

ISSUE 1901

"In Support of Progress" Newsletter

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Happy New Year

The 12 days of Christmas have come and gone. As has the revamped Taste of Tasmania. Holidays are being enjoyed. The Cygnet Folk Festival looms, as does the Wooden Boat Festival.

And further afield a Federal election. Crazy times ahead. A Federal government already referencing as its centrepiece platform how bad the Opposition is! Is that all it can say? Is that its only feather that it has to fly with? The only arrow in the quiver? Not good enough – if it continues to do so, all that will happen is the Opposition will win by default, and that is also not good enough.

It is also becoming apparent that the political fringe is winning the media wars. It is the fringe that grabs the attention for its outrageousness, and for its populism. It espouses the politics of division, and it thus begs the question, as raised once before in these pages, as to what it is that unites us – what is it that makes us unique, and what is it that is our overriding common purpose as a society. In my view we – and our politicians – need to reflect on that which unites, rather than that which divides.

Success

I am intrigued by the response of the Hobart City Council to its very successful presentation of the the Taste of Tasmania. Has it embraced its success? Not at all. Instead it is pondering whether it will continue to be involved with it.

Events such as this come at a cost, it is true, and so the focus should be on that, rather than pulling the pin altogether.

I cannot help but think that we just do not know how to handle success. For so many years we were just average, average performance, average outcomes. Just enough was good enough. In fact we tended to frown on success, and for those who grasped at it – the tall poppy syndrome.

And then along came our "black swan" event. MONA. It knocked our socks off and challenged the existing paradigm of "being average". In fact it challenged us in our approach to lifestyle. And it succeeded. We have changed. Suddenly we were centre stage – a huge attraction, and the world was beating down our door to embrace the quality Tasmanian experience.

Employment came in our food and wine presentations, in the hospitality industry in all its guises, in our craft and in our design. We were quirky, we were different, we were INTERESTING. People in fact wanted to come and live here. Just imagine. We were SUCCESSFUL.

So what have we done to embrace this new paradigm? What have we been able to do to build on this success, and take us to the much vaunted "next level"?

Unfortunately, in many ways our response has been that of a marsupial caught in the headlights. Stunned.

Now the calls are out that MONA is TOO far out, that there are TOO MANY tourists, that there is not enough housing, that our infrastructure is groaning under the pressure etc etc. These calls really reflect a lack of foresight and planning. Things don't just happen in isolation. We may have been caught short, with the unexpected falling in our lap. The overwhelming response should be to ride this tiger, rather than cage it. Adapt. Adapt. Adapt.

Infrastructure 1

Two areas of high volume tourism are Coles Bay and Bruny Island. Toilet facilities are inadequate. Ferry services are inadequate. Accommodation is under pressure.

What have we done about it? What is the co-ordination between the various tiers of government to MAKE THINGS HAPPEN. Well, a year ago – almost to the day (and at risk of plagiarizing my own work) I wrote the following:

It is somewhat disconcerting to hear of the ... lack of adequate toilet facilities around the state...another example of things not being ... thought through.

.... The provision of toilet facilities – even porta-loos - coupled with aerobic waste-water treatment plants is not an expensive option at all, and they can be installed immediately, even if only on a temporary basis. Far better to do that and ensure tourists are not placed in such discomfort, than to do nothing while yet another consultant is engaged to write yet another report.

Meanwhile...

While on the topic of tourist facilities, a development application (DA) was lodged almost a year ago to enable a more effective management and movement of people in a sensitive national park. Essentially, cars out, a ferry service in. The developer accompanied the DA with a draft management plan, simply because there was not one already drawn up.

The Minister, Parks Service and the Co-ordinator General advised that they could not consider the DA because there was no management plan, and then, without advising the original proponent, tendered out the drafting of a new management plan, at a cost of around \$100K, which contained in its scope matters that were already covered in the DA and the accompanying management plan.

This decision has caused considerable delay in protecting a rather fragile environment (people are still flocking to the place), has caused considerable unnecessary expenditure in engaging yet another consultant, and has soured the relationship with the original potential developer. Why was it necessary to be so pig-headed?

If the draft management plan met all the criteria, as it seems to have done because the issues raised were then laid down in the subsequent scope, why not accept it as a draft management plan – maybe with some peer review - under which the DA could then be considered. The job would have been done by now, money would have been saved, the value of the precinct would not have been further diminished, an investment would have been made and the reputation of Tasmania as a place to do business would not have been tarnished.

It is a year since I wrote that piece, which was referring to Coles Bay and the Freycinet National Park. And still nothing... One year on – nothing! The paradigm is obvious. Let's go slow, let's not adapt. Too many visitors! Let's complain about our success instead. NOT GOOD ENOUGH!

Infrastructure 2

The Government has stated that it has on its books some \$2.9 billion worth of capital works to spend over the next 5 years. A lot of money and a lot of projects.

And yet, how will it deliver them? What organisation will manage that expenditure, to the benefit of taxpayers?

Well, it seems that the government does not know what to do or how to do it. It formed a "high level" committee some time back to consider such matters, but the committee has been bogged down by what I can only call "silo" issues.

The expenditure of this amount of money will require a certain degree of logistics work and involve a level of construction risk. What sort of skills will we need? When and where will we need them? What training of our workforce is required? Who will do the work? Who will oversight that work? Who will manage these projects? And how will they be co-ordinated?

If it was a single company, such matters would be bread and butter. But for our government ... "Nope, don't know!", comes the response... We're working on it!! "Maybe we should find resources on the mainland!" Of course, these are self-defeating arguments. Not only is local talent and resources being denied - and it should be a priority of government to spend its money in the state, thereby supporting local business and employment - but the real talent interstate is already occupied on their own projects, so no answers there.

It's a bit like the comment above - we are left with a lot of talk, a lot of committees looking into it, but NO resolution. Basically, we cant handle it, but we cannot admit to not being able to handle it.

Which leads to the real risk - that the projects wont be delivered at all. At least not within the timeline, and not withn any budget.

The Oil Rig

UNBELIEVABLE!!!

The oil rug Ocean Monarch arrived in the Derwent Estuary on 17 November for refurbishment and repairs, having travelled from the other side of the country. Its owner is Diamond Offshore Drilling Inc., a Texas-based company.

The company has refused permission for the State's Environment Protection Authority (EPA) to visit the rig and to carry out an underwater inspection. It has now advised that **IT** will do the inspection. So obviously, some 50 days later no inspection has yet been undertaken. Apparently the EPA is still considering its legal options.

This is beyond absurd. It is in fact a disgrace. The EPA **MUST** have the right to inspect the rig. It is nothing less than a proper act of quarantine/biosecurity. If in fact the Act does not give it that right, then the Act must be amended to so do. And as a matter of priority.

Now, where do the environmental warriors stand on this. Deathly quiet. Why? This is after all their *raison d'être*. If it was a coal mine...

The government has also been very quiet about this matter. It should not be. It is not too far a call to say its very sovereignty is being called into question. Who runs this show, the government or the company?

And what of the company? Very strange indeed. Why on earth would they refuse permission to do so. It simply raises suspicions and doubts. I am suspicious!

The Hobart City Deal

A 2015 Federal Government initiative, the City Deals program, was a key mechanism for delivering on the Smart Cities Plan. That plan was to make cities more "liveable" - for jobs, transport, housing, and a healthy environment. The program called on the involvement of the 3 tiers of government

Launceston signed up in 2017 to the Launceston City Deal, a 5-year program with 3 major projects, being the re-siting of the University, the City Heart Project, and the Health of the Tamar River (12 water projects have now been approved within that broader project), all three conforming to the guidelines of the Smart Cities Plan. Funds have been committed.

Hobart also wanted a deal, and in early 2018, with much fanfare the governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding to "progress" a deal. Such a deal would include:

- An Antarctic Centre at Macquarie Pt
- An Act of Parliament, to be known as the Greater Hobart Act, to allow the collaboration of all Hobart Councils
- A Greater Hobart Transport Vision, including light rail and ferries; and
- The UTas STEM project

Great enthusiasm and hype all round. No promise of money from the Federal Government, but "a deal would be in place by the end of the year". However, the language exposed the hype. Under the Smart Cities guidelines, the parties agreed to:

Examine options – (to facilitate an Antarctic precinct)

Create a Greater Hobart Transport Vision (to guide a co-ordinated approach to transport planning), which includes:

Assess the feasibility of future public transport options

Consider ways to support the future use of northern rail

Establish a Greater Hobart Act to provide a strategic framework for local councils to work together - presently out for consultation

Examine options to facilitate the development of the Uni's STEM project

Explore options to support affordable housing

In other words, more talk, all talk. (NB my underlining)

In November, the Minister for Cities visited Hobart and said that the deal should be finalised by the end of the year. **AND THAT** \$461m for the Bridgewater Bridge, promised in the May Budget, was a part of the Hobart City Deal. Oh? Really? What about all the planning, the exploring of options etc etc.

Still no deal. Could it be possible that the Bridgewater Bridge IS the Hobart City Deal? We'll see.

Of fire and flood

A big fire in the Wild Rivers National Park - a part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area - has now burned through 20,000 hectares of forest and button grass plain. It was caused by a lightning strike.

The question is: if it is wilderness, what should be done to manage fire? Imagine the hue and cry if one did nothing. Or suggested fire trails. And yet, we still want firefighters to put their lives at risk to control this blaze. After all, lightning and fire is an integral part of nature. It is indeed a difficult question to answer.

Wanting it both ways, wilderness on the one hand – fire control on the other.