

“In Support of Progress” Newsletter

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The Tarkine Action - a followup

I have not heard so much cock and bull in my life as the Greens rant over the Federal Court decision on the Tarkine matter.

Minister McKim celebrated the news – another reason to sack him from the Ministry - and Christine Milne warned mining companies they have to be more respectful of environmental issues. Yet the issue that has arisen has nothing I repeat NOTHING to do with the actions or attitudes of a mining company. Shree Minerals did everything that was required of them - and more. In fact the Minister imposed a range of additional conditions on the company when approving their application.

The issue that has arisen concerns the Tasmanian Devil, and a pertinent document relating to the devil (recently classified as an endangered species because of the facial tumour disease) entitled “Approved Conservation Advice for the ...Tasmanian Devil”.

In making his finding in support of the application by Shree Minerals to develop a mine on the NW Coast, Minister Burke referred to “all and any relevant conservation advice”. The judge however ruled that he should have referred to the PARTICULAR conservation advice. To quote from his findings:

Cl 47 The Act requires that...the Minister must have regard to any approved conservation advice for the species.

*Cl 49 It is irrelevant ... that most of the material in the advice was before the Minister by other means. The Act requires the Minister to have regard to **the** conservation advice”*

There is in fact some debate regarding whether “having regard to...” actually means the Minister has to cite the document. Probably a moot point now.

As you can see, it is a matter of words, not deeds, or in this case a lack of deeds. The Minister considered information that was contained in the conservation advice, as well as other conservation advices. The judge acknowledges this. So the fault was not a lack of consideration of the advice. He did consider advice when making his decision. It was just that he was too “overarching” in his language when describing the available documents when making his decision.

That is all it is, nothing more.

For the Greens to grandstand claiming victory over mining on environmental grounds is a total absurdity. For the media to swallow this line says a lot about the media. Apparently, you can feed them anything – even a falsehood.

The new Minister has decided he has to go through all the documentation before reviewing the decision. This is probably a wise precaution, but frustrating none the less.

In my last newsletter, I stated that the actions taken by conservation activists had weakened the conservation cause. The support given them by Greens politicians is rapidly destroying their standing in the community as well.

Freight

In Issue 1313 I discussed the need to resolve the Bass Strait freight issue. This is not an academic exercise – it is real and it is urgent. Companies are now announcing closure of operations (eg One Steel) or reducing workforces (PacAl) because of the present absurd and expensive freight arrangements.

The Premier says these decisions have been taken because of the global economy. No Premier, it is because of continuing government inaction.

The State Minister established an advice panel in November last year. The Freight Logistics Coordination Team has cost over \$1.5 million and is still to report on this matter – they have been deliberating for many months, and still no action. The Federal government, which has funded the panel, has provided a short-term financial fix, but with no long-term solution in sight.

Action needs to be taken, and it needs to be taken now. The State Liberals have suggested a scheme involving State monies, but that is not the answer. It is a Federal responsibility, and the Federal Government must resolve it. The Liberals must lobby Abbott, and the State Government must lobby Rudd. There is no better time to do so.

The boat presently coming into Bell Bay is an interim fix, but after Bell Bay it goes on to New Zealand for cargo. A slow and expensive exercise.

A possible long-term solution involves a vessel travelling direct to Brisbane – known as the training vessel plan – another involves a direct service to SE Asia, but this has obvious (volume-based) limitations. These decisions can be made NOW.

The time for mirror committees is over. Tasmania can ill afford further delay.

Genetically Modified Crops

GM has been given some coverage in recent times as a result of the government decision to review its policy on this matter, and of an article written by Greg Barns in last Monday's Mercury.

Removing the emotion from the argument – an impossible task I know – it needs to be said that nature has been engaged in genetic modification from the year dot. Plant breeding is but an accelerated form of a natural process – some strains will be of advantage, others not so. And GM is a tool in plant breeding.

The so-called green revolution, saving millions from poverty, starvation and death, was a direct result of providing new strains of crops with higher yields and greater resistance from disease. The fact that there is some risk involved is no reason to not be involved.

For Tasmania to argue on the one hand that its future lies in agriculture, and on the other to argue that it should not play a part in this endeavour is to essentially turn its back on science, is grossly hypocritical, and will lead us inevitably to lesser, not greater, opportunities in the market place.

This newsletter is supported by Tasman Management Services.

Further information is provided at www.julianamos.com.au



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