



**Sharon Grierson MP
Federal Member for Newcastle**

26 May 2008

Governor-General's Address-in-Reply

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (4.20 p.m.)—It seems a long time since the Governor-General spoke at the opening of parliament and the parliamentary year began. I would like to begin my address-in-reply speech by acknowledging the Ngunawal people, the traditional owners of the land on which this parliament meets, and by paying my respects to the Awabakal and Worimi peoples, the traditional owners and custodians of the land that encompasses the federal seat of Newcastle.

While this is my third address-in-reply speech in the Australian parliament, this is the first time I have had the great privilege of responding from the government benches to the Governor-General's speech. It does feel very special. There are a significant number of firsts in this new parliament. The Indigenous welcome to country, which preceded the official opening of the 42nd Parliament of Australia, was an amazing occasion for me, considering the generosity with which that was delivered, the colourful ceremony and the opportunity to engage with people from the Torres Strait Islands and areas of Australia that we do not often get to meet people from. It was a wonderful setting of the tone for this new parliament, and I thank the Indigenous people of Australia for that generous welcome.

It was responded to by the national apology to the stolen generations. There could be no more moving event for any of us than to see our parliament—in this case the House of Representatives chamber—become not just a place of advocacy and debate but a place that certainly reflected the heart and the soul of the people of this nation. It was indeed a great honour and privilege. It was such a long overdue apology. I recall watching—this was when I was not a member of parliament—Kim Beazley deliver a speech on the *Bringing them home* report and seeing how moved he was. I thought of him during that ceremony, because it was something that he was passionate about and truly believed in. So it was a wonderful beginning and it was a watershed moment, and I was certainly proud to be there.

Those events were possible because of the election of our government on 24 November 2007, an election that saw the people put their faith in a new and positive agenda put forward by the Labor team for the future. The people were ready for a change. I think that was very obvious, and having 34 new members is testimony to that. It is wonderful to see them. The people were ready to move away from a very different era of politics, an era of divisiveness in which fear, instead of reason, had been championed. It was certainly for most people a time that they would look back on with some regrets. We do

see change now. It is just delightful for people like me who came in after the *Tampa* election to now see the moves of the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Evans, to put some of that right again: to see the Nauru facility closed down, to see people taken off punitive TPVs and to see some compensation for Vivian Solon and Cornelia Rau in particular. Those are wonderful moves in respect of issues that the Australian people needed to see settled.

We have had over 1,000 African settlers, humanitarian settlers, come into my electorate. I saw their distress when they were used as political footballs during the election campaign. I think there is a new era, one that we need to embrace—and Australians certainly did at the election. It was also wonderful to see that people did want to move away from Iraq—perhaps the saddest day of my existence in parliament was to be in a parliament that sent its young people to war—and to know that our plans to leave Iraq are underway and that there is still a commitment to protect our country, to protect democracy and to fight terrorism where it really does flourish in this world: in Afghanistan. So I think the divisiveness that was encouraged in the past has certainly been put behind us.

I would also say that there was perhaps a real need for change in terms of the movement away from community participation in the delivery of services to people on behalf of the Australian government, and I hope that one of the other things that we will see now is community participation coming back into service delivery, particularly for those sensitive services like the humanitarian settlement service.

We also know that the Australian public wanted to move away from Work Choices. This was a legislative arrangement which fundamentally attempted to change the face of our nation. It was a change that was never going to be accepted by the Australian people, because of their good sense, their honest belief in fairness and their absolute protection of people who are very vulnerable in the workforce. As a mother of young people who have been exploited, who have had very little protection and who have had no safety net, I was particularly proud to see our national apology and our first lot of legislation introduced on the first day of parliament removing the threat of Work Choices from the Australian people and restoring some decency to the workplace again.

I would also like to congratulate the labour movement on the Your Rights at Work campaign. It was a significant grassroots campaign and one that I think was very much needed. I am always proud when the labour movement, the political wing of the Labor Party, the rank-and-file members and the people come together so well to undo some injustices that are prevailing. I congratulate the Australian Council of Trade Unions and Unions New South Wales for their role in the community campaign. I welcome, too, the member for Charlton, Greg Combet, as a new colleague in this place. I acknowledge his role in that campaign prior to his election, as well as the contribution of Jeff Lawrence, Sharan Burrow and John Robertson.

Again, I think what was also rather inspiring to the Australian people was the new-look team and the new-look leadership. To have two wonderful leaders, Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard, support each other so admirably I think did inspire. The unity was, I think, something that inspired the Australian people. I would like to put on the record my

personal thanks to both of them for their support, their counsel and their willingness to always assist the caucus members when they particularly need it. The Prime Minister's vision is one of inclusiveness and it pursues some long-term challenges that we face. I think that was very attractive to the Australian people.

We know that the 5.4 per cent swing nationally to Labor brought some wonderful new colleagues into this parliament, and I congratulate them and welcome them. They will be an asset to us. It is wonderful to see their diverse backgrounds and their talents already assisting the Labor team.

As for my third election campaign in the electorate of Newcastle, it was a wonderful result and many people deserve special thanks for that. We had a redistribution that saw new areas— including Thornton, Woodberry, Beresfield, Tarro, Heatherbrae, Hexam, Tomago, Williamtown, Fullerton Cove and Fern Bay—come into the electorate of Newcastle. The people in those areas had less than 12 months to get to know me and vice versa, but they voted overwhelmingly to support Labor's positive agenda. Winning new booths like Beresfield, Fern Bay, Tarro, Thornton, Tomago and Woodberry on primary votes was especially satisfying and I do want to thank those constituents in particular for their trust. Winning the seat of Newcastle on primary votes was also a wonderful outcome and certainly places me in a position of great responsibility. The people of Newcastle have retained their trust in federal Labor for the last 107 years and it is a trust I am ever mindful of and always willing to repay through hard work and dedicated representation. So I do thank the voters of Newcastle. Our swing from the redistributed 8.7 per cent to almost 16 per cent was a wonderful one around the nation and one that I am proud to have received, but I am also proud and passionate as a Novocastrian to represent the people of Newcastle here.

Election campaigns are very much a team event and we always do have many people to thank. Behind every elected member, I know there is always an extraordinary team of supporters. In my case I have, fortunately, a loving family, a close circle of friends, a great campaign team and the support of genuine rank-and-file Labor Party members. I would also thank the Newcastle trade union movement and a strong cross-section of the Newcastle community. I am grateful to them all.

I want to put on the record my appreciation of the rank-and-file members of the Australian Labor Party for their trust and strong endorsement of my candidature. These are the people who embody Labor values and principles and who selflessly volunteer their time and energy to promote Labor's agendas and ensure that Labor delivers—so they are very vocal right now as well, which is wonderful.

Campaigns are tough but a strong campaign team does make all the difference. I want to particularly thank Sharon Claydon, Simonne Pengelly, Ben Farrell and John Dunn, who all played key roles in my campaign; my FEC executive—Morrie Graham, James Marshall, Shirley Schulz-Robinson, Barbara Witcher, Noel James, Ruth Callcott, Bernie Bernard and Mark Walmsley; Lauren O'Brien and Harry Criticos for their assistance with the preparation of campaign materials; the campaign office volunteers—Cath Claydon, Victoria Phillis, Tommy Lockett, Su Cruickshank, Sue McCormack and the dozens of other people who helped out in the campaign office; the mobile corflute team, including

Donovan Harris and John Sherry; and all those people who displayed posters at their home or workplace.

I also thank Ross Coates for coordinating the street stall campaign and the dozens of people who helped out on stalls all around Newcastle. I thank Chris Hepple and the team of volunteers who maintained the prepoll booth rosters; Mary Callcott, James Marshall and John Ellery, who scrutineered the mobile polling booths; the 52 booth captains; and the hundreds of people who volunteered to work on polling booths across the electorate on election day. I thank Pat Martin and Irene Bennett and their able team, who helped prepare and deliver lunch and supplies to booth volunteers, and the dozens of scrutineers who stayed behind at the close of polls for the count, despite the temptation to join us and celebrate a long-awaited federal Labor victory.

I also want to acknowledge the support of the Newcastle Trades Hall Council, particularly the secretary, Gary Kennedy, the Maritime Union of Australia, particularly Len Covell, and the United Mine Workers Association, in particular Ian Murray and Graheme Kelly, for their support throughout the campaign. I welcome the opportunity to work with the wider labour movement. Having not come from the labour movement, I very much appreciate being a part of that wider family.

I also want to thank my federal parliamentary Labor Party colleagues who were so willing to visit Newcastle in their former roles as shadow ministers to ensure that Labor's policy agenda took account of Newcastle's needs and aspirations. In that lead-up period they included Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard, Lindsay Tanner, Nicola Roxon, Brendan O'Connor, Chris Evans, Craig Emerson, Stephen Conroy, Jan McLucas, Annette Hurley, Martin Ferguson and Kate Lundy. To have their support in that very busy year when we were all facing so many challenges was wonderful, and I do thank them very much.

My final and most important thanks go to the people of Newcastle—the local residents and families, community groups, representative organisations, small businesses, manufacturers, educators, health workers, environmentalists, IT workers, scientists, creative artists, and seniors and youth alike—for their ongoing support and for entrusting federal Labor with the responsibility of creating a better and fairer future.

The people of Newcastle are never backward in coming forward. My electorate office, which is a shopfront office, is extremely busy with personal calls, visits, letters, emails and community events. I greatly value the contact, feedback, suggestions, constructive criticism, policy ideas and assistance from the people of Newcastle. I also take great satisfaction in being able to provide them with help, information and advice and to put them together when they can achieve much more in that way. Never a week goes by in my office when someone does not make the effort to thank me or my staff for the work we do. I am told that that is quite an astounding thing—it does not always happen. The people of Newcastle always take the time to say thank you. For that I am particularly grateful.

We have of course as a new government put forward a very positive agenda. The key themes—economic management and reform, work and family, the education revolution,

health, climate change and water, housing, social inclusion, Indigenous policy, national security and international relations, and governance and transparency—are vital to a new direction in this new century. It is a big agenda, tackling the big issues and aiming to make our nation fair, productive and secure. At the election I think the people of Newcastle found it was an agenda that resonated with them very strongly.

We have a very strong industrial and working-class background, but we are a city that has always been in transition, is always having to be resilient. We have been tested over and over again, as recently as last year. In a week or so, it is the 12-month anniversary of the June storms that saw the *Pasha Bulker* washed up on shore and hundreds and hundreds of people washed out of their homes. I think people know of our history in terms of the earthquake et cetera. They know that Newcastle is a tough place. The people stick together. They believe in a fair go and that a harmonious workplace is a safe and productive workplace. Newcastle has seen too many of its people injured and lost at the workplace.

Novocastrians did vote for change and they voted for some of the things they know are important to their future. We are proud of our coalmining heritage and we will never abandon the jobs of those working around that industry, but we know that we do need, and will need, to do it smarter and cleaner. So, on climate change, Newcastle sees great opportunities in the government's agenda. From the beginning of last year, I have hosted roundtable meetings with stakeholders in the energy sector to talk about becoming a region of energy sustainability and energy solutions. I am very pleased to say that those meetings with the state government continue this week, trying to put together a proposal and submission from our region for the Clean Energy Enterprise Connect Centres announced in the new budget.

I welcome the support of Minister Penny Wong, who visited my electorate just last week to see the outstanding and world-leading research being done into solar thermal, clean coal and energy efficiency technologies at CSIRO Energy Technology Newcastle. It is a wonderful facility. I was very pleased to receive a call from Geoff Garrett, the CEO of CSIRO, last week to say he had been to Newcastle and how much he had enjoyed visiting our Hunter Means Innovation Festival, how much change he had seen in the city of Newcastle in recent years and how he was delighted to know the flagship was attracting some of the world's best young scientists who wish to be part of the energy solutions for the world and who were certainly very happy to come to Newcastle to be a part of that activity. Those sorts of agendas are wonderful for us.

The social inclusion agenda is also terribly important for Newcastle. We are a regional capital, so we provide services for people with disabilities and mental illness. We know that homelessness affects the people in our city. We know that binge drinking is one of those social problems. To have a social inclusion agenda will be very important for a regional capital like Newcastle because, in many ways, it is a magnet for people seeking support or running perhaps to bigger centres.

We also know that we have been left with a neglected burden, and that is the neglect of regional infrastructure. Our port of Newcastle is of course the biggest exporter of coal in the world. The regional airport is the fastest growing regional airport in

Australia. We do know that there is a need for a new approach that looks more holistically at the value of infrastructure and certainly builds some cooperative approaches with our state colleagues. Those are some of the challenges we want to be a part of.

There are other challenges facing Newcastle in this parliament, ones that I am very happy to pursue. We know that a Federal Court building is earmarked for our city and we know that will support not just the city of Newcastle but a quarter of the state at least, maybe even more. We also know that the Hunter Medical Research Institute needs support from this government and the wonderful health and medical fund announced in our budget will see a way forward for those facilities. Innovation is what we are about and certainly the HMRI is a successful innovator when it comes to health research.

One of the ways we have taken to build on these wonderful agendas was the 2020 summit. I am pleased to report that the Newcastle 2020 Summit on 5 April, which was facilitated by myself and Professor Nick Saunders, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Newcastle, was undertaken in that very great spirit of gathering ideas from over 100 local people, drawn from all sectors. One of the overwhelming themes to emerge was that our region needed to work better at establishing a dialogue across sectors, setting some clear priorities for our region which reflected a shared view. It was agreed that by doing that we could play a greater role in national policy design and its local implementation, taking charge of our destiny and leading the national agenda by local example.

The local summit produced a range of great ideas that were submitted to the national 2020 Summit. I seek leave to table the Newcastle 2020 Summit communique.

Leave granted.

Ms GRIERSON—Our ideas were a reflection of the strength of our community and I look forward to working with the Newcastle community to deliver on those. I am proud to say that two weeks ago the federal Labor government delivered a budget that meets my election commitments to Newcastle. I will be speaking in detail about those during consideration of the budget bills, but in this address-in-reply speech I will finish by once more giving my commitment to the people of Newcastle that I will honestly and passionately represent their views to this parliament and that I will be very proud to be part of creating a more prosperous and fairer future for them. It is an honour to represent them and I will continue to be a strong voice for Newcastle in the new Rudd Labor government. *(Time expired)*