



# Inaugural Speeches

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Page: 422

**The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George):** Order! I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of family, friends and supporters of the member for Ballina. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of New South Wales.

**Ms TAMARA SMITH (Ballina)** [5.27 p.m.]: (Inaugural Speech): I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Gadigal people of the Eora country, elders past and present and the Bundjalung people of my homeland, and their elders past and present. I congratulate Madam Speaker on being selected as Speaker for a second term and for continuing as the first woman in that role. In her remarks on the first sitting day Madam Speaker acknowledged a number of firsts by my female colleagues in this place, and I am proud to be part of that list as the first woman to represent the seat of Ballina. On that note, allow me to make special mention of my colleague and Greens "sister" the member for Newtown, Jenny Leong, and to note that together we are the first Greens women in this House.

The more closely the demographic of Parliament reflects our society, the better this place is likely to be in representing the people of New South Wales. I am honoured to be joining a stronger Greens team in the New South Wales Parliament. I acknowledge the member for Balmain, Jamie Parker, and congratulate him on his re-election. He has paved the way for many more Greens to enter the Legislative Assembly in the future. I am also looking forward to working with my new colleagues in the upper House—Jan Barham, Jeremy Buckingham, Mehreen Faruqi, John Kaye and David Shoebridge—in Parliament and in my electorate. In The Greens party room we have such wonderful diversity: people of passion and commitment who work hard every day for the people of our State and for the protection of our amazing natural environment.

I also acknowledge the dedication of the former member for Ballina, Don Page, who served our community as member for 27 years. He is a true gentleman who conducted himself with honour and steadfast determination to improve the lives of those in our region. I also give a shout-out to my fellow Byron Bay and Ballina Greens and supporters who are watching this inaugural speech at the Ocean Shores Tavern. My entry into this House comes as a surprise to many. It is the first time The Greens have won a regional lower House seat at a general election and it is the first time The Greens have taken a seat from The Nationals—with all due respect. This result is a genuine testament to the health of our democracy.

This place is truly a House for every woman and every man. It shows us that communities can unite, agitate and vote for change. It is a lesson to me—and I hope to all of us—that our job is to be responsive to our constituents, their values and priorities, and to put the collective interest ahead of vested interests. If I do not live up to that ideal, I do not deserve to be back here in four years' time. I make this commitment knowing that for tens of millions of people across the globe this right, this freedom and this wonderful democracy do not exist. And so it is an even heavier burden for those of us who are privileged to hold office—as the very root and branch of our democratic history—that we remain at all times mindful of the many who have no voice and no opportunity to be heard.

It is with an enormous sense of civic duty and humility that I stand in this place today before my peers and community, my family and friends, and pledge my whole heart to the role of being a member of this House. I am getting emotional. People told me that I would get emotional delivering this speech but I did not believe them. I pledge to advocate not only for the betterment of the people and interests of my electorate and a fairer, more just society at large but also for those things much more fundamental to our survival: clean air and clean water; the biodiversity of our glorious forests, rivers and oceans; and the rich land we need to grow healthy food. These intergenerational treasures do not belong to us; they belong to the future, and must be put beyond the reach of our mistakes and tribulations as the common wealth of all and the heritage of future generations. Our laws must do this, and it is the people in this place who make those laws. This objective spans the political divide.

This is a watershed moment for The Greens and for the North Coast. It is a moment that suggests that people from all walks of life, in greater and greater numbers, care deeply about the environment. They understand that our resources sustain our way of life and that the essentials of life must not be sold off to the highest bidder. They remind us that there are natural laws that trump even the ones made in this place. As environmentalist and civil rights activist Paul Hawken puts it:

This planet came with a set of instructions, but we seem to have misplaced them. Important rules like don't poison the water, soil, or air ... and don't touch the thermostat have been broken.

We have an economy that tells us that it is cheaper to destroy the earth in real time than it is to renew, restore and sustain it. The electorate of Ballina extends to the Gondwana rainforest of Nightcap National Park in the north and the forest and cascading streams of Federal in the west. It stretches to the most easterly point of Australia, in Arakwal country at Cape Byron, and to the heritage town of Wardell in the south. It is quite honestly one of the most beautiful regions of the world, and it is no wonder that its residents love it with a passion.

We are a community of teachers, builders and nurses; permaculture, aquaculture and organic food growers; cane and dairy farmers; artists; children and musicians. We saw in this election, in the Ballina and Lismore electorates, farmers and environmentalists, people from the towns and the bush, children and grandparents united against the industrialisation of our hinterland and standing up against the threat to our food and water security from unconventional gas mining. And where they saw that this place had failed them and that our laws were failing the environment, they peacefully and defiantly stood up and said, "No, you will not destroy what we rely on to survive and that which belongs to all." There is a moral lesson in this, but there is also a political one. While unconventional gas may have been the catalyst, I believe the mood for change runs far deeper.

At the last election people from all walks of life started to see themselves and their hopes reflected in the social and economic policies of The Greens. They see in The Greens a deep commitment to genuine grassroots democracy, where local people have a greater say in their economic future. They see in The Greens a commitment to ecologically sustainable development and they hear The Greens' message about the opportunities that renewable energy offers, creating a future free from the harm of fossil fuels. It makes no sense to them in the dying days of the fossil fuel industry—as new, cleaner technologies proliferate and the effects of climate change are felt more acutely with each passing year—that a society, backed by a responsible government, would seek to unleash a new, dirty, destructive industry on our lands. This industry would see our exquisite region dotted with gas fields, drill casings that leak methane into the atmosphere and that risk our clean, precious water when we have the radiant sun shining down on our region and we are on the cusp of a renewable energy revolution.

We are a lucky country and a lucky State but we are stealing the future, selling it in the present and calling it gross domestic product. People see this, and they are looking for another way—a greener way. As Richard Di Natale said last week, "The future for us as a party is very bright; the issues of the twenty-first century are Green issues." I am proud of the role that The Greens have played in putting these issues on the political agenda across Australia. I was at the Sydney launch of The Greens in 1991 and I am a voter, supporter and member of the Greens because I guess I was born green. My primary drive, ever since I was old enough to run away from home and join a political march, has been to defend our environment and species that have no standing and to be an advocate for those in our Australian and global societies who do not have a voice and who are disempowered.

I acknowledge that The Greens' success in Ballina comes on the back of more than two decades of work by The Greens leaders and generations of grassroots activists, environmentalists and social justice advocates throughout the country and on the North Coast—people who have dedicated their lives to defending universal health care and quality public education; to protecting forests, waterways, threatened species, glorious communities and our rural and regional way of life. In the past decade we have seen the voice of The Greens gaining traction federally. I take this opportunity to commend retiring party leader Senator Christine Milne for her outstanding contribution to that voice, and in particular for her incredible work championing action on climate change.

The North Coast has been a seed bed—excuse the pun—for the growth of historic figures in The Greens. Byron Bay's Richard Staples was the first Greens councillor in our region and Broken Head's Ian Cohen was the first member of The Greens elected to the New South Wales Parliament. Ian's passion for the protection of our environment is unrivalled, and I take this moment to thank him for the support he has given me and for seeing the potential in me to do this work. Jan Barham, a current member of the upper House, was the first popularly elected Greens mayor in Australia—and possibly the world. It was her phenomenal work as Byron's mayor that staved off the overdevelopment of our region. That work is continued today by our current Greens mayor, Simon Richardson. The people in my community have stood up against mega-development in pursuit of unique village life, embracing our agricultural history, and riding the crest of the organic and slow food movements that have seen cottage and boutique industries from our region make it onto the world stage.

More than a million people a year flock to our region to surf and dive, fish, walk and swim our beautiful beaches. They come to escape the hurly-burly of fast-paced lives, soak up the beauty of the hills and rivers, and immerse themselves in the art, music and culture of the region. We are the jewel in the crown and we deserve to be resourced accordingly. I think my love of nature comes from my father, Lanny Smith, the son of a baker and Missouri farmers, who is in the gallery this evening, and my mother, Frances Norris, whose greatest solace in the world is the ocean.

My childhood was spent swimming and building cubbies in the bush behind our house in Hazelbrook in the Blue Mountains, and swimming in the Brunswick River and off Bribie Island on our annual holidays to visit my mother's family on the north coast and in Brisbane. My father taught me to bodysurf at Harbord Beach when we moved to Manly. As a young teen I learnt to ride a board and spent my early mornings and afternoons until dusk surfing North Steyne. My friends and I formed a board riders club aptly named

"Wind and Sewage" as a protest against the outpouring of sewage from North Head into our beautiful beaches. Of course, the first rule passed by the club was "no girl surfers allowed".

As soon as I was old enough to venture out at 15, I headed to Byron Bay to surf and play music. It was there that I first got involved in the grassroots environmental movements to save our north-east forests and Fraser Island, to stop uranium mining at Roxby Downs and to stave off mega-development in the Northern Rivers—the home of my maternal great-great-grandparents, great-grandparents and grandmother, Josephine Frances Hegerty. I still surf, but today I am an avid ocean swimmer. I can be found on as many mornings as possible at 8.00 a.m. on the deck of the Byron Bay Surf Club, setting out with as few as two or as many as 100 fellow swimmers to walk around the bay to The Pass and swim back. It is always a thrill, and my love for our marine park and our beaches is fierce.

My strong sense of social responsibility comes from being vulnerable in my own life and from my professional life in education and law. I know what it is like to have to grow up quickly and leave school to care for a sick parent, and to do my Higher School Certificate at TAFE because I had outgrown the cultural context of my peers. I know what it is like to raise a family on one income, to be unemployed and to uproot my family and move 2,000 kilometres away from home to the outback because that's where the work is. I have been that working mum who is sitting up at night finishing her studies so that her child can have a better life. I was a teacher for 20 years in public schools in remote and regional New South Wales and the western suburbs of Brisbane, and I cut my teeth as a solicitor in Redfern and the Northern Territory.

Australians are strong, resilient and hardworking and ought not be divided by the Prime Minister into categories of "lifters and leaners" because that binary simply does not ring true for me. A caring country and State understands that any one of us may need to lean in to take shelter when the vicissitudes of life hit hard, and that meaningful work and quality education are the things that lift us to be our best and most productive selves.

I thank my campaign manager, Graeme Williams, and Rhianna Blackthorn and Justin Field for their genius and for their tireless work during our election campaign. I owe my election to them and the hundreds of volunteers who selflessly gave up their time to campaign for a different sort of politics for the North Coast. I thank my closest friends Professor Baden Offord, Christopher MacFarlane and John Ryan, who are in the gallery this evening and who have come all the way from Western Australia, for their friendship and love over the decades and for continuing to challenge me to think from the perspective of a thousand-year-old mountain.

I thank my sisters, Natasha and Nicole—both extraordinary women—for their encouragement and support. I thank my brother and acclaimed author, Dominic Smith, who is in the gallery this evening and who travelled here from Austin, Texas. He is that person whom I seek out for integrity and a compassionate position on any issue. I also thank my beloved daughter, Tara, who is also in the gallery this evening—an unparalleled champion of the rights of creatures great and small. Finally, I see my duty in this Chamber as being an advocate and cultivator of democracy in close collaboration with the community. I look forward to working with each of you as I work my hardest to do just that.