



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**FIRST SPEECH**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 9 September 2015**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

<b>Date</b> Wednesday, 9 September 2015	<b>Source</b> Senate
<b>Page</b> 6444	<b>Proof</b> No
<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> McKim, Sen Nicholas	<b>Question No.</b>

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**Senator McKIM** (Tasmania) (17:00): Thank you very much, Mr President. I start by acknowledging the first people of this land, the Ngunawal and Ngambri people. I acknowledge and pay my deepest respects to their elders past, present and future. I also acknowledge that adequate reparations have not yet been made for the wrongs that Australia's original inhabitants have suffered since European invasion. I look forward to the day when there is a treaty between Australia's first people and those who displaced them from their land.

It has been a bit of a winding old journey for me to end up here. I was born in England and moved from London to Tasmania with my family when I was five years old. I would like to sincerely thank my parents, who are here today, for that, the best decision they could have made for their family. I have worked in a wide range of jobs, including as a Huon Valley apple picker, a shepherd in Scotland and a biodynamic market gardener in Switzerland. I have guided clients through the breathtakingly wild and beautiful Tasmanian wilderness and I have worked in advertising and public relations. I know what it is like to sweat for a living and, more recently, to talk for a living.

I have spent time between jobs unemployed, so I know what it is like to have to choose between paying the rent and putting food on the table. I will never forget the tough times, no matter how lucky I get. I have been lucky to have the privilege of being a member of the Tasmanian parliament for 13 years, leading the Tasmanian Greens for six of those years, serving as a minister of the Crown in the Tasmanian government and now rising to make this my inaugural speech in the Australian Senate.

I do this at a time when politics, the chosen profession of everyone elected to this place, is in a fair bit of strife. It is in strife because the Australian people are completely over being treated with a lack of respect and being taken for granted by so many of their political representatives. They are sick of the sniping and negativity that characterises so much of what passes for political debate in this country and, at times, in this parliament. They cannot believe that we have a Prime Minister and a Leader of the Opposition who get up every morning and ask themselves, 'How can I win the next election?' rather than, 'How can I better serve the people that I am here to represent?' The canary in the mine shaft of our body politic is falling silent. The early warning signs are clear and they are there for all to see: the antipolitician vote, the ever-increasing churn in support for parties and candidates, an increased volatility in the electorate and a desperate hunger for real political leadership. There is a tangible yearning for hope in our community, for something better than what the old parties are offering.

I commit, in my time in the Senate, to exploring new ICT platforms that will allow me to have a far more genuine engagement with the people that I am here to serve. I am also proud to be part of a party, the Australian Greens, that places a priority on respectful engagement, building genuine relationships, being up-front about the challenges we face and working collaboratively to deliver solutions. It is a party that knows that politics is really just a tool that we use to talk about what really matters to us—our families, our friends, our communities, our wellbeing, our health, our education and the ecosystem that ultimately sustains it all. It is a party that understands that financial and economic systems prioritise greed over compassion and put profit before people and the planet. We will not sit silently by while policies driven by greed gobble up the future of our children and grandchildren. It is a party led by someone, in Richard Di Natale, who is offering genuine political leadership at a time when Australia so desperately needs it—a leader for our times, if I ever saw one.

And what times they are. Global warming is shifting the equilibrium of the earth's ecosystem and impacting on every single person on the planet, every single thing that we do and every form of life on earth. Today the world that Australia is part of faces unprecedented challenges but also unparalleled opportunities. Our scientific knowledge is increasing exponentially and technological developments, particularly in renewable energy and information and communication technology, are providing us with the tools to respond to the task before humanity and deliver sustained prosperity in a way that is very different to how we have tried and so far failed to do.

It has been observed recently that Uber, the world's largest taxi company, owns no vehicles, and Airbnb, the world's largest accommodation provider, owns no real estate. Something very disruptive is happening. It is called the shared economy or the collaborative economy, and it is coming to a mobile device near us all. It is turning a generation of interconnected people into entrepreneurs. It is a peer-to-peer economic ecosystem which relies on data and connectivity, and it is growing exponentially. A PricewaterhouseCoopers report has found that just the four major sectors of the collaborative economy have an annual global revenue of \$21 billion, a figure that it predicts will explode to \$478 billion within a decade. It is already transforming sectors like accommodation and transport, and services like equipment rental, energy supply, labour hire, moneylending and even child care will be next. It brings down prices, it cuts out middle people, it encourages innovation and, crucially, it is environmentally friendly because it avoids greenhouse emissions through the more efficient use of existing resources. It is the free market working like it should for the benefit of people and the benefit of the environment.

The opportunities that come will shift people away from welfare and into economic independence, and the free-flow of information and data will protect consumers and reduce regulatory burden on governments, freeing up more money for the delivery of essential public services. The drivers of the global economy in the years ahead will not be cumbersome, cost-heavy corporate dinosaurs; they will be the small businesses, the innovators and the entrepreneurs of the future, and the Greens will be right there with them advocating for more support, less protectionism and the lightest possible regulatory touch.

Throughout human history our biggest challenges have arisen when ecologies collapse and when the equity gap—the gap between the haves and the have-nots—is at its widest. This is the situation currently facing us on a global scale and it is manifesting most obviously in the human tragedy unfolding before our horrified, disbelieving eyes in Europe, where millions of refugees have been displaced and thousands have died as they and their families attempt to reach peace, sanctuary, the chance for a better life or just simply a chance at life. Australia must do more. We cannot turn our back on the world, for obvious moral reasons but also because it is not in our national interest to do so. The world's problems are our problems.

I can let you know that my home state of Tasmania, a big-hearted community with a proud history of welcoming new arrivals, stands ready to help. Let me tell you a story about Tasmania and refugees. When the Australian government built a high-security detention centre at Pontville and filled it with children and young adults just a few short years ago, Tasmanians broke into it. Not all of us were convinced about asylum seekers, but we could not help ourselves, because down in Tasmania we welcome strangers. So, in the locals went, carrying gifts of beanies and food. We opened our schools to those people and we opened our hearts.

But we have to understand some of the underlying causes of conflicts in the 21st century. The National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America has recently published a study entitled 'Climate change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the recent Syrian drought'. It concluded that human influences on the earth's climate are implicated in the current Syrian conflict. As the report's co-author, Richard Seager, of Columbia University in New York said, 'Added to all the other stressors, climate change helped kick things over the threshold into open conflict.' The abject misery on our screens is real and it is deeply confronting, but I am so very, very sorry to say we ain't seen nothin' yet.

The opportunity is there now in this century of rapid change for Australia to make smart, informed decisions, to get ahead of the game, to be market leaders, to show the world how we can transition an economy out of an overreliance on resource extraction and into the industries of the future. That is why we need to keep the coal in the ground; that is why we need to reintroduce a price on carbon, not only for Australia's sake but for the sake of every person and every species that we share this amazing, miraculous planet with; and that is why we must reject the false choice between jobs and environmental protection—a choice that is put so often in this place. We can and must create a future that secures both. From electric vehicles to renewable energy, from carbon sequestration to environmental remediation, from localised production of everything from food to electricity, we can live more sustainably; we can create more meaningful work for our people.

There are many national issues that currently demand action—many. Marriage equality is an issue whose time has come. It is a reform based on the values of compassion, love, respect and celebrating the diversity that is one of Australia's absolute strengths. It will make families stronger, provide a sense of stability for children and make marriage more relevant to more Australians. How can we as leaders in this place ask the Australian people not to discriminate on the basis of sexuality in our schools, in our businesses and in our communities when we still sit on discriminatory legislation? My party, the Australian Greens, has led this debate in Australia since we

tabled the nation's first marriage equality legislation in the Tasmanian parliament in 2005. Every Greens MP has voted for marriage equality every single time, and we will continue to work to support people in our community to champion this reform until every Australian, regardless of their sexuality, will know that they are equal before the law in all respects.

There is an epidemic of men's violence against women in this country. This year alone in Australia 60 women have been killed by a man that they know. As a White Ribbon ambassador, I implore more men to take leadership on this issue, to stand up against this violence, this sexism, and to stand up for true gender equality in our country. Violence against women is a problem caused by men and it will not be solved until we men man up and take responsibility for that.

On the topic of responsibility, I cannot let this chance go by without talking about corporate responsibility, or the lack thereof, in Australia and around the world today. With a few brave exceptions, corporations continue to behave like psychopaths. Fair dinkum! If people behaved with such a reckless disregard for the public good, we would lock them up in jail for the harm that they do. We politicians need to accept responsibility for this because, over time, we have tripped over ourselves to hand over power from the chambers of our parliaments to the corporate boardrooms, which are so unaccountable to the people whose lives they are destroying. It is time for us to reclaim that power. We need to completely change the regulatory frameworks that govern the way corporations operate and we should require them to act for the public good.

So, to Tasmania, the best place in the world to live and a place that I love so much. A beautiful heart-shaped island hanging at the bottom of the world. A place with competitive advantages that the rest of the country can only dream of: clean air—the cleanest in the world; abundant fresh water; world-class soils; renewable energy; spectacular wilderness; carbon-rich forests; and our kind, innovative and deeply resilient people. We lead the world in Antarctic and marine science. We have more scientists per capita than any other state in Australia, we have world-class medical and scientific research facilities, and we have a world-class university ranked in the top two per cent of universities around the world. It is a place with the clean, green, clever and creative brand that gives us the opportunity to add a premium to what we produce for the global markets.

I listen to the rest of the country laugh at Tasmania and I say, 'Laugh while you can, because we are coming for you and we are coming hard.' I chuckle quietly to myself because I know our time is coming. I know it. We have what the world wants and what the world is willing to pay for. Yes, we are the smallest state and we should be proud of that because it is one of our biggest assets. Small places know that relationships matter, and being closely connected with each other means we can be nimble and flexible and fast on our feet, better able to change in response to a rapidly changing world, and able to change fast to adapt, to evolve and to innovate. But to do this there are some steps that we need to take.

Our island status is one of our great competitive advantages but also presents some of our bigger challenges. The cost of getting people and goods across Bass Strait has held Tasmania back for far too long, but the solution is simple: make Bass Strait part of the national highway and ensure that national highway funding right across the country is distributed on the basis of genuine need rather than the political imperatives which too often skew funding priorities. We need to improve the carriage of data between Tasmania and the world. There is a proposal before the Tasmanian government for another fibre-optic connection which would improve competition, bring down data transmission prices and increase redundancy. It is vital for Tasmania's future that this project goes ahead.

We should also start work on a business case for draining Lake Pedder, that absolute jewel of a wilderness lake in the south-west wilderness with its spectacular quartzite beach. Pedder was flooded in the 1970s, breaking the hearts of so many Tasmanians. But it also became the crucible of the environment movement in this country and led to the formation of the United Tasmania Group, the world's first Green political party. Restoring Lake Pedder could be achieved with a loss of just two per cent to Hydro Tasmania's system energy output in a state that is forecast to have an electricity glut until 2027 at the very earliest. It would put Tasmania on the front page of every newspaper in the world and establish us as a global leader in environmental remediation, one of the industries that will boom, and is booming, in the 21st century. I have in my office a bag of sand that belongs on the Lake Pedder beach. I do look forward to the day that I can pour that little bag of sand back onto that magnificent, one-kilometre-wide Lake Pedder beach.

The Tasmanian economy has been undergoing a quiet transformation for a decade, moving out of an over-reliance on resource extraction and into a more diverse and more resilient economy. It is a transition that has primarily been driven by the innovation and the creativity of our people, not by governments. It started later than it should have and, because of that, it has been harder for some Tasmanians than it needed to be—and it is not finished yet. But look at us now. We are selling cherries to Japan, truffles to France and tulips to Amsterdam. We are creating jobs in viticulture, aquaculture, cut flowers, honey, small fruits, boutique beer and cider, and broadacre farming. We are creating jobs in the digital economy, the creative economy, the knowledge economy and, of course, tourism. We now have over a million tourists arriving every year and they are staying longer and spending more money. They are not coming because Tasmania is the same as the rest of the country or the rest of the world; they are coming because we are different, and proudly so.

In a world racked by climate disruption, we in Tasmania are on track to be powered by 100 per cent renewable energy by 2020. We have some of the most carbon-rich forests in the world—assets that we have a moral responsibility to protect for future generations. We are a wild and beautiful archipelago. Our wilderness not only nurtures our souls, sequesters carbon and supports biodiversity; it underpins so much of our future prosperity. The Tasmanian government currently wants to log and mine in the United Nations Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. This is as short-sighted and senseless as proposing to mine the great pyramids of Egypt and using the rubble for road gravel. We have to look after our place for its own sake and for the future we can create in Tasmania as a beacon of sustainability and prosperity to the rest of the world.

In a world of poisoned and dying environments, we have healthy and clean agricultural land. In a world harried by scares about food contamination we have high quality, clean, safe food supplies. In an overcrowded world, where people do not know their neighbours and rarely see green and growing things, where countries are shattered by division and sectarianism, we have space, we have peace, we have supportive communities and we have safe public places. In Tasmania you can live in a city and at the end of your working day you can go fishing, or surfing, or for a walk in the forest.

You know, if you are a Tasmanian—whether you are a sea-changer or a migrant, whether you arrived yesterday or your people have lived there for 200 years or 40, 000 years—that you are part of something unique. Our rate of volunteering soars above the national average. We are supposedly the poorest state in the country, but that is because some people measure wealth using only money. Remember, in times of crisis Tasmanians are the biggest donors per capita to national appeals for help. That is richness right there, not poverty.

The mainland states and the rest of the world are welcome to watch us with envy, and we are happy to welcome their people, who come to Tasmania fleeing drought, violence, overcrowding, excessive heat and disillusionment with their hectic lives. We have lived through recessions and depressions, redundancies and factory closures and we have not only survived; we have never forgotten who we are and what we have in Tasmania and we have never stopped being proud of ourselves and of our island home. We Greens and countless other Tasmanians have fought to protect that place and we will never abandon our stewardship of it. Never. There are howling gusts of change blowing all around the world. But in Tasmania we live in the Roaring 40s. We don't mind a bit of weather down there, and we are more than used to change. This century is the sustainability century, and it is Tasmania's chance to shine.

I want to conclude by acknowledging the many people who have helped me on my journey through life and politics. To all of the staff who have supported me so brilliantly during my time in politics, and to those who still do, who are here in the chamber today, thank you for putting up with me and for putting in so much incredible time and effort. To all the Greens members and volunteers and supporters who have advised me, supported me, pushed me, cajoled me, backed me in and voted for me over many elections, I thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

I want to particularly thank two people who are known well in this chamber, Bob Brown and Christine Milne. Like them, I have come from the Tasmanian parliament to the Senate, truly following in the footsteps of giants. Thank you both for your leadership and your friendship. Thanks to my mum and dad, John and Joanne, who never stopped believing in me even when I had a bit of trouble believing in myself; to my brother, Tom, and his beautiful family; and to my family—my magnificent partner Cassy O'Connor, who I love so much and who somehow loves me right back and without whom I simply could not do what I do, and her beautiful daughters, Stella and Mara, who make me so proud and bring me so much joy. Thanks guys; I will give it everything I've got to do you all proud.