

Legislative Council Hansard – 29 May 2019 – Proof

INAUGURAL SPEECH

The PRESIDENT: Before I call the Hon. Mark Banasiak, I remind all members that the honourable member is about to make his first speech in this place. I ask members to extend to him the usual courtesies. I welcome into my gallery this afternoon Mrs Tina Banasiak, wife of the honourable member, Serena, Sofia and Luca, their three children, together with his mother, stepfather and mother-in-law, who are all here to hear the member's first speech.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK (15:02): It is with pride and honour that I enter this place, Australia's oldest Parliament, as a representative of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party. I have been a proud member, volunteer and State committee member of the party for more than 15 years and I am privileged to have been part of the party's greatest election result. Less than three years ago we had two members in this Parliament. Today I am proud to stand alongside four party colleagues. Our electoral success was the culmination of four years of hard work and planning and it is an honour to have been part of this historic achievement.

Everyone's background, family and personal experiences colour the lens they see the world through. Mine is no different. I begin with my family. Both sides of my family have had different experiences. My great-grandfather on my mother's side was one of the Rats of Tobruk. On the other hand, my father's parents were liberated from a camp at the end of the Second World War and travelled to Australia. They are what you would call the poster family for assimilation. I grew up in the seaside town of Kiama and lived there for more than 18 years with my mum, dad and sister. When I was not travelling the countryside playing representative soccer we would spend time with my grandparents who lived in Gerringong and we would go down to the boat harbour with our fishing rods and often come back with something for Sunday lunch. This is where my love of fishing probably started.

Sadly though my father died when I was 17 years old and approximately four weeks out from completing my Higher School Certificate. It was my teachers who took the time and showed they cared which got me through these last few months of school and probably what inspired me to become a teacher myself. I completed my teaching degree at the University of Wollongong and it was here that I was exposed to different cultures and people with different life experiences and opinions. Maybe I did not agree with my peers all the time but I have always respected the rights of others, their right to have a different opinion to mine. I am a proud Australian. I love the outdoors and I love to sit around a campfire with family and friends eating the fish or the food that we have just caught or talking about the big one that got away. This country has provided endless opportunities for so many, including me and my family.

I am an ardent lover of history and a fervent believer that history does have a way of repeating itself, particularly in terms of attacks on culture. It is my own family background and my experiences growing up that fed my desire to pursue it at university. People choose to take a narrow view of what culture is, only attributing it to ethnicity or a country of origin. They cherry-pick the aspects of a culture they find acceptable and attempt to apply that rule to everyone. Hunting and gathering is the perfect example of how cultural practices are treated in the mainstream. The fact is it is the oldest cultural activity and it transcends political and geographical borders and unites people from all walks of life. Yet there is this immense intolerance towards hunting and gathering that if applied to another culture would see widespread condemnation. The truth is we are all in this room today because our ancestors were successful hunters and gatherers. The fact that some of us have chosen to ignore what is inherently in our nature because of the modern convenience of shopping centres is not cause to discriminate against those who have chosen to practise and immerse themselves in this culture.

Recreational fishing is another example of cherrypicking, as are the illegal and unprovoked attacks by extreme animal rights groups on our farming culture. It is this cherrypicking and the subsequent inaction from the major parties that in part inspired me to get involved in politics. I certainly did not picture myself standing here as an elected member. After completing my degree I walked into a teaching career, which I thought would see me through to retirement. I fell for the catchy billboards that were scattered along train stations reading "Teach and make a difference." For close to 15 years I believe I did. Teachers do more than teach. It is to our teachers that we collectively hand over our most precious resource for a majority of weekdays. They nurture and shape the future of our children and take care of them when we cannot. Regrettably our teachers are being used as political scapegoats, copping the blame for poorly thought-out and poorly implemented policy within the education system.

While teaching I quickly discovered that as teachers our ability to make a difference was being hindered by a system so convoluted and confused that for 10 years it could not even decide what to call itself. It quickly became clear to me that government failings to adequately address issues such as mental health, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, crime in our communities and socio-economic disadvantage, manifest in our classrooms daily. Our students bring the impact of those failings with them alongside their backpacks. Unfortunately, in my 15 years of teaching the education system has become even more convoluted, with very little offered by way of solutions. Seeing the education system broken in so many ways is also what inspired me to see if I could make a difference but from a different angle.

As I said, teachers do more than just teach and more than just deliver curriculum content. We deliver life lessons. I believe that the most important life lessons I have ever taught are, first, that we as people need to own our actions. We need to accept and take responsibility for both the intended and unintended outcomes of our actions and be accountable. Secondly, if we are a true democracy then the above is applicable to all, especially those in government and elected positions, such as ourselves. Thirdly, any criticism or feedback we do not like hearing is probably the type that we probably need to hear more of. My experience as a teacher and observing politics has highlighted an unwillingness by those in leadership positions to own their actions. Instead they play the blame game like young kids. If New South Wales is to achieve its potential in terms of responsible, active citizenship, then as leaders of this State we need to lead by example.

I chose to run for the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party because I was sick and tired of both major parties blaming each other for the mess this State is in. The truth is both major parties own it and both are equally accountable. Accountability was a theme that was certainly cemented as I travelled the State during the campaign. The general response was, "Can you bang their heads together and get them to just sort out the basics?" This is the feedback that both the Government and Opposition probably do not want to hear but they need to. I would like to share just a few of the basics with you from the people we represent.

I will start in Goulburn, where I met Barbara, a new grandmother. It is an exciting and proud moment for any mother to see her grandkids brought into this world. Unfortunately, if you have gestational diabetes like her daughter does and you live in Yass you cannot give birth in Yass Hospital. There is insufficient staff, and patients must be transported to the Australian Capital Territory to give birth. Why has this Parliament created a situation where we have to outsource a basic function of health care to another State or Territory? We are responsible for this situation; it is time to own it and it is time to fix it.

If we move a bit closer to Sydney you would think things would get better. In Wollongong a child who has had a seizure has to wait over a month to get an electroencephalogram [EEG] to diagnose the cause. Why? It is because on six out of seven days the machine has to sit idle due to a lack of qualified staff. As the administration staff of the hospital told me, "We need to make compromises." Yet 37 years ago this child would have had an EEG done on the day of presentation. So the next time we talk about health in this House, and the Government wants to give itself a pat on the back, I will ask: Can we not fudge the books by talking about more beds or fancy equipment? Beds and fancy equipment are useless without the staff to care for the people in the beds and to operate that equipment. Instead, let us talk about more nurses, more doctors and more specialists for our regional and rural areas, and with an actual plan to deliver it. This example in Wollongong, where we effectively had better services 37 years ago, is just one example among many. Patients and families suffer, and it is just not acceptable. The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party is prepared to work with both sides of politics to fix this mess.

Travelling up north to Kempsey I met Stuart, who works in law enforcement. He explained to me that in order to keep pace—with officers on leave for whatever reason—over 35 new officers would need to be recruited to adequately cover the northern region alone. Yet again the government of the day simply gives themselves a pat on the back for sending two or three police officers to a region. Where is the long-term strategic planning for frontline police resources? Why do we have to place our communities in danger? Once again the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party is prepared to work with both sides of politics to fix this mess that both major parties have created over many years.

In Coffs Harbour I met Paul, who is a full-time carer of a former public school teacher who was the subject of horrific bullying to the point where she has attempted suicide. She received no support from either the New South Wales Department of Education or the NSW Teachers Federation. Paul runs the Bullied Teachers Support Network, a support group for thousands of teachers who left the profession because of workplace bullying. The fact that such a group needs to exist makes a mockery of our work health and safety laws. I have personally met some of these teachers; they are not an anomaly. They number in the thousands.

Even last weekend we not only heard of the failings of Employee Performance and Conduct [EPAC] but also read of the comments of the Teachers Federation in the *Sun-Herald* choosing to side with and support EPAC in what is clear procedural unfairness over the teachers they are supposed to represent. The only question is: Why? For allowing such a culture to fester and for the EPAC unit failing to adequately address this, it is time that both the Government and the Opposition own it. Both major parties are responsible and the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party are prepared to work with both major parties to fix this problem.

In Condobolin I met Trish, who lives on her farm with her kids and grandkids. Trish suffers from farmers lung, a disease similar to mesothelioma. The only way she could possibly get respite would be to sell her farm and leave the work she loves, which would leave her kids and grandkids homeless. So she continues the work she loves, the work that is effectively killing her. However, what was of more concern for her was a feeling of neglect, a feeling of being taken for granted by both major parties. She said she was at the point of scaling right back and only farming enough to feed just her own family. She was not alone. This sentiment was echoed around the State by all the farmers I spoke to.

Because of the policies of this Government, both major parties have pushed farmers to their limits and have created a situation where this State's food supply is threatened, all the while having to be dragged kicking and screaming and shamed into providing support by my party. Both major parties are to blame for allowing this situation to fester, and it is time to own it. The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party are unashamedly biased for the bush. We will lend our support to fix the many problems you have created.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge my former colleagues and students, particularly those at my last school at Corrimal High School. Late last year we experienced a tragic fire in the Industrial Arts block. We were offsite for the majority of the last term. Even during such a tragic event the rot that is the government procurement system with regards to building and maintenance works did not ease. If anything it got worse, with a \$600,000 electrical bill to wire four demountable buildings and over \$600,000 to remove soil because they found asbestos in the top layer of the soil. They thought, "Hell, why not go 15 feet deep. You never know your luck, you might disturb more." It cost reportedly \$3,000 per hour for someone to monitor air quality in shorts and a T-shirt. All this work was miraculously completed and the site cleared just days before the traditional tradie shutdown around Christmas time. How amazing.

Mr President and members of the House, I ask: Where are the checks and balances? Who is signing off and agreeing to such things? Just imagine what that money could have been better spent on. Three years ago at an Education Week dinner, secretary Mark Scott made a personal commitment to look into the government procurement system and why schools were being quoted upwards of \$75,000 to paint three classrooms. Three years on and you have failed to deliver on that promise. That same night, to an audience of over 200 senior teachers and executives, you laid out your agenda to revolutionise the HSC and bring it into the twenty-first century, yet three years later you have delivered nothing in HSC reforms. To quote your bookmark titled "on us", well, it has been "on you" for three years.

Under your watch, you have allowed money to be pillaged and wasted instead of being spent on resourcing our schools, professional development of our staff and supporting our students to their full potential. It is simply unacceptable that schools are allowed to be taken advantage of when it comes to maintenance. This rort needs to stop. Both major parties are equally responsible for this mess. It is time to own it. The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party is prepared to work with both major parties to fix this mess.

It would be remiss not to mention New South Wales firearm owners. As the Chair of the Federation of Hunting Clubs, I have been informed of and have personally seen the evidence of the mistreatment of firearm owners for many years. There are far too many examples of misinterpreting of legislation by New South Wales Firearms Registry staff and poor to non-existent delivery of service—for example, 16 months to approve a new club, while the Department of Fair Trading and the NSW Department of Primary Industries process their applications in a matter of a week. What other government department would deem these time frames as acceptable? Probably one of the most disturbing matters is in relation to pensioners. Apparently the policy is that as soon as a firearm owner applies for a pension they are immediately subject to an overzealous review of their ability to hold a licence, which in many cases they have held for decades. I am no legal expert but I imagine this borders on institutionalised discrimination based on age.

Additionally, because the advice given is coming from a government department it must be true and correct, no questions asked. All these decisions are arbitrarily made with little or no reason given. Yes, firearm ownership is a legislated freedom, not a right in this country. However, there seems to be a belief at the New South Wales Firearms Registry that, because it is not a right, firearm owners therefore forfeit our most fundamental rights regarding procedural fairness and natural justice, like the right to know reasons for decisions or to receive those decisions in a timely manner. Under this Government's watch, they have allowed the New South Wales Firearms Registry to be staffed by people who have no demonstrable working knowledge of the firearm industry or legislation and they have allowed a culture of institutionalised discrimination against firearm owners to develop within the registry. It is time to own it and the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party will work with both major parties to fix this problem.

I must thank many people for helping me get elected into this House. First of all, my family: my wife, Tina, and kids Serena, Sofia and Luca. I could not have done this without you all. To mum, Therese, stepfather, Tony, and mother-in-law, Eva: Thank you for your support and for the additional childminding, school drop-offs and pick-ups you have done for me and will continue to do. To my sister, Laura, who is a brilliant environmental scientist: Thank you for your invaluable advice that has been offered to me on many occasions. To all my mates at the Illawarra Hunting Club: You are like family and could not have been a bigger support to me. To the other 50 clubs of the federation that lent support during the campaign: Thank you. To all our branches that did the same: Thank you. To all our lower House candidates that we ran during the campaign: Thank you for your efforts. To our fantastic party team led by our State director, Filip Despotoski: Thank you for the work and hours you put in to successfully run the biggest campaign in our party's history. It was mind-blowing and I thank you all.

A massive thank you must go to the thousands of volunteers who were out there on the ground—the shooters, the fishers, the farmers, the greyhound industry people, the taxi industry people, the miners and many others who value freedom and common sense. I would not be standing here today without your support and I will never forget that or you. To those in the party who have mentored and supported me through my 15 years: Thank you. To the members who came before me and achieved great things for the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party—the late Hon. Roy Smith, the Hon. John Tingle, the Hon. Robert Brown and of course my colleague in the upper House, the Hon. Robert Borsak—I thank you. I stand here today on the shoulders of giants.

In closing, I mentioned that people often ask when the government of the day and the Opposition will be made to own their actions and decisions; I do not intend to sit here idly for the next eight years. As a crossbench member and a member of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party, I intend to hold both major parties accountable and will work with them in the interests of the people of New South Wales. I ask members of the House to close their eyes. I want to take you back to that child in the Wollongong Hospital and I ask you: What would you be motivated to do to make people accountable if that was your child? One of us in this House was motivated enough to run for election to the New South Wales Parliament.

