



JEREMY BUCKINGHAM MLC  
THE GREENS NSW

# INAUGURAL SPEECH

11<sup>th</sup> May 2011

**The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM** [5.03 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): As a mark of respect, I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which this Parliament sits. I pay my respects to their elders, past and present. I also acknowledge and congratulate you on your elevation, Mr President, and I also congratulate all returning and new members on their election to this House of responsible government.

It is indeed a great honour to enter and serve the people of New South Wales in this House of review, this House with more than 150 years of democratic tradition, 150 years of consideration and conciliation, negotiation and debate, and 150 years of tempering the sometimes impetuous and ill-considered majority rule of the other place. It is with respect and temperance that I begin my work in this Legislative Council, acknowledging that we all now play a part in responsibly shaping the future and advancing the interests of the people of New South Wales. The legacies of peaceful, democratic change are now entrusted to us, and that is both a burden and a privilege that I do not carry lightly.

It is this Parliament's legacy that most concerns me as I consider my role in the deliberations and decisions of this place. Just one month ago I was working as a stonemason. One month ago, I was concreting and rendering in the Burruga cemetery, working amongst the Black Angus cattle, fog-draped hills and Box woodlands of central New South Wales. Like my father, who worked the isolated oil rigs in the seas of Bass Strait, I was taught a work ethic and to live by the maxim that the job that takes the longest is the one that is never started.

I am proud to enter this Chamber a labourer and tradesman. It was whilst carving headstones for those pioneer and country cemeteries, whilst tending war memorials in Millthorpe, whilst inscribing the name of a Victoria Cross winner or a Rural Fire Service volunteer that had died defending a neighbour's house that I had time to reflect on the names and lives of those now passed and what it is that gives our life meaning. I am convinced that, in the end, it is our legacy that defines us—not only how others and time judge us, but how we consider ourselves as we look beyond our own lifetime. It is an intrinsic human instinct that we all want our works to increase the wellbeing of our family and community, but also future generations. We all want to know that what we pass is of lasting value, will be cherished and maintained, and that we will not be forgotten. I believe that this

is the reason that, again and again, the last sentiment inscribed on a memorial or headstone about those who have passed is that they are lovingly remembered, never forgotten, or lest we forget. Our works are all different, and therefore our legacies. For many, their great works are the character of their children; for some, a bountiful orchard or a bloodline of stock, a moment of courage on a battlefield, or laws that finally deliver long-sought justice. I was born in Launceston, Tasmania, in 1973. It was a simpler time—black and white television, passive smoke and no seat belts.

**The Hon. Robert Brown:** Cracker night.

**The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM:** Yes, we had cracker night. We spent a lot of time in the country. I remember the long hawthorn hedgerows, the smell of dairies, keeping chooks and getting our honey straight from the beekeeper in old kero tins. While dad taught me to change a sparkplug on a motorbike, my mum and my granny, the late Pip Worth, taught me Scrabble and a love of words, politics and history. Whilst granny would regale me with tales of Yorkshire coalminer strikes, the Blitz or their days in Nigeria, mum would sit me down with a National Geographic or take me on Hiroshima day peace marches, or to hold candles in cold parks for Reclaim the Night vigils. They instilled in me the positivity and wonderment of our world and the virtue of embracing diversity. But they also taught me that you could not be passive; that freedom was hard won and had to be protected; and that if you wanted change you had to be active.

One day we visited the mighty battleship, the *USS Missouri*, the "Big Mo". As a little boy I stood on the aft deck below the massive 16-inch guns on the very spot where the Japanese had signed the instrument of surrender, where the carnage and waste of World War II had ended. I thought history and politics were awesome and I wanted to be part of it. And part of it I was, like it or not. For Tasmanians, the 1980s were a difficult and exciting time. The long Cold War was ending and a dawning ecological awareness was morphing into a new environmental and political activism. Dr Bob Brown was leading a movement against the Franklin River Dam. A natural constituency was emerging that was recognising the intrinsic value of biodiversity and ecosystems.

Everywhere you looked there were No Dams triangles, or stickers on utes that said, "Bulldoze a Greenie". It was hard not to be partisan when the lines had been drawn and debate raged—environment or jobs, the wellbeing of the future, or the wellbeing of now?

At school I found it difficult. All my mates had dads who worked for Hydro or for Forestry. I found it difficult to explain why I thought Dr Bob Brown was right. I can remember sitting cross-legged in a class one day and being asked by my teacher, Mrs Woolley, why I thought the dam was bad. I could not explain except to say that it was going to be an ugly grey and things would be okay if they would just consider painting it a nice green or beige. But later I understood and the reality became clearer.

After school I spent two years working as a benchman in a small family sawmill below the crags and bluffs of the great western tiers of central Tasmania. I was enchanted by the wild rivers and wilder weather. I learned that hard work was invigorating—pushing great logs of flitch through screaming saws in the rain and sleet, the sweet smell of freshly cut hardwoods and pine, the sense of satisfaction of a hot meal after a hard day. I lived in a shipping container with a pot-bellied stove, plonked in a paddock next to the gurgling tannin-stained Meander River. I poached trout from the

river, played footy and drank beer with farmers' sons. I learned to disagree on a world view and politics but to express it in a way that did not demean or cast aspersions on integrity, culture or commitment to community: we all love our country.

I learned that there was a conscious effort by vested interests and politicians to create misunderstanding and to drive environmentalists and rural communities apart. The false dichotomy was and remains a deliberate construct. For example, I saw firsthand that multinational corporations were driving out small sawmills and destroying jobs. Where once selective logging had meant the careful consideration of the best timber by teams of master foresters, it now meant the wholesale destruction of vast areas selected for obliteration and wasteful woodchipping. Like many young people I became restless, quit the job and came to the mainland, where I met my wonderful wife, Sarah. We settled in her hometown of Orange and had two beautiful boys, Eden and James. I set to work for Sarah's parents, Lee and Sheila Bradbury, the kindest, most generous people I have ever met. It was there, over the past 12 years, that I had the opportunity to travel western New South Wales—the blood red plains of Parkes, the sandstone pagodas of Rylstone, the Pilliga scrub, the Lachlan Valley—great places and even better people.

But it was also there that a frightening reality was dawning upon me. One late spring afternoon in Cudal cemetery, I stood squinting into the hot dessicating wind that was cracking my face and pinching the last of the life from the pastures and failing winter crops. The drought of those years that terrified and damaged so much of south-eastern Australia was more than just the worst drought in the history of European existence in this part of this great land; it was a sign of a changing climate. Fate then intervened in the form of a couple of slipped discs in my back. Unfit for heavy lifting and stonemasonry I enrolled in the ecological agriculture course at the University of Sydney. I wanted to act on climate change and to help farmers manage their farms and maintain their communities. I wanted to stop rural decline and deal with the challenges of food security and natural resource management.

I read and was convinced by Australian agricultural pioneers, such as Bill Mollison, Peter Andrews and P. A. Yeomans. I stayed on farms and talked to the men and women who put food on our plates and who care for the land and water on a daily basis—onion growers in Coleambally, cockies in Cowra, orchardists in Orange—all good people doing a tough job in a tough, natural and economic climate. I studied ecological economics and came to understand the fundamental interdependence of human economies and natural ecosystems. Derived from the same ancient Greek word Oikos, both ecology and economy deal not only with energy and capital but also with how we manage our house, our environment. If your house is falling down you are in trouble, as they say, there is no economy on a dead planet.

The ecological principles of natural capital, resilience, diversity and emergence are embedded in economics because they are the same thing. The principles of ecologically sustainable development, the precautionary principle and the notion of intergenerational equity, too often paid mere lip-service to, should guide our economic and social vision. The Greens have a vision for New South Wales, and as a proud country Green I will be working to implement this vision for country New South Wales. It is a vision built on food security and new sustainable industries and renewable energy—great, base load solar plants harvesting the sun's rays and turning them into electricity, a

vision of country men and women building, operating and maintaining these plants, and all the associated industries, jobs and prosperity. It is a vision of a flourishing future for country New South Wales through harvesting and not exploiting nature.

The alternative is to pockmark the countryside with coal seam gas wells, to drain and crack our aquifers and pollute them with cocktails of chemicals, to release salty mine water which destroys our creeks and rivers, to scar and divide farming land, scenic hills and remnant bushland with pipelines, access roads, coal pits and fracking ponds. The significant majority enjoyed by this new Government brings with it the opportunity to drive significant reform. No challenge is greater than transforming our society and economy so that it is ecologically sustainable. As a progressive and as a Green, there are many issues on which I will differ from those in government. However, environmental sustainability and addressing climate change are issues that should go beyond traditional ideologies. In the spirit of conciliation we must start the work of healing our environment that has too long suffered under the yoke of rigid doctrines and absolutes. We must acknowledge the social and ecological failings of both extremes.

Capitalism, with its rampant consumerism and greed, brought us the catastrophes of Exxon Valdez and now the Deepwater Horizon, while the Soviet Union's radioactive disaster at Chernobyl and its approach to industrial cotton farming led to the ecological disaster of the Aral Sea. Ours is a market-based economy, but part of our job in this place is to protect workers, farmers and business from the excesses of the market and corporations and we must ensure that government has the revenue to ensure social equity and a just standard of living. Recently we saw the power of multinational mining companies derailing the mining tax—another example of an unfair power relationship between big mining corporations, which dominate communities and strip sovereign wealth from this nation while not paying their fair share.

The Greens are not anti-enterprise but we stand against the falsehoods of so-called free trade. We support innovation, creativity, change and renewal, but we will never stop railing against a market system that exports exploitation to the developing world. Who can say that the duopoly of Coles and Woolworths is a healthily functioning and fair market? I have seen firsthand it force price-taking farmers to push out perfect orchards or sell valuable dairy herds. I hope that the legacy of this Parliament is to choose to act meaningfully on these issues, that we accept the science of climate change, act to remove our economy from an overwhelming reliance on the mining, burning and export of fossil fuels. I hope it seizes the nettle and embraces the opportunity of renewable energy and the massive boost to regional development and jobs in the bush that renewables will bring.

I hope this Government acts to create a fair and transparent planning system, to create and maintain a system of reserves that protect our long-suffering biodiversity, that this Government does not stifle the century-long dilemma of sustainably managing the Murray-Darling Basin and that this Government acts to protect our communities from the excesses and damage of mining and coal seam gas. I will never trade the principles or policies of The Greens, but if this Government acts to deal meaningfully with these issues, I will act to help it. This is not some cunning perfidy, but said with good faith. Some older hands may scoff and perceive my entreaties as naive, but they are genuine nonetheless.

Before I finish I would like to acknowledge the people who have made this journey possible: Bob Brown, the late Peter Andren, Ben Oquist, and my New South Wales parliamentary colleagues who all taught me the ropes; Andrew Burke, Kristian Bolwell, Jon Edwards and Jeremy Bradley, who all gave great advice and made it fun; in the central west, Stephen Nugent, Neil Jones and Ian Tucker, whose energy kept me going; Glenn Taylor on Orange City Council, a true Labor man; Max and Claire for being great mates and boosting for me; and of course my mum, Paul, dad, Tam, Lee and Sheila, Sarah and my boys.