



## **Mrs Nichole Overall**

### Inaugural Speech

Extracted from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Tuesday 22 March 2022

**Mrs NICHOLE OVERALL (Monaro) (15:22):** I quote:

And the Snowy River riders on the mountains make their home,  
Where the river runs those giant hills between;

Banjo Paterson's bush hero, fearlessly racing down the mountain in pursuit of the "colt that got away", first entered public consciousness in 1890. More than 130 years on, *The Man from Snowy River*, and the place with which he is so closely associated, Monaro, continue to capture the wider imagination, and both have long earned their place in the annals of Australian history. Well before and ever after, the deep connection of our locale's ancient peoples can be witnessed in some of the most significant traditional sites in our great nation, which coexist within the broader bounds of Monaro.

In respecting the heritage of the oldest continuing culture in the world, it was from the first languages that the place name "Monaro" ultimately emerged. Altered many times—Monera, Moneroo, Maneroo and more—before its final incarnation, the meaning is still debated, but it is thought to embody the essence of the diverse landscape for which it is recognised. Then there is that tricky pronunciation. It is held that Holden's original 1967 coupé was named for the area. A member of the company's design team passing through Cooma apparently spotted it on a council sign. Proving he was not a local, the popular model was dubbed Mon-ar-o rather than Mon-air-o, and every resident will expect you to know the difference. That is yet another fascinating thread woven into the cultural fabric of this special place, first happened upon by the land's newest arrivals almost precisely two centuries ago as they began to venture south of Sydney.

In a 1976 publication marking the 150th anniversary of settlement in the south-eastern corner of the colony of New South Wales, Mrs Lauri Neal wrote of the "characters with whom we can feel an emotional link, whether they be the young shepherds, the lonely stockmen, the struggling farmers, the hopeful diggers, the hardy merchants, or the quiet engineers". From our colonial past to the progress we witnessed from the turn of the twentieth century, to our embrace of modern multicultural Australia in our ongoing national evolution, each of these elements of who we are has played and continues to play an important part in shaping our destiny. With all of that in mind, how delighted I am to have called this region home for more than three decades. And beyond that, the pride I feel in being elected to serve as the parliamentary representative of this extraordinary electorate must be visibly radiating from me.

It is an incredible thing to stand here in this most historic of establishments, to speak of a famed poem, and to have the chance to wax lyrical on a location unique in the length and breadth of our "sunburnt country". Nerriga and Araluen are its top, through to Braidwood, Queanbeyan and the many satellites in their orbits, including Bungendore and Captains Flat. Travelling through its heart along the primary thoroughfare created in 1938, marked on maps as the Monaro Highway 20 years later, is Cooma and beyond: Nimmitabel, Bombala,

Jindabyne, Adaminaby, Delegate, where it marks the waypoint with the Victorian border. I refer to the rolling plains and the foothills leading on to the slopes of "The Snowies", our portion of the Australian Alps, the pinnacle of which is the awe-inspiring Mount Kosciuszko, or, closer to its native Polish, "Ku-shoo-zko".

I am not going to overlook Dalgety. In the early 1900s it was one of the top contenders in the battle to become the capital city of a newly federated nation. It was pipped at the post and instead Canberra landed in Queanbeyan's backyard. I refer to all of the other smaller villages and hamlets too, from Bredbo to Majors Creek, nestled within the more than 20,000 kilometres of Monaro's boundaries. A political seat since the first sitting of this very Parliament in 1856, it has been served by 24 different members. It has only recently come to my attention that one of those members has a statue almost directly in front of this great House and for whom Sydney's civic heart, Martin Place, was named. Sir James Martin, as his monument attests, was a "champion of self-reliance and public education". He was also the fourth MP for Monaro in 1864. He subsequently served as Premier three times before being appointed Chief Justice of New South Wales. Dare I say, that is quite a record of public achievement to be following on from.

As the twenty-fifth member for Monaro, not for a moment lost on me is the historic import and the equally great privilege of being the first woman to ever represent the electorate in more than 165 years of its European story—not the reason why I am here, but a significant and poignant realisation nonetheless. I do not deny I am in awe of actually standing where I am today. The last five months have been quite the ride for me also, and for those on this journey with me. I am a mum, a wife, a daughter, sister and aunt, and a friend. I have been a journalist, a small business owner, an author, a community champion and, you probably will not be too surprised to learn, an avid historian.

My interest in politics began early and while it had variously crossed my radar in the course of an otherwise diverse life path, finding myself here now is somewhat unexpected. In saying that, to channel musical icon Julie Andrews as she climbed every mountain in search of her dream: When a door closes, somewhere a window opens. While not raised in Monaro, it turned out I had quite a longstanding connection. My grandparents had lived there during the 1950s. My pop was a shearer on the historic property Carwoola, between Queanbeyan and Captains Flat. I was born and grew up in Griffith, New South Wales, in the heart of the Riverina. It is a terrific, diverse regional city and I have many friends and family still there. My mum was a trainee nurse when she met my father, a truck driver. Both were very young when I arrived, to be followed by a sister and brother. It was a tough childhood. There was not much money, nor a great deal of household harmony, and we had to deal with a lot.

As difficult as some of my early life experiences were, they produced in me characteristics I would not change: resilience, forthrightness, empathy, a rather pronounced streak of determination—some might say occasionally stubborn—and loyalty. And when I give you my word, you can be assured I will back it. What I will not do though is promise the world and deliver a globe, personally or professionally. Growing up, we spent much time with our grandparents at their small property at Hay where it backs onto the Murrumbidgee. There I did what country kids do: I swam and fished in that river, rode horses and motorbikes, and drove a tractor

around the paddocks. I also saw the real job—the successes, the hardships and the dedication of those living, working, running farms and small businesses and raising families in regional and rural Australia. In my teenage years, much talk over the dinner table revolved around interest rates approaching 18 per cent as the country hurtled towards what Paul Keating told us was "the recession we had to have". I experienced first-hand the almost crippling effects on my wider family alone.

Our local State and Federal members of that period were well known to us and highly regarded generally, Tim Fischer, Noel Hicks, Jim Small and Adrian Cruickshank—Nationals all. That grassroots nature of genuine local politics—representatives who had similarly lived and worked in their communities, who knew their communities and what mattered to them—resonated for me then and now. Some of my early interest in journalism came from my pop's seemingly inexhaustible archive of *The Weekly Times*, known for more than 150 years as the "Bible of the Bush", for good reason. While I also had an interest in law, the more creative side of me prevailed. A communications degree at the University of Canberra followed. I was the first in my wider family to ever go to university. I moved four hours from home to Queanbeyan, more or less because it reminded me of the country town that I had just left. For me, Canberra was still a big city. My career started out on the *Tumut and Adelong Times*, a fabulous all-round experience.

I was quite keen on the business world too. Back in Queanbeyan I launched a local entertainment magazine when I was still in my early twenties, with \$100 in the bank and no financial backing. I sold that successful business six years later. I had returned to my first passion—media and communications. I also earned something of a reputation as a regional historian during my husband Tim's 17 years in local government. This would include his 13 years as mayor of Queanbeyan and Queanbeyan-Palerang, from 2008 until his decision last year that almost two decades of service to the community in that guise was accomplishment enough. Thanks to that time, I am not a complete novice when it comes to elections. I ran Tim's four successful campaigns. By-elections, though, I can now fully attest are such unusual beasts. Monaro has not had one since 1918.

While in some ways the feeling is a little like being the colloquial "12th man", awaiting a generally unexpected and highly visible late entrance to the field of play, I also had the privilege to experience great teamwork. Even prior to putting myself forward, I had been encouraged, backed and supported not only by my friends and family but also by The Nationals family. From our Monaro branch, State team and executive, our leaders, Ministers, MPs, members and supporters, so many rallied behind me and for me from the outset. So, too, others who are part of this Coalition Government, and Federal colleagues also, who came out to stand beside me. In stepping up to demonstrate that your faith and confidence in me is deserved by working as hard as I could every single day over the course of a long campaign, so will I continue to work just as hard for you, for my electorate and for our great State, New South Wales.

I am a team player. One of the reasons I have enjoyed team sports my entire life—a shout-out here to some of my previous and current teams, Queanbeyan Bears Softball Club, Queanbeyan City Football Club and Monaro Panthers FC—is because I believe it reveals much about character: playing your part to the absolute

best of your ability and encouraging others to do the same, being reliable and dedicated, and never giving up until the final siren sounds. One of the most meaningful compliments I received throughout my election campaign was from a local who I have played against rather than with. Her message to me was, "If you're as hardworking and tenacious in standing up for the community as you are on the soccer pitch, Monaro will do well." As I have in all aspects of my life, I promise to be just as hardworking and tenacious in standing up for my communities in this role.

Most put themselves forward for public service such as this on the basis that they want to make a difference. For me, it is also about doing things differently, effecting change not just for the sake of it but because it is necessary. My passion for exploring and animating the past also fuels my forward thinking. From a political perspective, this is not only for a year's time or the four years after that but, as the old saying goes, looking to plant trees under the shade of which I will never sit. We can proudly boast as our own some of the greatest examples of this we have ever witnessed: the groundbreaking Snowy Hydro and now the Snowy 2.0. I am committed to seeing the continued development of the special activation precinct at Jindabyne, a 40-year vision for the transformation of the gateway to one of the most popular tourist destinations in the country.

The critical key that opens so many doors is education. To be able to bring to fruition the long aspired to new and upgraded schools for Monaro is something I am determined to see happen, not because of an electoral cycle but because I know how long my communities have been calling for these vital pieces of infrastructure and services in our region. And they are so much more than just infrastructure. Schools are the very heart of our communities, shaping both the future of our young people as well as the places we call home. To continue to positively shape them, we need to be able to educate our own, train our own, provide for our own and keep our own. This is how our communities continue to thrive.

Looking after our most vulnerable is another area of great personal importance to me. Over the past few decades, my involvements have included seven years as president of Meals on Wheels Queanbeyan, being chair of Queanbeyan headspace, involvement with local education facilities and fundraising endeavours for our local health services, as well as supporting organisations involved with victims of domestic violence and the homeless. How we care for those in need is one of the great testaments to who we are. This includes our elders, ensuring that those who have given so much of themselves know that they continue to be valued members of our communities and are afforded the dignity and respect they have earned.

As everyone knows, when it comes to aged care and health care there are major challenges, and it is even harder in our smaller regional and rural areas. However, that is when it becomes even more critical to ensure they are not overlooked. This is a situation, I am very saddened to say, we are currently facing down in Bombala at a residential aged-care facility, Currawarna, which was originally brought into being through the hard work and dedication of the town's residents. While the provision of such services is the purview of the Federal Government, ultimately it is about us all. What is required is cooperation and collaboration across levels, and I will do all I can to support the formulation and implementation of long-term, sustainable solutions in this regard. There are the more commonplace issues, too, be it the state of our roads, which have taken such a

beating, or biosecurity, from wild dogs to invasive weeds and the damage they inflict on what is one of the most significant agricultural and grazing regions in the country. It is not necessarily headline-grabbing stuff, but they are everyday matters that matter to everyday lives and so also matter to me.

Over the past few years in Monaro we have dealt with most of what nature can throw at us. And, of course, this is on top of two years of incredible hardship that none of us could have imagined, despite the lessons that should have been better learnt from history and the influenza pandemic of 1918-19. More than a century later I have had one tired and frustrated young person, in talking about the impact of COVID on themselves, their friends and family, describe it to me as "a time of non-life". With that phrase ringing in my ears, my focus now and into the future is on our continued recovery, not only economically but also psychologically. It is on backing small business, ensuring secure work and job opportunities, and assisting in the provision of homes people can afford to live in, particularly those for whom this is an ongoing struggle. It is on caring for our environment too—indeed, continuing to be at the forefront in this in the example this Government is setting, offering attainable and sustainable solutions, which is something our farmers and land managers in particular are attuned to more than most.

And in light of everything we have faced locally, as a State and nationally, with the heartbreak and devastation of the last month alone uppermost in our minds, and acknowledging the incredible assistance already provided in this respect, my focus is on how we continue to further improve our capacity to anticipate and deal with disasters both natural and man-made. In 1956 then Senator John F. Kennedy wrote in a book, *Profiles in Courage*:

... there are few, if any, issues where all the truth and all the right and all the angels are on one side.

Political compromise, he went on to say, is:

... the fine art of conciliating, balancing and interpreting the forces and factions of public opinion, an art essential to keeping our nation united and enabling our Government to function.

I could not agree more. No-one really gets by in life without the support and care, and sometimes the prodding, of others. I have so many who have helped me on my path that sees me here before you today. Supporters and friends, new and old, how I would like to individually name every one of you—but that would possibly lead to my first ejection from this illustrious Chamber! However, please know that all of you are in my mind and my heart.

Those I will talk of briefly include the former member for Monaro and Deputy Premier, John Barilaro. Monaro is not a safe seat, and John's accomplishments over more than a decade were remarkable. He delivered much for the electorate, precisely as his role as its representative and primary advocate demanded. I now look forward to building on this and forging a new road forward. I wish John well for his future and thank him for his confidence in me to continue to advance Monaro's cause. I also thank for being here today the Hon.

Gary Nairn, AO, Federal member for Eden-Monaro from 1996 to 2007 and a long-time family friend. So do I thank NSW Nationals State director Joe Lundy, chair Andrew Fraser and all those in the head office team. I thank my dedicated campaign team, Angus Webber and Rowan Carter, backed up by Alysia and Ashley and supported by George Lemon. Rowan suggested that we pulled off what would normally equate to a year-long campaign in just four months, and I appreciate all of their efforts in achieving what we did.

So am I grateful to our Monaro branch members, including some of the newest that I have had the pleasure to introduce. I am grateful to the Ministers who travelled far and wide with me in the course of the campaign: Sam Farraway, Dugald Saunders, Kevin Anderson and Sarah Mitchell, who could not have given me more support with our local schools. I am so looking forward to working more closely with you all, as well as the rest of our team. And of course I thank our deputy leader, the indomitable Bronnie Taylor, who has been such a support for me throughout it all. I thank Dunc Taylor too for putting up with us fretting around the Taylor kitchen at all hours. Thank you to you both—perhaps most of all for your friendship.

I would also like to mention Sue Litchfield of Cooma. I am sure Sue will not mind me revealing she has recently turned 80, and she remains a local powerhouse and the epitome of dedicated women throughout regional and rural Australia. I was so pleased that one of my first official duties was to nominate and present Sue as our 2022 Monaro Woman of the Year. To those who are essentially family to us and rallied as my own supporter army—including Brent and Kat Hunter, who are here today with baby Eliza; Trudy and Shane Taylor; the Brays; Biscottis and Nat Harper—a heartfelt thanks to you all. Also thanks to members of our clans on both sides, my sister, Michelle, and her Albury-based family; my brother, Damon; and my mum, Lorraine, in Queensland.

As I have mentioned, it was not an easy road for us when we were kids, but my mum worked hard to keep a roof over our heads and to make sure we had the opportunities of an education, and has always believed in us unequivocally. Thanks, Mum, for all you did and for the sacrifices I know you made. I also beg your indulgence to note here today my grandma Shirley. I am sad to say she died just a few weeks before the by-election, at almost 90, still living on the family property on the Hay Plain. A hardworking and gracious woman, I am so pleased I at least had the chance to let her know that I had put myself forward for this great challenge. Her words to me were, "I've always had faith in you."

Finally, I turn to three of the finest people I know, beginning with our sons, Nick and Alex. I am a little bit biased, but they are amazing young men—and I would think so even if I did not have the privilege of being their mum. I am so proud of you both for who you are. And of course there is Tim Overall, always in my corner whatever I have put my mind to over our 25 years of marriage—a milestone just passed on the first of this month, the same date they officially declared the poll. Again, biased I may be, but there are plenty who agree that Tim is truly a top bloke—and an accomplished one too, not least for having delivered a transformative and well-received vision for the Queanbeyan-Palerang area of Monaro. Thank you, Tim, for agreeing to marry me when I asked you, for encouraging me to be who I am and for being by my side through it all.

The Deputy Premier, currently Acting Premier and our NSW Nationals leader, the Hon. Paul Toole—to whom I also owe much thanks—recently described me as someone who is intensely passionate about, and a champion for, my communities. I truly love the place I have called home for more than 30 years, where I have worked, run businesses, raised a family and been involved in my community in many ways. This, now, is all about Monaro and my fellow residents. My role is to listen, engage, hear, and progress their hopes and aspirations for where we live. That does not mean I will always be able to please everyone all the time, but they can have confidence that I will stand up for them and fight as hard as I possibly can to ensure their voices are heard.

Thank you, then, for this greatest of honours to be the elected representative of our magnificent Monaro. I will do everything in my power to deliver what is wanted and needed as we step forward into the future together. Thank you.