



## Inaugural Speeches

### Inaugural Speeches

Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Tuesday 24 May 2011.

**Mr JAMIE PARKER** (Balmain) [6.14 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional owners of the land on which this Parliament sits, and I pay my respects to the elders, past, present and future. I acknowledge also the history of dispossession of this country's Indigenous people. I express my sorrow for that history and I resolve to do all that I can to overcome the ongoing consequences of that dispossession.

I am immensely proud and honoured to have been granted the great privilege of representing the people of Balmain. I stand here today as the first Greens member of this House. I join five upper House Greens members of Parliament as the largest representation that our party has had in the history of this Parliament. The 2011 State election was our most successful election ever, with a record number of Greens votes not only in the seat of Balmain but also in both Houses of Parliament. I acknowledge and celebrate the work of the members who came before me as well as the activists, supporters and representatives who worked to realise The Greens agenda both in Australia and around the world.

The New South Wales Legislative Assembly first met in this place more than 150 years ago and I acknowledge all those successful candidates who join me here today. I respect the tradition of this institution and the democratic principle that it represents. However, I recognise also its limitations. Rarely in its history has Parliament led progressive social change—most often the Parliament has followed, often reluctantly, the will of the people. While Parliament has great powers, I recognise that it is our local communities where genuine political leadership occurs. Local leadership has protected people from many poor decisions made by parliaments. The history of property development in this State is just one example of an area in which poor decisions have been resisted by strong and determined community leadership. It is from that history that The Greens and I arrive in this place.

The Greens are not only about challenging, we are also about creating. The Greens offer an alternative vision for how our society can progress based on our four key principles of environmental sustainability, peace and non-violence, grassroots democracy and economic and social justice. It is these four principles that guide The Greens' action, from how we vote in Parliament to how we campaign in our own communities. They acknowledge that we live in an interconnected world in which social inequality, denial of human rights and environmental degradation are not separate problems but the same problem manifested in different ways. These principles also acknowledge that we rely on each other, that diversity and respect strengthen and protect us all and that we share a planet upon which we all rely and which nurtures and provides for us and which we in return must protect. These four principles have guided me throughout my political life and it is against them that I will test legislation in this House. They set out our values but also our vision—the vision that I see for my community and the State of New South Wales. As a member of Parliament, I now have the opportunity to apply these principles to work with the Government to meet the challenges facing our State.

I would not be here without the support of many people. I thank my family—my greatest supporters—for their love and their faith in me. I thank my mother, Pamela, my father, Richard, my sisters Rebecca and Jacqueline and my brother, Jonathon. I am delighted that they are in the gallery

tonight. It was in another part of the world that my parents' migrant journey began. It was in Australia that my parents sought a better future, free from the economic difficulties and class prejudice of England in the 1960s. They followed others in my family who searched for a better life, including my great-grandfather, who escaped anti-Semitism in Germany and my aunty and uncle, who now live and work in the United States.

My family was a regular, suburban family and it was not overtly political. However, I can see now that politics was all around me. My father was a tradesman—a fitter who worked in the confined space of a ship's engine room when he sailed into Sydney Harbour as a merchant seaman. My mother was the daughter of a proud dock worker in Liverpool, England. After being bombed three times during the Second World War, her family sought the relative security and opportunity of this great nation. Australia was a refuge from the class-ridden mother country but it had its hardships. I remember vividly the stress experienced by my family when my father was on strike as each day rolled by with the uncertainty of no income but the determination to achieve a fair go for himself, his family and his workmates.

From those times I gained a real insight into power and the sacrifices that people made to achieve what we see today as fair and decent outcomes. The development of these values also helped to make clear to me the urgent need to address environmental exploitation because powerful interests were not taking account of environmental impacts or the needs of future generations. These ideas, which formed naturally in my life when I was growing, were confirmed and reinforced intellectually during my undergraduate and postgraduate studies, which—not coincidentally—were in the field of economics. It was these ideas, gained from my family, my studies and The Greens, that led me to stand as a Greens candidate for election to Leichhardt Municipal Council.

I was first elected as a Leichhardt councillor in 1999 and I am proud to have served the community as mayor for almost three years. I am proud that a Greens-led council has been able to deliver record investment in long-neglected basic infrastructure. We have new and expanded childcare facilities, an expanded library and more youth and senior services. We have continued the great tradition at Leichhardt Municipal Council of open council activities, we have abolished fees for freedom of information applications, we have introduced new ways to engage residents and we have tackled our carbon and environmental footprint. We have given unprecedented support to our chambers of commerce and local precinct committees, and we have always stood up against poor government decisions to make our community an even better place in which to work and to live. At the same time we have promoted initiatives for and provided support to the socially and economically disadvantaged, the disabled, the mentally ill and refugees. We have also been able to do our bit to promote, through non-violent means, the defence of human rights in Australia and abroad.

The seat of Balmain has beautiful bays, riverside parks and heritage buildings. It is a diverse and vibrant inner-city community with a rich and deep heritage. It has extensive evidence of long-term occupation by the Gadigal and Wangal people and their ancestors, as well as some of the earliest buildings of European settlement. The area has an Aboriginal history, a migrant history, a working-class history and a history of activism and political engagement. It has changed markedly in recent years, particularly in recent decades, and that change continues, but it holds on to its social and community values. There are now areas of significant wealth in the electorate of Balmain but there

are still areas of significant disadvantage. The community that I represent expects good government and the delivery of quality services and infrastructure. It expects also socially and environmentally responsible activities, fair treatment for all citizens and a decent society that looks after those in need.

I am inspired, for example, that my community, led by the Friends of Callan Park, has fought so hard and for so long to protect Callan Park not just as a beautiful part of Sydney's natural and urban heritage but as a home for mental health services for those who are most vulnerable in our community. During the last 20 years of my political activism a great deal has been achieved but the challenges of sustainability and inequality loom ever larger and are becoming increasingly urgent. Inequality in this country has increased dramatically; our natural resources are being consumed at an unsustainable rate; and our country is involved in futile conflicts abroad. The wealth gap in Australia is growing. The wealthiest 20 per cent of Australians own 60 per cent of our collective wealth, while the poorest 20 per cent of our nation own just 1 per cent. At the coalface of social justice work, charities and non-government organisations have documented that the most vulnerable people have been hit hardest by rising costs in key areas of education, health and dental services.

The influence of the economic rationalism agenda is now embedded in Liberal, Labor and even The Nationals policy, yet this idea that the market is superior to regulation and that private is always presumed to be better than public is undermining services and driving the growing wealth gap. This view has informed the privatisation and user-pays agenda of both Labor and the Coalition parties, allowing private profit making to dominate a range of services that once were considered basic responsibilities of government to its citizens. Privatisation has been a particularly pressing issue of concern for the people of New South Wales. Most often privatisation has delivered rising costs, diminishing services and reduced access for the disadvantaged. For The Greens inequality matters not only for the people on lowest incomes but, because of the effects of inequality, on the environment, social cohesion, health, social mobility and the future of a fair go in Australia. In short, we believe that a more equal society benefits everyone. The truth is that economic rationalism is a race to the bottom. A more democratic economy would be a win for the vast majority of Australians. To confront the challenges of inequality that face us we must find the tools for change. *[Extension of time agreed to.]*

I am not convinced by the arguments that the dislocation caused by economic rationalist policies will only be short term and that eventually there will be a longer-term gain. In fact, it is clear that inequality driven by this agenda has a corrosive effect on a collaborative society, encouraging excessive consumption, degrading trust and cooperation, exacerbating physical and mental ill-health, as well as fuelling a range of social problems. Addressing inequality requires more than changing the revenue allocations of a government, as important as that process may be. There has been a lot of discussion in this House about the Federal budget but it has not been pointed out that this country still spends more on the military and defence than on education, and many times more subsidising the fossil fuel industry than it does investing in renewable energy.

Inequality is not just about the divide between those who work and those who do not work but also how it affects people who work hard but are denied economic security. Casualisation in TAFE is a case in point. Casuals have become the norm rather than the exception in this critical area of

training for the next generation. Investment in public transport, health and education are critical in addressing inequality but so are efforts to promote employment, innovation, small business, cooperatives and community-based solutions—solutions that come from the grassroots of each of our communities. No government in this country, State or Federal, has presented a solution to wasteful production and excessive consumption, which lie at the heart of our environmental challenge.

In New South Wales we even struggle to implement container deposit legislation, when such schemes have been enforced in Europe for more than 20 years. And instead of investing in mass clean energy generation we often hear only of the need for individuals to reduce their footprint while governments agree to new coal-fired power stations and slap 110,000 households in the face, breaking its contract with the people who invested in solar. Australia is uniquely placed in confronting the great environmental issues of our time. Per head of population we use more fossil fuels, emit more greenhouse gases, have cleared more forests and have seen the extinction of more species than almost any other nation on the planet.

Despite this our country remains a place of great beauty and incredible potential, from its ancient hostile interior to its coastal rainforests and wilderness, marked still by a truly unique array of plants and animals. Our continent is home to enormous reserves of fossil fuels which we avidly overexploit, but we also have the natural assets that can deliver enormous amounts of clean, renewable energy that do not require us to destroy our farmlands and wilderness areas, pollute our atmosphere or destroy the habitat of our unique flora and fauna. I have no doubt that in this decade we must and we will confront the environmental issues that are threatening our planet. I hope that this Parliament will play its role in leading the country towards a more sustainable future.

In our search for this more equitable, just and environmentally sustainable future it is not just parliamentarians that will lead us—it is the grassroots work of thoughtful and passionate people in our community that will lead the way. I conclude by acknowledging some of these people and thanking the many people in my life who have supported and encouraged me over the years. It is impossible to name everyone who has played an important role in me being here tonight or to go into detail about the support they have given me, but I will note a few special people. To Emily Christian, who joins us in the gallery tonight—thank you for believing in me and for your unrelenting support during the campaign. Your empathy and understanding means so much to me.

I say thank you to Hall Greenland for his solidarity during my first term on council; my close friends Ko Maung Maung Than, a Burmese refugee now living in Australia, and Ko Than Doke, who lives on the Thai-Burma border—both of whom are an inspiration in their struggle for freedom and democracy for the people of Burma; my fellow Greens councillors on Leichhardt Municipal Council since 2004—Michele McKenzie, Rochelle Porteous, Kate Hamilton, Alan Cinis, Cassie Plate and Daniel Kogoy; Emma Nicholson for her fine intellect, constant encouragement and positivity; Saskia Brown for her constant help over many campaigns; the tenacious Chris and Kathy Harris, and all the members of The Greens campaign team for Balmain, many of whom I am proud to say have taken the time to be here this evening; The Greens State campaign team and its media office; my fellow Greens members of Parliament; the current and former convenors of the Port Jackson Greens, Chris Holley and Craig Channells; and, importantly, all the members of my local Greens group.

In particular, to all the volunteers who worked so hard in the seat of Balmain I say thank you. It is because of you that I am here this evening and I commit myself to deliver the representation that you have worked so hard for and that all of you deserve. Finally, to the voters of Balmain I express my heartfelt gratitude for this honour. I can assure you that I will never take your trust and support for granted, that I will always try my best to represent your values and priorities and that I will work to ensure that, regardless of your political allegiances, you will be proud of the efforts I make for a more just, prosperous and sustainable society for the people of New South Wales.