. With regard to the farm gate value, we are on track to get to that \$10 billion by 2050. We have a big aspiration, but why not? We are on target and going well. We will work hard with our rural stakeholders to do that. The Rural Confidence Survey says that farmers' confidence has risen to a 15-month high, resulting from the high commodity prices and good seasonal conditions. I believe the leadership of our Government in Tasmania has something to do with that.

The confidence does not mean that there has not been challenges. There have been many challenges and that is why we have worked with the stakeholders to deliver the \$1.9 million Agricultural Workforce Resilience Package. We want to get the fruit picked, the vegetables harvested and off to market, and those grapes crushed and wine made and off to market. That is our objective and we have been delivering on that, thanks to the support with the workforce that has been so important.

We have provided more funding support for Safe Farming Tasmania to help make that a success. The Agri-food growth plan is working. We are delivering and I will soon be releasing the Rural Water Use Strategy which will guide our future water management arrangements to ensure an integrated, fair and efficient regulation of our fresh water resources and deliver a sustainable water resource into the future. The wise use of water will be at the forefront.

We cannot be prouder of being able to back in Tasmania's water assets. We have 12 per cent of Australia's rainfall and 27 per cent of Australia's water in storage in agricultural land. Eight per cent of our agricultural land is delivering more than 50 per cent of our agricultural production because it has access to reliable water. A total 16 of the last 19 major water infrastructure projects in Australia have been built in Tasmania thanks to the leadership of successive governments and especially under this Government.

We are working hard with our partners in agriculture, the fruit industry and the wine industry. Look at the pivots when you drive around Tasmania, those green circles. When you see that you think jobs because it delivers increased opportunity in agricultural products and benefits. You have the polytunnels with fruit including strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and blueberries - the works.

We are doubling the number of cows milked and we had record milk production last year and are hoping for another record this year. We are securing vegetable contracts and they are all employing additional staff and it is positive. We have delivered a record irrigation outcome for Tasmanian farmers, but there is more to do. We have five irrigation projects under way under tranche 3 - the Don, Wesley Vale, Sassafra, Northern Midlands, Fingal and Tamar, and we have big plans to go further than that. I could probably speak under water with marbles in my mouth about water but I won't because I do not have time today.

I will touch on seafood. We are backing in the fishers in Tasmania, the wild catch, the rock lobster fishers. They have had a tough time and today I am proud to say that there is going to be less paperwork and more fishing, thanks to our digital reforms in the fishing space, streamlining the process and cutting red tape. It was tough last year and that is why we announced the \$5.5 million seafood industry package and why last week we provided further fee relief for the wild fisheries of more than \$660 000, particularly for the rock lobster fishers but also the wild catch fishers. Thanks to the support of the Tasmanian Seafood Industry Council, the Rock Lobster Association and support across the board.

I want to touch on border controls and Biosecurity Tasmania. Yesterday I visited the Hobart Airport to say thank you to Biosecurity Tasmania and all the employees for their work and service to support and keep Tasmanians safe. That was a special visit and I appreciated that opportunity. I caught up with not just members of Biosecurity Tasmania but also Ruby, the detector dog. We doubled the number of detector dogs thanks to Jeremy Rockliff when he was Minister for Primary Industries and Water. Those detector dogs are doing the job to keep Tasmanians safe. I put my thanks and acknowledgment on the record.

In terms of recreational fishing, we have big plans for both recreational sea fishing and also inland fishing. We have amongst the best opportunities in Australia and we will be delivering on that with a draft recreational fishing strategy not far away. Forestry is delivering big time and in terms of those productive industries in the forestry space, thank you for your effort and your work. We support you.

Time expired.