

PLANT DISEASES AMENDMENT BILL 2010
Second Reading

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN [5.02 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I would very much like to begin by acknowledging the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, whose land we stand on today, and I pay my respects to their traditions and customs and to their elders, past, present and future. Given where I am standing, I must also acknowledge our collective history of the treatment of the first proud peoples of Sydney Harbour and the rest of this land that was named New South Wales. The path to full reconciliation and equality with our indigenous sisters and brothers has taken too long, as has tangible and long-lasting action. The recent move to recognise Aboriginal Australians in our Constitution, while welcome, was shockingly overdue.

We still seem a long way from reaching the moment when we can all proudly say that an Aboriginal Australian can expect to live to the same age as an average non-Aboriginal Australian, and we still seem a long way from reaching the moment when an Aboriginal mother feels safe in the knowledge that her baby has the same chance of living a healthy life and receiving a decent education as the majority of other Australian babies. Here I acknowledge the Aboriginal women and men who have stood tall and fought tirelessly, since the day European boats began arriving on their shores, for their people's rights, dignity and self-determination.

This State has a proud and often colourful history of struggle, of ordinary people standing up for their rights and the rights of others. And this Parliament has hosted many inspiring leaders and visionaries, and I stand here profoundly aware of this history and my responsibility and accountability to the people of New South Wales. I am taking this seat in the place of Lee Rhiannon, whose tireless work in ensuring that the big end of town is held accountable for its actions is admired and respected by communities across New South Wales. Her work both in the Parliament and in the community has been a constant inspiration, and I look forward to seeing her continue to fight for the people and environment of New South Wales as a senator in the Federal Parliament.

If I am able to continue her work with just half the energy, integrity and determination she has shown during her years here, I will be fulfilling my responsibilities well. The people of New South Wales can rest assured, however, that I will aim for much more than half. The hard work and dedication over many years of other past and present Greens colleagues in this place—Sylvia Hale, John Kaye and Ian Cohen—is also inspirational, and I look forward to continuing that work with John, Ian, David Shoebridge and others in coming years. In July next year Lee Rhiannon will join eight other Greens senators and the Federal member for Melbourne in providing this country with strong, compassionate leadership. I have no doubt they will provide a stable, steady hand on the Government's shoulder to the enormous betterment of this great nation of ours.

I join 21 Greens elected to State and Territory parliaments across the country and many more in local government. I feel immensely proud of my party's ongoing achievements, and feel able to say with a good degree of certainty that these numbers will grow within a few short months. More Greens are getting elected to all levels of government across Australia because more and

more people are realising that the Greens represent their values and give voice to their vision—a shared vision of a fair and decent country. This is a vision of an Australia where the voices of communities and the needs of the environment are heard over the greed and self-interest that has come to go hand-in-hand with so many of the activities of big business and industry in this country.

This is a vision of a country where ecologically sustainable development means just that; a vision of a country in which views are tolerated, rights are upheld and our wonderfully rich diversity of peoples, cultures, religions and choices are respected and celebrated; a vision of a country in which communities are healthy and resilient, our cities liveable and sustainable, and our lives rich with learning and discovery and full of creative pursuit; and a vision of a country where our children and young people feel secure, loved and confident, and have the freedom simply to be children. My role as an elected Greens member of Parliament is to play my part in bringing this vision one or two steps closer to becoming a reality, in making New South Wales a better place.

The Greens vision of a just, peaceful and sustainable world, articulated so eloquently by Australian Greens leader Senator Bob Brown, is being heard and accepted by a growing number of people not only across Australia but also across the world. There are Greens parties in more than 70 countries, with some sharing government in countries such as Latvia and Finland; and in Ireland, too, where there is a Green Minister for Sustainable Transport, a Green Minister for the Environment and a Green Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. And of course here in Australia we are seeing a growing number of Greens elected representatives taking on positions of increased responsibility at all levels of government. The Greens are truly an exciting, dynamic party of which to be a part.

My father's family here in Sydney has a long history of active Labor involvement. As the first active Green in my extended family I perhaps represent the growing number of people of my generation, as well as those older and younger, who see the Greens as a party that shares their vision of a just, peaceful and sustainable world. My colleagues and I are here representing people who want their parliamentarians to care about and stand up for people, not vested interests. We are here because an increasing number of people see the Greens as playing a vital role in the ongoing fight for justice, equality and the protection of our natural heritage. We are here because an increasing number of people see the Greens as the party that champions open and transparent government. And we are here because an increasing number of people see the Greens as the party that represents their own values of compassion, fairness, integrity and respect for nature.

The four founding principles of the Greens are ecological sustainability, social justice, peace and non-violence, and grassroots democracy. These principles will guide the work I do in and outside of this place, while the party's thousands of passionate and dedicated grass roots members will inspire me to ensure I do that work with humility, integrity and purpose. I am well aware that I, like all other elected Greens across the country, am riding on the shoulders of an extraordinary network of committed party members across New South Wales and Australia and I thank you all for everything you have done to get us where we are today and for where I stand today.

In 1970 I was one of approximately 10,000 babies born in Australia who was put up for adoption. Though my birth mother lived in Melbourne, she joined other girls-in-waiting at St Margaret's Women's Hospital, in Darlinghurst, in the months before my birth. When I was reunited with her 10 years ago she told me she had lived with the most enormous amount of regret at her decision, a decision she felt forced to make due to society's notions of what an ideal woman and family were at the time. Her story of how she and her unplanned pregnancy out of wedlock were viewed back then makes me thankful we have come a long way. I am thankful to the struggles of the feminist movement, from the first suffragettes to the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s and later, that a woman now has more control over her reproductive choices in Australia than ever before. I am thankful too that in 2010 pregnancy out of marriage is no longer viewed by most as the bringing into this world of an illegitimate child by a girl who got into trouble.

I am a proud feminist and note with dismay how much more we still have to do before a woman's gender does not impact on the amount of pay she will earn in her lifetime, or when a woman's gender does not mean she will be so much more at risk of experiencing sexual assault than her male counterpart. In the early 1990s I attended Griffith University in Queensland, where I worked closely with a group of passionate and feisty women to establish a Women's Room and Women's Collective on campus. We used these partly as a basis to play our part in the active pro-choice campaigns in Queensland at the time. Despite the relentless work of the pro-choice lobby, it is a blight on the history of women's rights in this country that in New South Wales and Queensland a woman and her doctor can still be charged under the Crimes Act for procuring an abortion. It is my goal to work with progressive women from all sides of politics to decriminalise abortion during my time here.

At three weeks of age I was adopted by loving parents who had recently settled in country Queensland, growing up living a life of comfort, love and having the freedom to roam and explore the town and bush around me. As is the case with many people who are passionate environmentalists, I have no doubt that my love of nature and animals was instilled in me from a very early age. Owning and caring for pets, camping with my father and brothers and bushwalking with my parents in the beautiful rainforests of Lamington National Park are some of my most precious childhood memories. I firmly believe that each and every child must be able to enjoy many positive experiences of the natural world if we are to ensure that as a society we value nature and understand our fundamental connection to it. To this end I believe that environmental education, including the study of the appreciation of nature, must become a central component of our education system in this country.

I am a firm believer in the links between social equality and a healthy environment. I recognise that the conservation of nature and the attainment of truly sustainable communities will only be possible when people have their physical, emotional and spiritual needs fully met. During my time in this place I will be standing up and speaking out for New South Wales's precious natural areas, its magnificent coastlines and its too many threatened species and ecosystems, like many before me have done. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to those passionate men and women, particularly from regional New South Wales, who stick up for the environment, for nature and for animals often in the face of adversity and sometimes shocking abuse. The vast majority of people in New South Wales respect and admire your determination in giving a voice

to the environment and to seeing a world full of natural wonders passed on to future generations to love and enjoy.

Here, I would like to acknowledge the passion and fighting spirit that my colleague Ian Cohen has shown in his years of speaking up for the environment in this place and outside it. Due to the dedication of conservationists like him over many decades, and yes, due to those committed individuals within past and present governments who have listened, New South Wales has an extensive national park system that contains some of the most remarkable natural areas in the world, some of them right here on our doorstep. From the World Heritage areas of Barrington Tops and the Blue Mountains, to the eerily beautiful moonscape of Mungo National Park in the State's west, to the spectacular gorges and forests of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia system in the State's far north, New South Wales is immensely rich with nature's wonders. Yet despite this track record of national park declaration from both Labor and Liberal governments alike, our natural environment is in trouble. Because when it comes to ensuring that future generations can enjoy and reap the rewards of a healthy natural world like we are so lucky to be able to today, national parks are not enough.

In this the United Nations International Year of Biodiversity, New South Wales has little to boast about in some vital areas of biodiversity conservation. Sustainability assessments undertaken by the Department of Environment and Climate Change for its 2009 New South Wales State of the Environment report show that 64 per cent of all assessable fauna species and 65 per cent of birds have a moderate or greater risk of extinction. Meanwhile fish stocks and marine ecosystems are under significant pressures. As a child I loved fishing with my father and brothers and remember nights when the amount of whiting you could catch off the beach or bream off the jetty seemed never-ending. Now, an increasing number of people who make their living from the sea the world over are speaking of empty nets and worrying how to make ends meet.

We must restore the balance between the rights of future generations 100 years or more from now to throw a line out with their children and catch something in return and for communities everywhere to enjoy healthy food from the sea, with the rights we enjoy now to harvest such an extraordinary amount of fish and other marine life from our oceans. We must also ask ourselves: what value do we place on nature? We need to work together on finding solutions to this fundamental question if we are to turn around the decline in the health of our natural environment. If we better understood the value of what we receive from nature—the fresh water, healthy soils, food, medicines, clean air as well as relaxation and enjoyment—we would better recognise the urgency and importance of safeguarding what we have left.

Here in our own backyard of Sydney, how much do we really value healthy water catchments if we continue to allow longwall mining to take place under rivers that supply Sydney with its drinking water? What value do we place on our rivers when longwall mining causes riverbeds to crack and subside, and for some of this water in rivers on the driest continent on earth to simply drain away? And in our wider backyard of New South Wales, what value do we place on healthy soils and aquifers when we prioritise coalmine after coalmine over the health of some of the nation's most productive agricultural land? Are we passing on a world to our children and theirs with no birds in the sky or fish in the sea? Though dire, this is not a hopeless situation but will

require true environmental leadership from present and future governments to protect habitat, both terrestrial and marine, to ensure the survival of many species.

We all have a responsibility to leave a legacy for our children and future generations of a healthy and productive planet. Life on earth, in all its miraculous forms, has evolved over billions of years, while we modern humans and our towns and cities have been around for an almost insignificant amount of time comparatively. However our impact on the earth has been far from insignificant. I truly hope I can play some part in ensuring laws are introduced that begin to address the drivers of the ecological crises around us. The impact that climate change will have, and is having, on communities across Australia, as well as on the plants and animals that call this beautiful nation of ours home is profound.

During my more than five years heading up the Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales it was distressing to see this devastating environmental crisis that humanity has brought upon itself and the natural world not receiving anywhere near the attention it so urgently requires.

Like many Australians, I am angry and dismayed at the inaction of governments the world over to reduce carbon pollution, and at how beholden they are to the vested interests of companies whose polluting activities are those that need to be controlled. Future generations will look back at this time with an even greater sense of anger and dismay if the people given the power to act continue to sit and do nothing. I truly hope that I can work with many of you in this place from all sides of politics in the coming years on lasting solutions to the climate change problem. We must rise above our political persuasions, beliefs and ideologies to work together on this, still our greatest moral challenge. Unless we all work together to end the undue influence of industry and big business on our system of government and political decision-making then communities and environmental interests will continue to be sold out in the quest for higher profits and so-called shareholder value. I look forward to supporting the work of my Greens colleagues in this fundamentally important area and to working with them and others to expose the undue influence and corruption of our democracy at every opportunity.

Finally, I must speak on another issue close to my heart. During my time at university my brother Richard ended his long battle with paranoid schizophrenia by taking his own life. I will be working to support organisations and individuals who undertake advocacy and provide vital support for people experiencing mental illness, and their families, particularly support that prevents young people from suiciding. More than 10 per cent of people in New South Wales suffer from a long-term mental health or behavioural problem—a shocking statistic, which I hope during my time here I can play some small part in addressing.

I am looking forward to my time in this place, excited and somewhat daunted at how much there is to do if any part of the vision I outlined earlier is to be realised for our country, for our communities, and for our children. I do know that the task ahead will be made that much easier by the support of those around me, including the Greens members and supporters in the gallery tonight. Your dedication to the Greens vision is so inspiring and I look forward to working with you all for communities and special places across New South Wales over the coming months and years.

To my friends in the gallery who are not party members, I look forward to our time together sharing stories and laughter over a meal now more than ever before. To my parents, who could not be here tonight, and to Paul's family who is now mine too—Margaret, Michael, Marley and Luca—thank you for your love and acceptance. And to my life partner, Paul Sheridan, without whose love and support I know I would not be standing here today, simply thank you.