16. Tasmania

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Prior to election day, Tasmania looked as if it was to be the State most likely to return to the status quo in terms of party support in the House of Representatives—five Labor members in five electorates—and a potential reverse of the major-party returns on the 2004 Senate result, with Labor this time edging ahead with three seats, Liberal two and the Greens one. It had been a dull and lifeless campaign with no reckless takeovers of regional hospitals (2007) or the theatre of forestry workers massing in Launceston in support of Prime Minister, John Howard (2004).

In contrast with those elections, in 2010, the volatile issue of forestry management lay dormant in the run-up to the vote. No political party, including the Greens, was prepared to risk the wedge effect of the forestry/pulp mill issue.

Tasmanians remained concerned about access to preventative and acute-care health delivery in remote rural and regional electorates—particularly Braddon in the north-west of the State, where a series of promises over cancer treatment facilities stretched the imaginations of the candidates and the bottom line of spending commitments.

Employment losses following industry closures in the vegetable-processing sector and paper mills in Burnie and Wesley Vale, east of Devonport, also heightened concerns in Braddon while uncertainty in the forestry industry was creating disquiet in Bass and Braddon. The impact of the proposed Mining Super Profits Tax on west-coast mining communities (which reverted to Braddon from Lyons in the 2009 redistribution) was a much discussed issue in early campaigning.

Labor made much of the National Broadband Network (NBN) roll-out in Tasmania, with the State the first cab off the rank for this ambitious project, and when the Coalition policy differed significantly in terms of cost and technology there was renewed focus on the impact these contrasting approaches might have in the electorates of Bass (Scottsdale), Lyons (Midway Point) and Braddon (Smithton), where fibre-optic connections had been operating during the election campaign.

Labor held Braddon and Bass but both were marginal. In Franklin and Lyons, Labor's margin was comfortable and Denison, a Labor seat for 23 years with a margin of 15 per cent, looked a relatively easy transition from retiring member, Duncan Kerr, to a member of a State Labor dynasty, Jonathan Jackson, son of former Tasmanian Attorney-General Judy Jackson.

In the Senate, the Liberals' team entered the election with an incumbent senator, Guy Barnett, shuffled to the vulnerable third place on the party ticket.

Labor endorsed Lisa Singh to run third on their ticket behind Senator Helen Polley and union delegate Anne Urquhart. Singh lost her State parliamentary seat—Denison—at the March 2010 election.

The Greens were confident of Senator Christine Milne's return with a comfortable result in contrast with the nail-biting wait in 2004.

Preselections, Parties and Candidates in Electorates

Incumbency would help Labor in Lyons where Dick Adams looked set to be returned on the back of an 8 per cent margin and in Franklin where Julie Collins was safe with a 4 per cent margin.

In Braddon, Sid Sidebottom was facing a bigger challenge with a 2 per cent margin, and in Bass, Labor faced the prospect of replacing the retiring Jodie Campbell, who had done little to advance Labor's prospects of holding the seat with a fragile 1 per cent margin. Labor was confident of securing a transition in Denison on the back of retiring Duncan Kerr's 15 per cent margin.

The Liberals preselected well-known candidates in Bass and Lyons. The party talked up the chances of media professional Steven Titmus ousting Labor in Bass on the back of Jodie Campbell's implosion. Rural services manager Eric Hutchinson was respected and well known in the sprawling rural electorate of Lyons and was a chance to eat into Dick Adams' margin. But the Liberals had to revert to relatively obscure candidates in Braddon and Denison. In Franklin, they endorsed a failed State candidate for Lyons, Jane Howlett, who switched electorates to run federally.

The Greens, buoyed by their 2007 results and successful State campaign, targetted Denison as a prospect and endorsed local medical doctor Geoff Couser. State campaign director, Sancia Colgrave, ran in Bass; long-time Tarkine activist and regular but unsuccessful State candidate Scott Jordan tackled Braddon;

unsuccessful State Legislative Council candidate Wendy Heatley was endorsed for Franklin; and party stalwart Karen Cassidy switched from State to federal electorates and ran in Lyons.

Two Independents nominated: John Forster in Franklin and Andrew Wilkie in Denison. Wilkie had narrowly missed out on a seat at the March 2010 State election on the back of an 8 per cent first-preference vote and the assistance of Hare Clark preference flows.

Campaign

Labor entered the campaign with confidence that they could hold all five House of Representative seats, and any opinion poll that was conducted locally reinforced that confidence.

Tasmanians focused on local and regional issues, especially health care, where discussion focused on governance arrangements for hospital administration within Labor's national health reform packages and the Liberal preference for regionally based boards. Support for road infrastructure projects was high on electoral agendas with local government mayors in the south of the State together bemoaning the lack of a share in infrastructure funds for their electorates; Franklin and Denison are not marginal and thus attract little interest from political parties and potential prime ministers who concentrated their pork-barrelling exercises in the winnable northern seats of Bass and Braddon.

Bass

Labor was nervous about Bass. The seat was very marginal and the rather unedifying exit of Jodie Campbell had the party concerned that too much damage had been done. The Liberals were running a well-known media identity as a candidate and Labor had endorsed a somewhat reluctant party stalwart, but well-respected community member, Geoff Lyons. The two major parties fought over silt removal in the Tamar River estuary, flood-levy infrastructure support and health packages.

Braddon

The Liberals felt that incumbent Labor member, Sid Sidebottom, might be vulnerable to an energetic, hardworking candidate. The Liberals had hoped failed State candidate Brett Whiteley might choose to run but after some months of speculation, he declined. The Liberals were left with little time to mount a convincing case around the endorsed candidate, Garry Carpenter. Carpenter had connections to the community through football and some exposure during

a dairy farmer dispute with a milk processor in the electorate but was hardly well known outside that narrow gaze. Issues in Braddon focused on securing State and federal commitments for localised cancer services; employment losses in industry sectors struggling to compete globally such as paper and vegetable processing; and some early concerns that the proposed Labor mining tax might damage investment and job prospects in the State's west-coast mining area.

Denison

Pre-election expectations for Denison were aligned to a Labor transition. For a seat held by Labor with a 15 per cent margin, there was a seemingly quiet Labor preselection process, and Jonathan Jackson was regarded as a strong chance to replace the retiring Duncan Kerr. The Greens saw an opportunity to stake a claim at the federal level in a seat with very high Greens voting credentials, especially when Andrew Wilkie—an unlucky loser in the seat in the State election—decided to run as an Independent. The Liberals once again struggled to supply a high-profile candidate for this important capital-city seat, but eventually Cameron Simpkins nominated and was selected.

Most of the non-Labor candidates took the view that it was time Denison was again given the attention it deserved in the federal Parliament—particularly in relation to infrastructure—so their collective mantra was 'make Denison marginal'.

Franklin

Labor incumbent, Julie Collins, held a comfortable 4 per cent margin, and again the Liberals struggled to find a significant challenger and, in the end, in a rather desperate move, parachuted in a failed State election Lyons candidate, Jane Howlett. Wendy Heatley, the Greens' candidate, had received only 621 votes at the State poll. A contentious road-infrastructure development—the Brighton by-pass—threatened Aboriginal relics and this was a focus for considerable argument and debate about resolution and consultation with the Aboriginal community in Tasmania.

Lyons

The affable Dick Adams, Labor Member for Lyons, prepared for his sixth defence of his realm. The Liberals sought to challenge Adams by nominating a smart, well-known rural-based manager, Eric Hutchinson, who worked in the wool industry and had a high profile in the rural electorate. Adams had the advantage

of the preference flow from the Greens in Lyons, and the Greens were able to coax party stalwart Karen Cassidy to nominate. Rural and regional challenges around liveability and sustainability dominated pre-election issues in Lyons.

Results

Labor retained four of its five House of Representatives seats. The Independent Andrew Wilkie won Denison. Tasmania defied the broad national swing against Labor by further endorsing the south-eastern (Victorian, South Australian) sentiment, with a two-party preferred swing of 4.4 per cent and 60.6 per cent vote. Labor increased its first-preference vote across the State by 1.2 per cent. The Liberals had an election meltdown and a post-election crisis. The party had a 4.6 per cent fall in its first-preference vote and could secure only 39.4 per cent of the two-party preferred State vote. In addition to the rout in the House of Representatives, Senator Guy Barnett lost his seat, with the Liberals securing two senators (Abetz and Parry), Labor three (Polley, Urquhart and Singh), and the Greens one (Milne).

Table 16.1 Two-Candidate Preferred Votes and Swings in Tasmanian Divisions, 2010

Division	Labor votes	Percentage	Liberal votes/ Wilkie Ind., Denison	Percentage	Percentage swing to Labor
Tasmania					
Bass	37 165	56.7	28 337	43.3	5.7
Braddon	37 650	57.5	27 855	42.5	5.2
Denison	31 642	48.8	33 217	51.2	
Franklin	39 856	60.8	25 675	39.2	6.8
Lyons	40 959	62.3	24 796	37.7	4.0
Total Tasmania	198 322	60.6	128 830	39.4	4.4

Source: Adapted from AEC Election Results 2010: <http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/federal_elections/2010/index.htm>

Table 16.2 First Preferences in Tasmanian Divisions, 2010 (percentage preferences)

Division	ALP	LP	GRN	SPA	CEC	OTH/Wilkie/Denison
Bass	43.4	39.7	15.6	0.0	1.3	0.0
Braddon	48.7	39.4	12.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Denison	35.8	22.7	19.0	0.0	0.0	1.3/21.3
Franklin	42.9	33.5	20.9	0.0	0.0	2.8
Lyons	48.9	32.7	16.8	1.7	0.0	0.0
State total	44.0	33.6	16.8	0.3	0.3	4.8

Source: Adapted from AEC Election Results 2010: <http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/federal_elections/2010/index.htm>

Table 16.3 Senate First Preferences by Group: Tasmania, 2010

First preferences for Tasmania Quota: 47 242 Enrolment: 358 567				
Group	Votes	%	Swing	Quota
Liberal	109 023	33.0	-4.4	2.31
ALP	136 908	41.4	+1.3	2.90
Australian Greens	67 016	20.3	+2.1	1.42
Family First	4045	1.2	-0.8	0.09
DLP (Democratic Labor Party)	1560	0.5	-0.2	0.03
Shooters and Fishers	6649	2.0	+2.0	0.14
Australian Democrats	1608	0.5	+0.5	0.03
Secular Party of Australia	574	0.2	+0.2	0.01
Senator On-Line	1488	0.5	+0.5	0.03
The Climate Sceptics	766	0.2	+0.2	0.02
Unendorsed/ungrouped amalgamated	1054	0.3	-0.4	0.02
Senate Ghost Groups amalgamated	0	0.00	-0.9	0.00
FORMAL	330 691	96.8	-0.6	
INFORMAL	1047	3.2	+0.6	
TOTAL	341 738	95.31	-0.7	

Source: Adapted from AEC Election Results 2010: <http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/federal_elections/2010/index.htm>

Labor's Geoff Lyons triumphed in Bass with a 6.1 per cent increase in Labor's first-preference vote supported by a high Greens vote that flowed through to a 56.7 per cent two-party preferred vote, representing a 5.7 per cent swing to the Liberals. The Liberal's Steve Titmus had to concede defeat on the back of a disappointing 3.7 per cent drop in first-preference votes. Bass was no longer highly marginal.

It was a similar story in Braddon. Labor's Sid Sidebottom had a decisive victory that moved Braddon out of highly marginal status. Sidebottom secured victory on the back of a 3.8 per cent swing in first preferences, an increase in the Greens vote of 3.8 per cent, and a lacklustre Liberal vote—a loss of 3.6 per cent on first preferences. Sidebottom secured a two-party preferred percentage of 57.5 per cent and a 5.2 per cent swing to Labor.

No-one predicted Andrew Wilkie's victory. When the counting was complete, he had secured 51.2 per cent on the two-candidate preferred basis over Labor's Jonathan Jackson (48.8 per cent). How did this happen? The short answer is that voters in Denison abandoned Labor (−12.4 per cent first-preference swing), once again could not support the Liberals (−7.3 per cent), and shifted to Wilkie rather than the Greens (+0.4 per cent).

Finishing ahead of the Greens candidate, Geoff Couser, and just behind Liberal, Cameron Simpkins, Wilkie was well placed to challenge Jackson when the distribution of preferences began and a two-candidate preferred battle ensued. Polling-booth analysis reveals that Wilkie had a significant 65 per cent two-candidate preferred vote in high-income, socioeconomically advantaged residential areas such as Sandy Bay, Battery Point, Tarooma and Waimea Heights, and was able to maintain an approximately 60/40 per cent advantage in at least 17 other polling booths. These booths equate to just less than half the total in the electorate.

Julie Collins replicated Labor's victory march in Franklin. On the back of a 6.2 per cent increase in the Greens' first-preference vote, Collins managed a small 2.2 per cent increase and a two-party preferred vote of 60.8 per cent against a Liberal vote of 39.2 per cent and a swing of 6.8 per cent. The Liberals faced another compelling defeat, losing 7.8 per cent on first preferences in Franklin, and the electorate continued to display its Green tinge.

Labor's Dick Adams increased his two-party preferred vote on the back of a 5.4 per cent first-preference swing and a substantial Greens vote (16.8 per cent—a 5.8 per cent swing). Adams' two-party preferred vote improved from 58.3 per cent in 2007 to a massive 62.3 per cent in 2010—a 4 per cent swing. Liberal candidate, Eric Hutchinson, secured the smallest swing against the party on first preferences (−0.8 per cent), but that would have been little comfort. Lyons is Dick Adams' seat until he chooses to retire.

Post-Election Analysis

Two issues are worthy of some discussion post election: Andrew Wilkie's negotiation with Labor and the fallout for the Liberal Party in Tasmania.

The detail of Wilkie's agreement with Labor tells us much about his intentions in the Parliament. Wilkie knows well that his future as the Member for Denison will now be about outcomes rather than the rhetoric of 'new political paradigms'. Beyond his commitment to supporting stable government and principles around transparent and accountable government, some of Wilkie's proposals have been adopted within the *Agreement for a Better Parliament* document.

The Liberal Party in Tasmania is busily licking its wounds as a result of its poor results. An independent review is being undertaken of the campaign including preselection processes and campaign strategy, and a very public discussion is emerging, driven by defeated Senate candidate Guy Barnett, around the power and influence of senior Liberal Senator Eric Abetz within the Tasmanian Liberal Party organisation. Senator Barnett, who will depart the Senate in June 2011, described the Tasmanian result for the party as 'diabolical and disappointing', but State Liberal Party President, Sam McQuestin, a Liberal candidate for the Legislative Council seat of Launceston, said the party's comparatively poor performance in Tasmania was not a reflection of its candidates or volunteers (*Examiner*, 24 August 2010).

Conclusion

Tasmania bucked the national trend (–5.4 per cent against Labor on first preferences) to return four Labor members to the House of Representatives—all with significantly increased two-party preferred margins—and three Labor senators, all of whom were women and two of them newcomers to the Parliament.

The election of Independent Andrew Wilkie in Denison, and his extensive negotiated agreement with the Gillard Labor minority government, will continue to be the subject of much scrutiny over the course of the Parliament.

The Liberal Party in Tasmania is at a crossroads over its capacity to attract both the voting public and candidates who can connect with the constituency.

References

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