

Elise Archer – State of the State Reply

I rise to speak in response to the Premier's address and I promise to make some positive comments, but unfortunately some of them will need to be negative because I cannot possibly agree with all of what the Premier has said in her address.

As identified by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Hodgman, the Tasmanian Liberals have a vision and plan to address the key issues facing Tasmanians: the economy, jobs and the cost of living. It is a plan we will seek to implement because the Labor-Greens Government is simply not delivering.

Today we tabled a number of bills that deal with rebooting our economy to establish a statewide single-dwelling residential planning code by the end of this year, protecting and growing jobs by bringing in a local benefits test in government procurement and red-tape reduction for small business. We will also tackle the cost of living with legislation to provide full choice and competition in the electricity sector, giving Tasmanian households and small business access to the same choice of cheaper electricity that the Government and big business has. I know that the member for Denison, Mr Groom, has already raised that issue and we look forward to debating it in this House. We will seek to gain the Parliament's support for our balanced 13-point forestry plan to protect Tasmanian timber workers and their communities from Labor's attempt to appease the Greens by totally ending native forestry. We will also seek to protect Tasmanian frontline workers such as nurses, teachers and police from being sacked.

Our positive agenda is the most comprehensive reform agenda that Tasmania has seen in many years, unlike what was contained in the Premier's address, which was full of motherhood statements and very little substance. Our plan is a clear, strategic approach that focuses on jobs, the economy and the cost of living and is in stark contrast to the lack of vision and leadership for Tasmania's future currently shown by the Labor-Greens Government.

Turning now to my shadow portfolio of planning, I had hoped that the Minister for Planning would be in the House so that I could explain some of the comprehensive reform that is needed in planning in Tasmania, but no doubt he can read the *Hansard* of my contribution. There were recent criticisms by peak bodies involved with Tasmania's planning system and these brought back to the surface the inadequacies and inconsistencies of the Tasmanian planning system which have resulted in a slowing of development applications from individuals and business. In a media statement on 6 December last year the Property Council stated that \$2 billion of potential investment is at risk under the current planning system in Tasmania. The Housing Industry Association, the Master Builders Association and the Property Council organised a sustained campaign late last year highlighting the State Government's inaction on planning reform.

Labor had promised a statewide residential planning code in December 2009, following many years of discussion by the State Labor Government on streamlining

and simplification of planning, but totally failed to deliver any reform. In December 2010, the current Planning minister, the member for Braddon, Bryan Green, said that he expected a statewide residential planning code to be in place by early 2011. It is now March 2011 and we still have no statewide residential planning code in place.

I was quite surprised at the lack of detail and commitment to planning shown by the Premier in her address after indicating in various media reports last week with much fanfare that she saw planning as a priority. We still have no time lines from the Labor-Greens Government in relation to planning. All we have is more motherhood statements that the Government remains committed to finalising the regional land use strategy program and delivering new planning schemes to all councils in the State. Again, nothing new.

The Premier also stated that she would also put in place a new statewide planning template to ensure consistent and standard development provisions which support the new planning schemes. Again, she gave no time line and no detail. This has been promised by planning directive number 1. I know that the Minister for Planning, Mr Green, gets quite confused by planning directives 1 and 4 but I will attempt to explain that in my speech in coming paragraphs. The Premier also expects us to believe that we will see her Government's commitment to the current planning reform agenda to deliver a number of positive outcomes laying the foundation for a more efficient and more effective planning system into the future, yet she did not identify what the number of positive outcomes would actually be.

Despite the statewide residential planning code having been drafted from industry itself - and I am aware of this from the Housing Industry Association - the Government appears to want to delay this interim reform until the three regional strategies have been finalised by the north, north-west and the south regions. If we wait until that has been finalised we could be waiting several more years because the regional templates must be finalised and then it is up to all of the local councils to submit planning schemes that comply with the template. This could take years.

Mr Bacon - But they will be interim planning schemes in the meantime.

Ms ARCHER - Yes, but the statewide residential planning code is also an interim measure.

Mr Bacon - It will be in place.

Ms ARCHER - That relates to planning directive 4, not planning directive 1. They are separate planning directives, Mr Bacon.

Tasmania needs to commence planning reform and the statewide single dwelling residential planning code will provide the impetus to kick-start the rest of the reform needed out of planning directive number 1.

After 12 years of neglect and six planning ministers, the 2008 report card from the Planning Institute of Australia branded Tasmania's planning system as the worst in

the country. We cannot afford further delays and dithering on planning. Improvement to our planning system is too important and long overdue. The statewide single dwelling residential planning code will make a start to overall planning reform needed.

The Tasmanian Liberals are serious about the need for an appropriate and comprehensive planning scheme in Tasmania. It is simply ridiculous that there are 29 local councils administering 36 planning schemes in Tasmania with little or no strategic direction from the State Government on future development plans at a state level. This has resulted in inconsistency between local council planning schemes and a lack of coordination and duplication of services across local councils.

The code will, at the very least, curb the red tape, cost and frustrating delays that define Tasmania's current planning system for single dwellings, but it will not diminish the role and functions of local government. Obviously overall reform is needed to consolidate planning schemes to a statewide approach which would significantly reduce the planning bureaucracy and deliver more consistency in the format, provision and application of planning schemes. The statewide residential planning code would dovetail into the Government's regional planning process under planning directive 1, which I hope is nearing completion anyway and would provide a State-based planning template through the implementation of three standardised schedules for residential activity, subdivisions and multi-dwellings, giving consistency to each of the zonings. Each council would still maintain their own planning scheme document but there would be consistency between councils, which is long overdue.

In line with the intentions of the north-west coast regional planning initiative, a statewide residential code would improve the operation of local planning schemes. It would mandate that local planning considerations be included. It would reform local councils' planning schemes by introducing contemporary instruments with a common structure and use of expressions and enhance the ability of individual councils to prepare, administer and enforce their local planning schemes.

The Tasmanian Liberals, in our election policy, undertook to embark upon comprehensive public consultation on the proposed changes so that a rational discussion could occur on the need for a statewide streamlined planning system that will provide greater efficiencies and better planning outcomes. Industry agrees with our interim reform in the form of a single-dwelling residential planning code and most, if not all, councils can see the benefit of a consistent approach, which will dovetail into the final template from planning directive 1 in any event. Obviously it is vital to implement this in consultation with local government and other stakeholders. The current planning system has been a stumbling block to development and investment in this State for far too long.

Turning to the long awaited capital city strategy, in more general terms Hobart itself requires strong, transparent and long-term plans in place to manage population and economic growth, particularly in the form of land use strategy to address climate

change, improve housing affordability and to tackle urban congestion. With respect to the capital city strategy, a COAG agreement requires that all States have their capital city strategy in place by 1 January 2012. The State Government has tried to indicate that it is on track to having its plan in place by this time but there is absolutely no evidence in place that work has even commenced, let alone a strategy drafted and submitted for consultation with relevant peak bodies. I know this because I have been consulting with these peak industry bodies on a regular basis. I am far from convinced, due to these consultations, that we are anywhere near finalising a capital city strategy. Of course this strategy is crucial because national infrastructure funding is contingent on the capital city strategy being in place by the deadline of 1 January 2012.

Stakeholders such as the Planning Institute and the Hobart City Council, being the relevant council here, have said that the progress on this plan is not good. They have highlighted the nature of the governance structure and the need for legislation, and that the Sullivans Cove Waterfront Authority must be abolished. Certainly that is the view of the Hobart City Council; I do not want to misrepresent the view of the Planning Institute. It has been a longstanding priority of the Tasmanian Liberals to abolish the Sullivans Cove Waterfront Authority, least of all now because it will save the State a minimum of \$1.75 million per annum.

The Minister for Planning, Mr Green, also failed to assure this House on 16 November 2010 about the progress of the capital city strategy in response to my question about it. I am aware that the COAG reform council travelled to Hobart to monitor the progress on the capital city strategy in late 2010. The current status of the strategy is unknown and so I call on the Minister for Planning and indeed the Premier to advise the House where we are at with respect to the capital city strategy. Too much is at risk to allow the Labor-Greens Government to fail to respond to this requirement by the COAG agreement. Missing out on future infrastructure funds is not an option, particularly for the capital city.

The ABS figures on building approvals released on 3 March this year show that Tasmania's private sector is still struggling, despite false protestations to the contrary from the Treasurer and Premier. The figures show that total dwelling approvals fell 7.7 per cent between December and January in trend terms and a massive 35 per cent in seasonally adjusted terms, with Tasmania experiencing the biggest fall in the country. Household consumption has been stagnant for the past five quarters, indicating that Tasmanians do not have confidence in our economy. Private gross fixed capital expenditure is also down on recent years as is export trade. These are all sectors that rely on private investment. A capital city strategy is not only essential to infrastructure funding but will help create some certainty around what development is wanted and needed for our capital city so that we can once again have an increase in private investment. Again, a capital city strategy should feed into the overall vision for Tasmania in the final regional strategies. The Premier and the Labor-Greens Government have relied on Federal stimulus money to help the limping economy and this is not good enough. We need to drive private investment in this State.

Turning to the State coastal policy, the revised draft State coastal policy 2008, which will hopefully and eventually replace the 1996 policy which is outdated, provides general guidance and an overall framework for the management of the Tasmanian coastline. Of course this policy review process is being undertaken by the Tasmanian Planning Commission, which comes under the Planning minister's portfolio. Every stakeholder group that I speak or who contacts me all say that the draft State coastal policy is inadequate in addressing its purpose. Its purpose states that it must be to facilitate the conservation of natural, social and economic assets, values and processes of the coastal area, the sustainable use or development of the coastal area and the satisfaction of social needs and development of culture. The 1996 State coastal policy has been under review since 2004 - coming up to seven years now. The result of this review is as stated. The 2008 revised draft policy has been referred to the RPDC, which is now the Tasmanian Planning Commission. The revised draft policy remains with that commission, which received 50 representations through public consultations last year. I believe it is yet to be decided whether the commission will hold a hearing in relation to those submissions. The length of time the Government has taken to execute this review is simply appalling. I do not blame the commission at all, but the lack of urgency, commitment and resources provided by the Government and now the Labor-Greens Government is of concern.

The Greens are critical about the lack of a finalised State coastal policy, and I acknowledge that, but their former environment spokesperson is currently a member of Cabinet and so the Greens must stand condemned also for failing to deliver an outcome in this area. Put simply, the 1996 policy is inadequate and out of date. It does not deal with the challenges Tasmania currently faces and will face in the future in terms of the environment, climate change and future development. The policy must provide certainty for developers, councils, industry and interest groups around the use and development of land that falls within the remit of the State coastal policy. This will not only ensure appropriate investment but also ensure that Tasmania is open for business on a strategic and, most importantly, environmentally sound basis. The Labor-Greens Government must show leadership on this issue because at least 12 councils have their boundaries on coastal areas and it is not an option to have 12 different ways of dealing with coastal issues.

I now turn to one of my other shadow portfolio areas - police and emergency management. I note yet another broken election promise: Labor's and the Greens' election promise to get police out of the courts and back on the beat in the north and north-west of Tasmania. My point on this is purely that this promise should have been delivered by now when the Labor and Labor-Greens governments had the money to ensure the Justice department took over this role, and rightfully so. Our police service is already stretched. The Police Association has said that people in the north and north-west of the State are getting 'a second-rate service compared to the rest of the State.' Commander Locky Avery has also said, 'It is challenging not being able to deploy police officers to the area where I see the priorities are.'

We also saw the recent deployment of police officers to Risdon Prison as the situation at the prison worsened. I am concerned about the difficult situation in which police are put in these circumstances, both those standing guard at the prison and those left in the community who are dealing with the same amount of work with fewer police officers. There were seven police officers stationed at the prison on this most recent occasion and I was significantly concerned that the local stations in and around Risdon Prison were left understaffed. Stations such as Risdon Vale are important to the local community and the attitude of the Corrections minister, Mr McKim, left a lot to be desired in resolving that prison standoff. It did not help the local police get back into their communities as quickly as possible and it cost the taxpayer additional money because these police were employed on a full cost-recovery basis. I also believe that many were on overtime shifts.

I will now turn to the indication by the Premier that there must be a 3 per cent cut to all budgets, which will of course include the police budget. In the police department this is simply impossible without cutting police numbers. I am extremely concerned that the Government does not seem to be aware of the real implications of a 3 per cent cut to the police budget. The Police Association has said that 85 per cent of the police budget goes in salaries and the 3 per cent cannot be found in the remaining 15 per cent of operating costs, so jobs are certainly in the firing line. Today we have seen the Police Association confirm that this is the equivalent of 200 police jobs. The police service is already stretched and I am really not quite certain that the Premier understands that community safety is at risk, and certainly at threat, if 200 police jobs disappear. Our police have a very difficult job and they often work under extreme pressure. Cutting back on staffing levels will only make the situation worse for them. Today we have also seen that the March intake of recruits has been cut and there is an indefinite cut in intake on the cards. Because of this Tasmania loses some of these recruits to other trades and professions because of the uncertainty of when there might be another recruitment.

Finally I turn to an electorate issue. The former Premier, Mr Bartlett, made an election promise in relation to Cosgrove specialist sports school but this has now been revealed as a farce with it being axed by the new Premier. It always was a desperate attempt to hoodwink the people of Denison and con them into voting Labor when the former Premier clearly realised he had lost a lot of Labor support in his own electorate. Now that the former Premier has been removed from the top job all his promises have simply gone out the window, including the announcement that plans for the \$18 million Cosgrove specialist sports school has been axed.

Just a few months ago the Education minister said that the Cosgrove specialist sports school is 'a keystone educational project.' That was stated in a media release in September last year. Perhaps the word 'keystone' is a new Labor word for pork-barrelling, who knows? Many in the community criticised the rushed and ill thought-out promise at the time it was announced. Even the local council was surprised that there had been no prior consultation on this election promise. Therefore it is no surprise that the Labor-Greens Government was so keen to dump this policy and blame it on the budget crisis.

Finally, with the impending loss of 2 300 jobs from the public sector announced by the Premier, she must immediately detail which departments these job cuts will come from. As I have outlined, the Police department cannot take another cut. For the future of all Tasmanian children, our community and our health, the cuts must not be from frontline teachers, police or nurses.