

## INAUGURAL SPEECH

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD (17:55):** Thank you, Mr President. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land I stand on, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I acknowledge also the Awabakal, Darkinjung and Guringai peoples, traditional custodians of where I now live and where I grew up. I pay my respect to elders past and present and to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people here today. This is, was and always will be Aboriginal land.

The traditional custodians of this land lived for tens of thousands of years in a sustainable economy—producing and storing food, sewing clothes, engineering and building homes and infrastructure, respecting country, understanding that if you look after the land the land will look after you. Of all the ways we have failed First Nation peoples—and there are many—failing to learn from them about land management may be what ends up making Australia uninhabitable for us all. As an elected member of the New South Wales Parliament I pledge to stand alongside First Nations peoples in their struggle for justice and self-determination and for the right to practise culture and to speak and preserve Indigenous languages. The truth must be told. History must be corrected. Treaties must be signed on the path to justice.

I did not get here by myself. I am here because of the support of my parents, my partner, Rod, and my children—each of them a gentle anchor to my truth and my values. I am here because of the active and engaged community on the Central Coast where I live and because of the 433,000 people who voted for The Greens in the recent State election. I am here because of the belief and trust placed in me by Greens members. Thank you to The Greens movement across the country, built over decades and still going strong. Thank you to all The Greens volunteers, staff and public representatives across New South Wales, including my hardworking colleagues Cate, David, Jamie, Jenny and Tamara. I am so pleased to be able to join you in this Parliament.

Thank you to The Greens NSW State campaign team; thank you to the team in my office who are helping me settle into this new role with such care; and thank you to the parliamentary staff who are going out of their way to make me feel welcome. Thank you to The Greens members who trusted me with a winnable position on our State election upper House ticket. Thank you particularly for your support Cath Connor, Matthew Thompson, Mark Riboldi and Damiya Hayden, all of whom I am pleased to see in the gallery tonight.

To all the people who have brought me to this moment, I thank you. Family and friends, I embrace you. I trust you to guide me and hold me to account over the next eight years. I believe it is important for us in Parliament to thank and acknowledge the people, communities and movements that brought us here. We might belong to various political parties but we are united in one thing: There is no manifest destiny that brought us here, no divine proclamation of our specialness or our right to be politicians. We are not special. We have privilege and we have power and we have an enormous responsibility to use these on behalf of the people and communities who brought us here. They have placed their trust in us to represent them and make decisions on their behalf. If we cannot do that we should quit.

I am under no illusions about the political differences that some of us share. I also know that positive change happens when good people sit down and try to find consensus. I have no doubt that I will disagree with every single one of you at some point—and that includes all of my Greens colleagues—but I hope that we can disagree with respect and good grace. To do that we must reject fear and embrace hope. We must reject the politics of hate and division, reject misogyny, reject racism and reject discrimination. We must pursue equality, compassion and justice. I hope that through generosity and patience we will find things in common that we can work together on, for the benefit of the broad community that is New South Wales. I hope we can all keep open minds: As the medical profession says, we must be humble before the evidence.

My family emigrated from England when I was two years old. I spent my early childhood sharing in my parents' enthusiasm as they experienced all that Australia had to offer. They instilled in me not only a love of our unique Australian flora and fauna but also a love of observation and analysis. Nothing

was taken for granted. I learned that our life in Australia was special, that the freedoms and opportunities we are given here are not shared by everyone across the globe, or even by everyone across Australia. Like so many other families, we have had our fair share of troubles working through mental illness, drug addiction and disability. From my own childhood to my time now as a parent, I have learnt that no child comes with an instruction manual and good intentions and caring hearts are not always enough. Many children and families need additional assistance and professional support. Parents, carers and siblings need reassurance and timeout.

I learnt early that those we love can hurt us. When I was 16, I lost myself in an abusive relationship. I still do not fully understand how another person was able to have so much control over me and make me feel so small. Having been a victim of child sexual assault, the abuse I experienced at the hands of my first serious boyfriend compounded my feelings of shame and deepened the sense that my body did not belong to me. It is common for those who have experienced sexual assault to feel shame: guilt attaches to specific actions whereas shame attaches itself to our identity. Guilt can tell us where we went wrong and encourage us to do better whereas shame tells us we are rotten. Shame is a destructive state that holds us back, whispering in our ear that it is our fault that we were abused—that we are inherently dumb, ugly, boring, worthless.

It was not until I was in my late twenties that I sought professional help. By understanding and rejecting the shame I felt, I moved past being a victim and became a survivor. In my twenties I hid from so many things. I let my shame dictate so many of my decisions. In my thirties I could look at myself in the mirror again. I found love with Rod in a deeply caring and supportive relationship. We had our two amazing children, who bring us such joy. No longer at war with myself, I am comfortable in my own skin and confident that the traumas in my past do not define my future. I have been supported to overcome many of life's obstacles. But not everyone is so lucky.

I am concerned and angry that too many people in New South Wales fall through the cracks, through no fault of their own, because we as a government fail to provide the services and supports they need. We cannot prevent hardship—I wish—but too often, whether you survive or whether or not you go on to thrive, depends on your postcode or your bank balance. We live in an increasingly unfair world. Economic inequality in Australia has widened. In Sydney, the top 20 per cent of income earners have an income around five times higher than those in the bottom 20 per cent. As household debt and expenses continue to skyrocket, median wages have flatlined. People are pushed into poverty.

The difference in quality of life between people in Sydney and people in regional and rural areas is striking. Drought-stricken towns in regional New South Wales have been without drinking water for months, surviving only because charitable folk trucked them water when the New South Wales Government turned its back. As a proud Central Coast resident I will not turn my back on rural, regional and remote New South Wales. We know that when people do not get the help they need, they are more likely to continue to face increased challenges. These problems can spiral out of control. Our failure to help people denies them full participation in society. For example, compared to those without a disability, people with a disability are seven times more likely to face health problems and can expect to earn less than half the weekly median wage. Children who have experienced violence or abuse are more likely to face mental health challenges and are at increased risk of homelessness and unemployment.

Disadvantage creates further disadvantage. The evidence is in. We understand this. This makes government responsible for doing something about it. But too often government resources go to those who move in the right circles, or are allocated to try and win elections. Rather than deep and meaningful investment in public and community services, we push small pools of money back and forth, taking money from one threadbare service and throwing crumbs at another. The Government finally signed up to Our Watch for the prevention of domestic and family violence while, for example, simultaneously slashing funding to some of the community-run legal centres that help women to leave their violent partners—centres like the Warringa Baiya Aboriginal women's legal service.

Right now, vital whole-of-government reforms are needed to turn around the lives of millions of disadvantaged people in New South Wales. We can spend another electoral cycle playing whack-a-mole with people's lives, or we could deal with the root causes of so many societal problems by investing

in widespread reforms to end the cycle of disadvantage. For a start, we can redirect billions from prisons and punitive policing and put it into prevention and community services. We can create a safe State where women and children are free from violence and harassment. We can build a New South Wales where your access to quality education and health services is not determined by how much money you have. We can care for people by investing in suicide prevention and mental health services for our young people, and by helping the 90 per cent of people with a disability who are falling through the cracks of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Making those investments now will strengthen our society and improve people's wellbeing. Stronger communities means a stronger New South Wales.

I undertook my first degree in psychology, wanting to understand what makes people tick. Then I studied law, wanting to understand the rules of society. Because I had a public school education and I grew up outside of Sydney, people had a particular—negative—impression of my prospects in law. Always stubborn, I determined to prove them wrong and work for a corporate law firm. It was from there that I became fascinated with finance and capital markets. In those early years, I viewed the capital markets as a well-oiled machine with easy to grasp rules for operation. I bought into the myths that markets deliver good outcomes for society, and that the accumulation of extreme wealth for a very few could be excused on the grounds that that wealth would eventually trickle down to everyone else.

Over two decades in Sydney and London, I became an expert in global banking regulation. I was in London for the onset of the global financial crisis. I had a ringside seat as governments around the world scrambled to prevent the failure of some of the largest financial institutions, and to contain the fallout from those that fell. I was in the thick of it as regulators were left gasping at how little they had understood the financial system they were supposed to be responsible for. I was there as the UK economy reeled from the impact of the cracks in the financial system as the government let the most vulnerable people fall through. Retailers faltered. Shops and small businesses closed at an alarming rate. In the financial services industry, redundancies were commonplace but those who kept their jobs still complained of reduced bonuses.

The social impacts of the financial crisis were replicated across Europe and the United States. Financial services professionals walked away relatively unscathed; the rest of the workforce reeled from the resulting economic downturn—job losses, mortgage foreclosures and an entire generation of young people left with little prospect of entering the workforce or of ever owning a home. My experience left me with two very clear understandings. First, when financial systems fail, the heaviest burden is felt by those least able to withstand it. Secondly, the global financial system as it stands cannot be controlled or even adequately regulated. Our financial system relies on credit, which in turn demands constant economic growth. Without the production of more and more things, without increasing our consumption, the system falters. And if the financial system falters, if you and I refuse to get ourselves into ever-increasing levels of debt, the real economy falters too and we all suffer.

This tangled knot linking the real economy and the financial system desperately needs to be unpicked and unwound. When the next financial crisis comes, as it inevitably will, we must be ready with a plan to build a progressive and sustainable economy. Capitalism is an economic model past its use-by date. For a time it delivered leaps forward in the quality of life for many, but now it causes more harm than good. We are in the twenty-first century, operating on nineteenth century economic principles. That is pretty stupid. The late-stage neoliberal version of capitalism we have now in Australia is reducing our average quality of life. It is driving widening economic inequality and trashing our environment. It is stifling creativity and holding back people's ability to participate.

Neoliberalism has encouraged us to be in constant competition with one another and with nature, to act and think as individuals, to equate acquisition with success and to put a price on everything in our lives. To solve the mess we are in we need to go in a different direction. Our new economy needs to take into account our global ecological limitations and the impact of information technology on markets. We have hundreds of years of advancements in academic and scientific thought, yet those in charge clutch woefully at the past. The way an economy works is not a predictive science; it is inherently political. Government budgets are a series of political decisions. We can choose to build hospitals and high schools instead of stadiums. We can choose to spend money on domestic and family violence prevention instead of propping up the gambling industry. We can choose to make coal-fired power stations accountable for the toxic pollution they produce. We can choose to invest in

the renewables industry, which will deliver cheaper, cleaner energy and stable sustainable jobs for tens of thousands of people.

The New South Wales economy suffers from short-term government thinking. We budget for infrastructure differently because we know the benefits extend into the future. Infrastructure spending does not create deficits because it is budgeted as an investment. Why can we not do the same with social spending? Building a prison should not be easier than employing a nurse. The evidence shows that spending money on public services such as education, health and transport improves social outcomes. We know that investing in early support services and tackling poverty and housing insecurity keeps people out of prison and keeps kids with their families. Why can we not finance services the way we do infrastructure? Actually, we can, if we choose to.

Our economy can recognise the long-term economic benefits of free life-long education. Our economy can recognise that the ongoing benefits of essential services being in public hands far outweigh the short-term revenue gains from privatisation. It is time to replace gross domestic product as a measure of economic success with a measure that includes indicators of wellbeing and sustainability. It is time to become agnostic about growth. What matters is wellbeing regardless of growth, not growth regardless of wellbeing. We can choose to pursue a zero-waste circular economy in New South Wales. We can invest in technology, facilitate lifestyle changes and increase our rates of repair, reuse and recycle.

The first step is making industry responsible for the full life cycle of the products it produces and the pollution it creates. Make no mistake, our planet is dying. When I was a child my best friend, Saneaia, lived next door. We spent hours exploring in our backyards, bandaging up the eucalyptus trees we saw bleeding with sap and tracing the scribbles under the bark made by hungry insect larvae. We fed the visiting blue tongues and dug out worms and mice from the compost heap. With other children in the neighbourhood we would play for hours in the bushland at the end of our street, a vast wonderland full of lizards, frogs, wallabies and parrots. We would explore the caves and make figures out of the clay by the streams. As the sun went down our mums would call us in for dinner, yelling our names loudly over the roaring din of thousands of crickets and cicadas.

These days the area is very different. It is not just that there are more houses, that the bushland is sparser, or that my childhood friends have moved away; the area no longer teems with life. We are killing off hundreds of species globally every year. Australia has one of the highest loss of species rates anywhere in the world. They are not all as cuddly as a koala, but the species dying off are vital for a healthy, well-functioning planet. We are breaking temperature records year after year. But the climate emergency that we have created goes beyond hotter temperatures. We are in a state of climate degradation.

Global warming is the sweaty fever of a deep sickness degrading the earth's vital organs: the great lungs of our forests that filter the air; the water, circulating like blood, giving life to all things; and the soil, the vital skin tissue that houses the insects and micro-organisms on which so much other life depends. As we rip out more and more trees, allow water to be siphoned off and poison the soil with chemicals, we not only change entire weather systems, but also destroy the very things that should give the earth the resilience to withstand climate change. You cannot tinker with one part of our fragile environment without impacting another. Seemingly small and compartmentalised decisions by governments can have a devastating impact on our ecosystems, on our climate and on our ability to withstand climate change.

That is why we have to reverse the 2016 tree clearing laws. That is why we have to stop the extension of the Warragamba Dam and preserve those river ecosystems, maintain access to sacred Aboriginal sites and ensure people are not put in the path of extreme flooding. That is why we need to leave the coal, oil and gas in the ground, and ensure a just transition to economic stability for the workers in fossil fuel industries. I became active in politics when I realised that I had as much right and as much responsibility as anyone else to fix the things I think are broken, to stop harm being done, to save that which needs rescuing and to protect the things I hold dear.

I want our Parliament to better reflect the community we represent. That means more women, more people of colour, more people with disability, more people with diverse gender and sexual orientations, and especially more First Nations people. Representing the people of New South Wales requires us to listen to unions, advocates, community organisations, activists, experts and the public—and I do not mean obsessing over opinion polls. Overcoming the growing tide of political disillusionment requires us to build trust and respect through open dialogue. Democracy suffers when protest is sanctioned, when money buys access and when vested interests influence political decisions.

Democracy is about more than voting and elections. To misquote Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, our democracy should be designed to speak truth to power. Real democracy is an ongoing, deliberative process of deep conversations and brave decision-making. Political communication must be about more than spamming peoples letterboxes, screens and school fences with focus-group marketing materials. Addressing the challenges we face will take all of us, inside and outside of parliament, working together.

To the people sitting in the gallery and outside of this Chamber, if politicians are not doing their jobs, I ask you to challenge us. There are so many more of you out there than us in here. If we fail you, I hope you will rise up and put us out of a job. Hope is a most precious resource. It is hope for something better that inspires us to act; it is those actions that will create the change our world needs. I ask you to stay vigilant in guarding your hope, stay brave in creating change and remain fierce in holding your representatives in Parliament to account. Thank you.