

INAUGURAL SPEECH

The PRESIDENT: I welcome to the President's gallery The Greens former Senator Bob Brown. I ask the members of the public not to applaud. I welcome to the President's gallery Mr Michael Rickard, partner of Miss Dawn Walker, and their three children, who will all be in the House for the member's first speech. I remind all honourable members that Miss Dawn Walker is about to make her first speech in this place. I ask members to extend to her the usual courtesies.

Ms DAWN WALKER (18:02): I would like to first acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation on whose land we meet, and pay my respects to elders past and present. I also acknowledge that I have travelled to this place from Bundjalung land and acknowledge elders past and present from this great nation, many of whom have done me a great honour by sending messages of encouragement as I make my inaugural speech today in this place. My local Aboriginal community has supported me so patiently and with great care by sharing with me their stories and wisdom, and giving me a safe space to start to understand the rich, living Aboriginal culture that is going on around us every day, despite the best efforts to dispose of, suppress and destroy these ancient and resilient first peoples. The Williams family, the Slabbs, Rob Appo, Aunty Bonny, Aunty Kath and Aunty Jackie, you stuck with me and you taught me the importance of the long game, and I sincerely thank you.

I would love to see more Aboriginal representation in this Parliament. Linda Burney has been the only Aboriginal member of the New South Wales Parliament and with her departure for Federal politics we again have no Aboriginal representatives. New Zealand has had dedicated Maori seats since 1867. They have a treaty, yet in this country we are still dealing with the consequences of terra nullius. We should consider establishing dedicated seats in this Chamber for Aboriginal people elected by Aboriginal people. In 1998 the Standing Committee on Social Issues held an inquiry into enhancing Aboriginal political representation, including introducing dedicated seats. Unfortunately, not much has progressed since then. I would like us to resume the discussion about facilitating Aboriginal representation in our political system to ensure that Aboriginal people and their communities have a direct voice in our democracy. I intend to consult and work with Aboriginal people about this and will work in this place to put this conversation back on the agenda, perhaps working towards a referendum at the next State election.

As I stand here with you all in the oldest Parliament in the country, I thank you for giving me this great honour to represent the people of New South Wales, and this opportunity to introduce myself and reflect on why I am here, what drives me and what I hope to achieve. I take this opportunity to thank the parliamentary staff and the other members of Parliament who have welcomed me so warmly, all of you actually, and assisted me with great understanding and good humour as I acclimatise to life as a member of the Legislative Council [MLC]. To be honest, I cannot think of a greater privilege than to be sworn in as the fifty-fourth woman in this House and to give my inaugural speech on International Women's Day. I thank the Whip and the Leader of the Government for arranging for me to speak on this significant day.

With the Parliament currently exhibiting the inspirational stories of women in New South Wales politics, I take the opportunity to acknowledge the enormous achievements of these women, both in political and public life, as well as their courage and tenacity to gain women the vote and represent the community in Parliament. Those women also represent the many women who have supported, mentored and organised to ensure greater representation of women in our decision-making process. And in fact across New South Wales we are seeing more and more women speaking up on behalf of our communities and environment. I see women acting on their concerns about the effects of climate change, the growing inequality in society and the frustrations of our young people. It is women who are saying enough is enough. The Knitting Nanas are a wonderful example of straight-talking women who will not let big corporations come into our communities to industrialise our land and water. It is just not happening.

I also have marched with women in my community to retain our much-needed local domestic violence services. I marched with these women last year when funding for this vital service was cut.

Tomorrow they will present Parliament with 10,000 signatures asking for the reinstatement of a standalone domestic violence service. I look forward to working in a Parliament that respects and seeks out the views of women in our communities and considers the effect on women and girls of decisions made in this place. One such inspirational woman is Jan Barham, whose casual vacancy I have the honour of filling. Jan's legacy and close connection with the local Arakwal people has been an inspiration to me, as is her untiring work for the North Coast community. As an emerging community spokesperson I followed Jan's career with interest as her forthright attitude and close ties to her community helped me understand the power of the local and the importance of providing a voice for the community.

I was born and raised in Melbourne by a Queensland mother and a Victorian father. So it seems fitting that I have landed halfway, in this great State of New South Wales, to raise my family and to now contribute to public life. My mum came from a large, single-parent family that did it tough in the depression years. I remember her telling me about being sent to the fruit shop to buy the "specks", the cheaper, marked fruit, and selling violets to returned servicemen during the war years. As a young woman mum moved to Melbourne to work in the telegraph exchange and met my dad, who was a newly qualified electrician. It was mum who gave me a strong love of family and the importance of facing the music for my words and actions.

It was dad who instilled in me a deep, deep love for country. He spent his early years travelling around Australia as a jackaroo, picking up shearing and fencing jobs on outback stations across the country, and cutting cane in Murwillumbah and north Queensland. His stories of dusty roads, bare paddocks, wild rivers and ancient forests profoundly shaped me. It was dad who taught me how to work with the environment, not fight against it, how to tell the time without a watch, how to follow a river out of a forest and how to light a fire without a match. Dad also encouraged me to act on my convictions. I remember being 11 years old and devastated when I learned that a much-loved piece of local urban bushland was going to be clear-felled for a freeway. Dad taught me that if something concerns you or touches you there is no point sobbing in your bedroom; you need to do something about it—and he showed me how to write to my local member and raise my concerns. I lost the bushland, but I learnt that important lesson of taking positive action on things you care about.

I started my working life as a young graduate recruit in the Federal Department of Employment, Education and Training. This was a time when it was the head of the typing pool who could make or break your career, not your boss; morning tea was signalled by the punctual arrival of the tea lady to your floor; and cigarette ashtrays were government issue. But, more importantly, it was an era when the public service took great pride in providing frank and fearless advice to ministers of all political persuasions. I was first based in the Commonwealth Employment Service [CES] in a heavy manufacturing area and saw firsthand the human tragedy of Christmas layoffs and 10 per cent unemployment—poverty, inequality and human desperation as jobs became scarce. This had a huge effect on me. It was during my time at the CES that I witnessed the increased privatisation of government services with the eventual wholesale transfer of job placement and training to the private sector.

I became concerned about the shift of focus from supporting jobseekers of all abilities to a profit-driven service, so I left to become a policy adviser in the State office of the department and later the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development. During this time I was responsible for developing and funding TAFE programs to encourage women into non-traditional trades, to make TAFE more accessible to women and to increase the flexibility of our national training system with the introduction of competency-based training and more equitable entry level through traineeships. It was about equity and access. This gave me a passion for our TAFE system, its historical roots in providing practical vocational skills to meet skills shortages and a second chance for people at gaining an education, and retraining opportunities for our workforce.

I am pleased to see this Government is continuing this work by setting targets for women in non-traditional construction roles through its Infrastructure Skills Legacy Program. We are seeing the benefits of this equity approach locally, with construction works at Lismore Base Hospital creating greater opportunities for women to enter traditionally male dominated trades. I hope the Government will see fit to support the TAFE system as an important contributor to these goals. We need a vibrant TAFE system to train our young people in the skills required for our renewable energy future with jobs

in development, implementation and maintenance of wind and solar industries across New South Wales.

My other passion is the environment, which is shared by my father who loved nothing better after a long walk together in the bush than to kneel with me and drink from a freshwater river with cupped hands. He would look up at me and say, "Isn't that the sweetest thing you've ever tasted?" This simple act together has been with me in the determination to protect our land and water—to ensure that all of us can kneel by a free flowing river with our children and taste that clean water without having to worry about a coal seam gas [CSG] well or a coalmine upstream; to speak up for the community's right to clean air, clean water, a safe climate and a fair society.

Last weekend I took some time out to travel to Protesters Falls in Nightcap National Park to reflect on this wild and biodiverse place before I made the journey here to give this, my first speech in Parliament. These ancient and dark forests on Bundjalung country were the site of the pivotal Terania Creek protests in the late 1970s where local people put their bodies on the line to protect these forests from logging, including the first New South Wales Greens member of Parliament, Ian Cohen. They understood the importance of protecting our forests and over the next few years our survival of our forests will again be under the spotlight as the regional forest agreements [RFAs] that have been the framework for public forest management in New South Wales for 20 years expire, beginning in 2019.

After decades of non-violent direct action to protect many of our irreplaceable forests from logging, the RFAs were supposed to end the conflict and ensure ecologically sustainable forest management. What has become clear is that the agreements have failed to deliver on their promise. As the National Parks Association concluded last year, the RFAs have "enabled the whole-scale destruction of public forests with impunity" and left our forests in a worse state than when the agreements were reached. Native forest logging has been left with inadequate regulation because under the RFAs it is not subject to scrutiny by Commonwealth law and because the New South Wales Government removed the capacity for third party legal action to enforce breaches of logging approvals. As a result of these failures, the carbon stores in our mature native forests are decreasing, and many plant and animal species are in rapid decline.

I will be joining the experts by calling on the Government to end logging in our public native forests once and for all following the expiry of the RFAs from 2019. When threatened species legislation was enacted in New South Wales in 1995 there were approximately 700 plant and animal species listed. Two decades later, we are now just one species away from 1,000 species listed as threatened. This is a travesty, and I pledge to you that I will continue to be a strong voice, both inside and outside the Parliament, for our forests, ecosystems and other wild places.

I never planned to enter Parliament. I live in a small coastal village on the far North Coast. I moved there with my family to run our small business in the surfing industry and raise our children under the watchful gaze of Mount Wollumbin and by the Pacific Ocean. The plan was for a quiet life. But unbeknown to me this little village was built on an extraordinary story of community resilience and sense of place. I had moved into Mr Healy's little old fibro post office that had been at the centre of this village's survival from a development proposal of massive proportions. In the late 1980s the developers, Ocean Blue, had secured a Crown land lease and had plans to build an international hotel on top of a critically endangered littoral rainforest, a luxury marina on a protected wetland area and 400 townhouses to replace the existing historical village.

A tent embassy was set up, the community rallied and after two years of defiance the community won. The Crown land lease was cancelled and the land awarded to the Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983, being one of the first successful claims under this Act. It was very powerful for me to come into a community that not only had successfully headed off a major development but also had been able to protect the century-old tuckeroos, the lilly pillies, the native orchids, the gingers and the nationally endangered plants such as the *cryptocarya foetida* that flourished in the surrounding littoral rainforest. It was a rare victory and it gave the community the courage to stand strong. As the much-respected community organiser Olga Vidla said at the time:

The message we were receiving all through the campaign from our opponents was that the little people couldn't stop the big people. How wrong they were.

The spirit to protect this special place has continued and an exhibition of the Fingal Women Warriors was celebrated by the Tweed Museum on International Women's Day last year. Four fellow warriors are here today—Helen Twohill, Kay Bolton, Heidi Ledwell and Karen Morrison. As all environmentalists and community activists know, it is never done and dusted. I could see new challenges on the horizon, and I worried that although this battle had been won, we might still lose through death by a thousand cuts. I started working with the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, the Fingal Head Community Association and the Fingal Head Coastcare, writing submissions, chairing meetings, and preparing funding submissions—just as my dad had taught me to do with my first letter to my local member. But it seemed we were going around in circles while successive governments continued on their merry way with their anti-environment agendas.

It was at a meeting with Bob Brown that I finally joined the dots between community advocacy and politics. I thank Bob for being here tonight. I went to hear Bob speak at the packed Bangalow A and I Hall. I sat up the back with a notepad, ready to jot down Bob's words of wisdom, but Bob did an extraordinary thing. He dimmed the lights and started to show us snapshots of his life. It had the intimacy of a family slide night. As he showed us photos, he spoke of his mountain, his river, his father, his home. It was profoundly moving and we were all transported to our mountain, our river, our home, our family. It helped me understand the importance of standing up for what matters and the importance of participating in the political process, so I joined The Greens.

This opened up the world of Greens members of Parliament and my community started to see real results as they advocated on its behalf in the New South Wales Parliament. I worked with our MPs to oppose the destructive 10/50 laws which allowed a developer to clear-fell a critically endangered rainforest in my region. On behalf of the community we also helped expose polyfluorinated compound contamination on the Gold Coast airport site, which is currently the subject of a major court action. I camped beside Jeremy Buckingham at Bentley to stop coal seam gas invading our farmlands, I stood with Jan Barham to protest cuts to single parents' payments, and I supported our Indigenous community.

Knowing our MPs achieved so much, I could see the value to my community of having a strong Greens voice on Federal and State issues. As the lead candidate for Richmond in the previous two Federal elections, I saw the Greens vote increase and we forced the Labor incumbent to break party ranks and adopt the call of The Greens to end fossil fuel subsidies. I have been active in our grassroots campaigning that has seen The Greens take the seat of Ballina, nearly win the seat of Lismore, and return Greens mayors in Byron and Tweed. The Greens give me a deep connection with grassroots campaigning. Its members are the lifeblood of our party and it is their passion and vision that gives me the drive to stand up for our community and our climate.

There has never been a more pressing need for the strong voices of The Greens in our Parliament. I want to see The Greens grow and be successful because in 10 years' time I would like to live in a New South Wales that has embraced a clean energy economy, having implemented a just and robust plan to assist our communities through that transition; to have innovative small businesses thriving in providing technology and services to the renewable energy sector; and I want to see our young people trained in the skills required to build, run and service wind and solar farms across the State.

I would like to live in a New South Wales that values its precious biodiversity and starts reversing the decline of our threatened species. I would like to be in a Parliament that works together to address the climate emergency before us. But it is my community on the Tweed that will keep my feet on the ground. A few days after the announcement of my becoming a member of the Legislative Council I booked in to my hairdresser—a born and bred local. We usually chat about politics and he fills me in on the goings-on around town. That day I could see he wanted to ask me something in particular. He congratulated me on my new position and politely inquired what I would be doing. I explained that I was committed to initiating immediate action on our climate emergency, addressing social inequality and the rise of right-wing populism. He kept cutting and then said:

It's just that there's a bush turkey up in the rafters of the bakery next-door and we thought you'd know who to call.

It was such a potent reminder that life goes on for most people. It is a great privilege to be able to come to Sydney to participate in the decision-making process on their behalf, to ensure that legislation and democratic processes are fair and based on evidence and that the precautionary principle and intergenerational equity inform our governance. People across New South Wales are relying on us to uphold democracy on their behalf. I am greatly honoured to have this opportunity in this place at this time. I thank you all for your support, particularly my husband, Mike, and our children who are with me here today. I cannot thank you enough for always being there for me.