

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH ON THE OPENING OF THE 48th PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

6 May 2014

His Excellency was pleased to deliver the following speech:

Mr President and honourable members of the Legislative Council, Madam Speaker and members of the House of Assembly, I welcome you to the first session of the Forty-Eighth Parliament of Tasmania.

The 2014 state election delivered a decisive change of government for Tasmania. The people of Tasmania voted for a return to majority government, and winning 15 of the 25 House of Assembly seats gives the new government a strong mandate to implement its agenda and policies.

The Honourable Will Hodgman has been commissioned as Premier of Tasmania and will lead my Government with responsible economic and financial management, and a strong plan for Tasmania's future.

My Government took to the election a comprehensive policy platform to revitalise the economy and create jobs, to make Tasmania attractive for investment, to build a modern economy based on the state's competitive strengths, to get budget spending under control, to rebuild essential services in health and police, and to invest in education for a job-ready generation. It is my Government's intention to deliver on all its commitments and to be a government that makes a positive difference to the lives of Tasmanians.

The Premier has committed the new Government to move decisively and to work for the future of this state with purpose and optimism. The new Government made a series of commitments to the Tasmanian people in its first week, its first month and its first 100 days in office. It is honouring those commitments.

In the first week, my Government issued a whole-of-government direction that its first priority is to create jobs and reduce the unemployment rate to at least the national average. In its first 30 days the Government began the process to reinstate an international shipping service, and appoint the Coordinator-General and the Regulation Reduction Coordinator. The Coordinator-General will aggressively pursue investment opportunities for the state, and the Regulation Reduction Coordinator will cut the red and green tape that is a handbrake on economic progress.

Early action to remove water and sewerage headworks charges for two years is set to deliver an urgent shot in the arm that the Tasmanian economy needs.

All government agencies have been directed to pay their bills within 30 days of them falling due for payment or face paying penalty interest, as part of a government determination to support Tasmanian businesses and create jobs.

New legislation is being drafted to prevent protesters from unlawfully impeding access to workplaces, and to provide for mandatory prison sentences for assaults on police officers and other emergency services personnel.

A new planning taskforce is being commissioned to commence the task of delivering a single state-wide planning scheme that is fairer, cheaper, faster and simpler than the current system. Tasmanians have made it clear that they expect their government to deliver a better standard of essential public services in health, police and education.

My Government has begun the process of rebuilding those services, announcing that an additional graduate police recruitment course will commence this month, and inviting the regional high school communities to express their interest in extending their local high schools through to year 12.

In accordance with its commitment, the Government has unveiled the hidden waiting list for access to the health system, and has begun the process of separating emergency from elective surgery to reduce surgery cancellations. By prudently reviewing the important Royal Hobart Hospital redevelopment, the Government is demonstrating its commitment to ensuring Tasmania has the health services it now needs and will need in the future.

Early in my Government's term the Premier joined the Prime Minister's Asian trade mission that provided an unprecedented opportunity to promote Tasmania and its key competitive strengths - agriculture, aquaculture, mining, energy, forestry, tourism, international education and Antarctic affairs - to our two largest trading partners. The trade mission also provided a rare opportunity for the Premier to meet the President of China in person and to invite him to visit our state.

Tasmanians made it clear they wanted a government that was decisive and that would implement the changes the state needs to prosper. Already, the Government has demonstrated its determination to do just that.

Mr President and honourable members of the Legislative Council, Madam Speaker and members of the House of Assembly, there are early signs that confidence is returning with the return to majority government. The latest Tasmanian Tourism Industry Business Confidence Index is at 95 points out of 100 - a massive turnaround from the less than zero results in 2011. And confidence in Tasmania's property industry has reached a three-year high. While the unemployment rate is still too high, the most recent employment figures show a welcome increase in the labour participation rate.

The next 12 months will see my Government focus on implementing more of its long-term agenda for the state. While the new Government recognises that the challenges facing Tasmania cannot be overcome immediately, it has in place a clear plan for its first 100 days and a long-term plan for the future. It will report regularly on progress against the commitments made to the people of Tasmania.

Priorities in the first year will be to make Tasmania attractive for investment and to rebuild the Tasmanian economy to create jobs. Infrastructure Tasmania will be established, a new independent body to provide a coordinated approach to the planning and delivery of all major infrastructure in Tasmania, including rail, major roads, energy and ports.

To meet its objective of increasing tourism numbers to 1.5 million by 2020, the Government will invest more in the marketing and promotion of our state. The Government will also call for expressions of interest for appropriate developments in the state's national parks. This policy has been described by the tourism sector as a 'game changer' and has been well accepted by the majority of Tasmanians.

The new Government recognises the importance of the small business sector to the state's economy. My Government has outlined a comprehensive package of reforms to assist businesses, including payroll tax relief, and programs to encourage market expansion and innovation, as well as providing a more competitive environment for Tasmanian businesses to secure government work. The reforms also include removing impediments for Tasmanian firms who want to do business with the Tasmanian Government by disaggregating large government contracts into smaller, more manageable tenders, with more commercially reasonable terms and conditions.

Legislation will be drafted to require annual audits of red and green tape, along with a direction that all new legislation be accompanied by Regulation Impact Statements. It is critical to Tasmania's long-term future to make it easier for businesses and industry to be competitive and create jobs. Building a modern economy means building on our competitive strengths in our traditional industries such as forestry, mining, agriculture, aquaculture and tourism.

To build confidence in the agricultural sector and to deliver the government's objective of increasing the value of agriculture tenfold to create a \$10 billion industry by 2050, a high-level specialised division will be established, and a review of the Primary Industry Activities Protection Act 1995 will be commenced. This is an important step in strengthening the legal position of farmers and right-to-farm provisions. It will also give farmers a fairer go by removing barriers to growth and reducing red and green tape.

Measures to establish the new Department of State Growth have already commenced, and the plan is that the new department will be ready for business by 1 July this year. It will put all the state's major economic drivers under one roof to break down silos, to encourage investment and to create jobs.

Raising education standards and equipping the next generation with the skills they need to reach their personal potential and determine their own future is at the heart of my Government's plans. The new Government believes in education and understands the importance of education to revitalising Tasmania's economy. As well as extending 21 high schools in rural and regional communities to year 12 over the first term to improve Tasmania's unacceptable retention rates, the recruitment process for the first intake of 25 specialist literacy and numeracy specialists will get underway shortly, so those additional teachers can commence work in term 3 of this year.

To ensure patients waiting too long for elective surgery can be admitted sooner, the Government will begin the process of recruiting new hospital staff to reopen and staff surgical beds around the state. The Government will also undertake the preliminary work to introduce child health nurses in primary schools and youth health nurses in secondary schools, and the governance structure to commence the Rethink Mental Health Project.

The vast bulk of my Government's election commitments will be implemented as part of its first Budget. But prior to the introduction of that Budget, the Government will consult with the

community services sector on its new 'hand up' approach for vulnerable Tasmanians and the development of an affordable housing policy.

An independent review of students with disabilities will also commence, and the Government will convene the expert panel for an autism continuum of care.

To address our tragic youth unemployment rate, the new Government will invest significantly in young Tasmanians who are disengaged from our education system or who are unemployed or at risk, to help them stay in school, access training or to find employment. A strong economy is needed to provide support for our most vulnerable Tasmanians.

My Government is making a significant investment into community support services in all corners of the state, including those organisations that do extraordinary work every day to support Tasmanians in need. However, the centrepiece of the social agenda of this government will be to bring new thinking and a new approach to tackling entrenched disadvantage in Tasmania, and to change lives. My Government believes it is essential that all Tasmanians share in the success and growth of our economy in the future.

In order to deliver on its commitments, my Government will need to address one of the major challenges, the state's poor fiscal position. The recent Budget update has revealed more than \$1 billion in accumulated deficits over the forward estimates, a situation that cannot be allowed to continue unaddressed. A tough and disciplined fiscal approach will be required, and this is why it was necessary to defer this year's Budget, to ensure that the new Government can bring down a budget that sets the state back on course to fiscal sustainability.

Fixing the budget is critical to the delivery of the Government's election commitments. The implementation of measures to effect savings has commenced. They include strict vacancy control mechanisms to reduce the size of the public sector by 500 full-time equivalent positions, cutting ministerial transport costs by 20 per cent, and the audit of all government boards and committees. Agencies have also been instructed to suspend all expenditure on non-essential advertising, and review all discretionary spending on consultancies, transport, travel and grant programs.

My Government will rebuild the budget day by day, dollar by dollar. It intends to keep every one of its election promises.

Mr President and honourable members of the Legislative Council, Madam Speaker and members of the House of Assembly, Tasmanians made it clear at the 2014 election that they wanted change. The Premier and the new Government have a strong mandate to drive this change; to build a Tasmania of which all Tasmanians can be proud, that is open for business, has a competitive economy and where people want to live and work, not just visit.

An important part of this change relates to the forest industry. My Government took to the election a clear plan to repeal the Tasmanian Forests Agreement 2013. Legislation to honour that commitment will be introduced in this session of Parliament. It will remove approximately 400 000 hectares of land from its current status as 'Future Reserve Land' and place it under a new status, 'Future Potential Production Forest'. All future potential production forest will be placed under the management of Crown Land Services, ring-fencing it from Forestry Tasmania's management in order to protect Forestry Tasmania's markets and FSC certification. The minimum

annual sawlog quota will remain unchanged at 137 000 cubic metres per year, and in future the Government will require any further formal reservation of Tasmanian forest to be approved by a two-thirds majority in both Houses.

Work will also commence with the forest industry in a sensible and considered way on a new long-term strategy based on science, not politics, and that has the endorsement of the Tasmanian people. My Government will not attempt to change the status of any land currently listed as World Heritage. However, should the Commonwealth's current application to excise land from the World Heritage Area be successful, that land will be added to the future potential production forest. These changes will give certainty to the forest industry and to Tasmania's specialty timber industry, which contributes more than \$70 million a year to the Tasmanian economy, by ensuring the industry has access to a sufficient and sustainable wood supply now and in the future. The new Government's changes to forestry are sensible and considered and have the endorsement of the Tasmanian people.

With more than half of Tasmania's population living outside the capital city, the new Government recognises that regional communities have suffered. Measures to reinvigorate those communities include a regional revival fund to fund the public infrastructure necessary to create thousands of new private sector-delivered jobs, to relocate Mineral Resources Tasmania to Burnie, ensuring our mining expertise is placed in the heart of our mining region, and to locate in the north of the state the Office of Coordinator-General, the engine room of our economy.

Tasmanians have entrusted the new Government with a great responsibility - to govern the state well and to provide Tasmanians with certainty, optimism and hope for the future. My Government takes those responsibilities seriously. It has committed to providing strong, united and stable government, and to working hard, with discipline, integrity and purpose. And most importantly, my Government has made a strong commitment to honour its pledges and to deliver a brighter future for Tasmania.

I leave you now to the discharge of your important duties and trust that divine providence will guide your deliberations and further the true welfare of the people of Tasmania.