

**PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA  
RECEPTION TO MARK THE  
BICENTENARY OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
REMARKS BY  
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA  
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, MONDAY 18 MAY 2026**

**VICE-REGAL SALUTE**

Good evening. I warmly welcome you all here to acknowledge the recent bicentenary of our Legislative Council of Tasmania. May I acknowledge the President and Honourable Members of the Legislative Council and Members of the House of Assembly.

May I acknowledge the Muwinina people upon whose land we gather. I acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal Community as ongoing custodians of Country. I recognise their enduring culture and deep connection to land, sea, sky, and waters.

This is the fourth bicentenary we have celebrated here at Government House over the past two years. First was the bicentenary of the Supreme Court of Tasmania, then the bicentenary of the first appointed Solicitor-General, and, following that, the bicentenary of the Executive Council.

The Legislative Council story begins, formally, on 17 July 1825, when King George IV signed a warrant separating Van Diemen's Land from New South Wales.<sup>1</sup> Governor Darling of New South Wales proclaimed this warrant in Hobart Town on 3 December that year. A single-chamber Legislative Council was created, comprising six male nominees and the Lieutenant-Governor, George Arthur. On 12 April 1826, the Council sat together for the first time, in private behind closed doors, in old Government House.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Parliament of Tasmania: A brief historical overview (sesquicentenary booklet, 2 December 2006)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

Two hundred years on, may we reflect on those six men, in a room in a colonial outpost on the far edge of the British Empire. They enacted laws that were required to be consistent with the laws of England and to govern a place in which none of them had been born and over people who had no say.

We know that the Council's first decades were neither democratic nor representative in any modern sense. The early Lieutenant-Governors, most famously, George Arthur, had no appetite for elected representation.

Change came from a slow build of pressure from free settlers and one moment of nerve. In 1845, most of the eight non-official members of the now 15 nominee Council members walked out of the chamber rather than vote for taxes to support the convict system.<sup>3</sup> The Lieutenant-Governor was denied his quorum. The MLCs who walked out, immediately became local heroes and were known as "the Patriotic Six." One of them, Richard Dry, went on to become the first Tasmanian-born Speaker of the Legislative Council, and later, the first Tasmanian-born Premier.<sup>4</sup>

The Lieutenant- Governor sacked "the Patriotic Six" and appointed substitute Councillors. Two years later, on instructions from London, they were reinstated.

In 1856, with the advent of responsible government, the Legislative Council was incorporated as part of the new bicameral Parliament, and 15 members were elected.<sup>5</sup> At this time, the title of the Presiding Officer changed, from Speaker to President.

The Council that emerged has developed a character of its own. It sat with longer terms than the Assembly. It retains an independent tradition. It has a history of periodic, and sometimes spectacular, disagreements with the Lower House. Most notably, that was demonstrated in the constitutional crisis of 1924. Then, Premier Joseph Lyons could not get his budget through the Council. The Administrator, Sir Herbert Nicholls, gave Royal Assent without it.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Parliament of Tasmania: A brief historical overview (sesquicentenary booklet, 2 December 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

This led to the formation of a Joint Select Committee, which laid down Money Bill principles.<sup>7</sup>

There have been welcome changes in the Legislative Council, although it took some time to elect a woman. It was not until May 1948 that Margaret McIntyre became the first woman elected to the Tasmanian Parliament in the Legislative Council for the seat of Cornwall. Tragically, she was killed in an aeroplane crash. Her time in office was brief as she sat for only nine days.<sup>8</sup>

In 2008, Sue Smith became the first woman elected President of the Council.

In May 2019, for the first time, women made up the majority of its members. Today, nine women are members.

It was not until 1968 that full adult franchise was applied for Legislative Council elections.

Such changes resulted from debates, some of which lasted for years in the Chamber. These debates continue, often late into the night.

May I conclude by mentioning an interesting fact about the Black Rod carried by the Usher at the opening of Parliament. Polished ebony with Royal Arms in gold, it is the second oldest Black Rod still in use anywhere in the Commonwealth. Ours alone still carries Queen Victoria's cypher.<sup>9</sup>

Tonight, may we acknowledge the work of the Legislative Council, its members, officers, the Clerk and the Usher of the Black Rod.

Thank you and please enjoy your reception.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/legislative-council/brief-tour-of-the-legislative-council>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/visit-and-learn/resources/about-parliament/parlhistsq> accessed 5 May 26

<sup>9</sup> Office of the Black Rod, "*Historical Information on the Black Rod*" (briefing supplied 4 May 2026)