

ISSUE 1903

“In Support of Progress”

Newsletter

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Foundation Days

Fire

Revised Estimates

Political Optics

Hobart City Deal

Housing and Traffic

Health

Macquarie Point

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Foundation Days

Australia Day to Regatta Day. Two long weekends, now an integral part of the general holiday and festival scene. Both days are a recognition of European discovery and settlement. And bookends to the end of holidays.

Abel Tasman first sighted ‘van Diemen’s Land’ in November 1642. In 1838, some 35 years after British settlement, Governor Franklin declared the Regatta Day holiday. It was to be a “water sports” day. In 1879 the day was moved from November/December to February as it was a more “convenient” time to do so. It has been a long weekend celebration ever since.

Australia Day, which celebrates the landing in Sydney Cove of the First Fleet, has had a more chequered history. For many years, in the colony of New South Wales, it was known as Foundation Day. It was first acknowledged in 1818, and continued to be called that for many years. It was essentially a NSW affair, as other colonies, such as Tasmania, had their own celebratory day.

In fact the name “Australia Day” was not in universal use until 1935, and it was not celebrated on the day until 1994. The land of the long weekend indeed.

Should it be moved to another day, to a day that actually reflects the creation of the nation state of Australia? No way, maybe, possibly, probably. It is a divisive topic, and encourages strongly held views, on both sides of the debate. It is a topic that won’t go away, and whatever else might happen, it will need a better understanding for it to become a truly “representative” day.

The establishment of a European-centric society was done at the expense of an existing indigenous culture, and since 1938 many have declared January 26 as Invasion Day. It was possibly inevitable that European settlement would have occurred when it did, and also that it would have totally overpowered the existing inhabitants. However the fact remains that it did occur, and if the day is to be seen to be a day of unification and an expression of hope for the future, then it must also incorporate an acknowledgement of the past. It can do both.

I was particularly moved by a speech given by Stan Grant in 2016, on “the Australian Dream”. It is a sobering reminder of our past.

Between these two long weekends, many of us are now back at work, kids are back at school, government is back in action, traffic congestion has become a part of the normal routine, and the political agenda is heating up.

Fire

But also between the two, so much else has happened. By far the biggest event has been the fires that have ravaged so much of the landscape. The one fire referred to in #1901, which at the time had burnt 20,000 hectares, was small beer compared with what became a conflagration of many fires that consumed over 200,000 hectares of forest and scrub.

Luckily, fortunately, incredibly, there has been no loss of life, and only a small number of properties affected, and firefighters are to be commended for their work in setting and maintaining containment lines, against impossible odds.

The resources that were thrown into fighting these fires were extraordinary, of men and materiel, and I suspect the final bill will be such as to give the Treasurer many sleepless nights. There will be no surplus now.

These were all natural events. Fire taking hold as a result of lightning strikes. With high temperatures and high winds, in inaccessible country it became impossible to contain, and many towns and villages were threatened by the steady march of the fire fronts.

We have experienced such an event before. Dunalley in January 2013, and the January 1967 fires being of recent memory. January seems to be the month, when it is indeed hot, dry and windy.

And yet, so quick has been the commentary response that this has all been the result of climate change. One commentator has said that the prolonged dry has become the new normal, while in the same breath comparing these fires to those of 1932-33. Presumably there was a prolonged dry then also, long before the climate change phenomenon.

A Greens senator has even referred to the event as being the result of burning coal, which is not just a stupid thing to say, but is blatant nonsense. Talk about hyping it up!

A dry period, coupled with a buildup of fuel over many years makes these events inevitable, as it has in the past, and therefore all the more reason to plan and carry out preventative action. There is no room for complacency.

The Revised Estimates Report

The Revised Estimates Report, released on 30 January, shows a drop in the budget surplus from over \$161 to just over \$7m. That is some drop - what happened? The Treasurer said more had to be spent on health than was budgeted for, by over \$100m, together with some \$20m for out of home care services, and other factors.

What the Treasurer did not say was that the budget had allocated over \$100m less in health than what was expended last year, so this is simply filling that gap. So, that is **what** happened. The question is **why** has this situation come to pass?

Was it a simple error in the budget process, that over \$100m was left off the health budget, was it a desire to reduce health spending, and some plan to enable it to do so (which hasn't worked), or was it a deliberate concoction to make the budget "look good"? No proper explanation has yet been given.

Whatever the reason, the release of this shock horror situation came on the eve of deferred negotiations with the public sector unions for a pay rise – convenient timing indeed! Sorry guys, no money!

However what is more concerning is the lack of real transparency in the figures. Because while the government says it is in surplus, these figures represent only half of the story. Because they ignore borrowings.

Simply and maybe somewhat simplistically put:

I am in debt, so I borrow money, now I am in surplus.

The Government's Cash Flow Statement tells a different story. It shows a continuing cash deficit.

Even then, it ignores the 24-hour borrowings on 30 June to balance the books. The following graph represents the true cash picture at end-of-year, when these borrowings are removed. It tells a different story again.



Figures courtesy of J Lawrence at tasfintalk.blogspot.com

It is incumbent on the government to tell the whole story. To date it has resisted doing so.

Some Political optics

Liberal Senator Bushby announced his resignation from the Senate, only to be immediately appointed as Consul-General in Chicago. The Liberal Party then chose his sister to replace him. Simply put, the optics (of both events) are appalling. Jobs for the boys, and nepotism.

The Labor party has announced it has dropped its policy of opposition to pokies in pubs and clubs. The announcement was immediately pounced on by all and sundry, saying backflip, unbelievable, unprincipled etc. Take your pick.

It was a lose lose situation, to either maintain a policy they could not deliver on, and be condemned, or remove it from their platform, and be condemned. Sometimes decisions have to be made as to what is the lesser loss. They chose a path that will have significant repercussions for some time to come. Such has been the effect of having the policy in the first place. Sequence – consequence

Adam Brooks has announced he will be resigning from Parliament, which I suggest is a good career move for him. Staying in Parliament was not a realistic option for him, or for the government.

The government has repeated time and again that it took over 100 policies to the last election, but it has never released the list. I have asked for the list, but to date it has not been forthcoming. I can only presume they didn't have over 100 policies after all. I am happy to be proved wrong.

Hobart City Deal

BY the way, how's that City Deal going? What a sham.

Housing and Traffic

These two topics are becoming increasingly intertwined. On the one hand we have councils such as Kingborough promoting more development in their municipality, while on the other hand Hobart bemoans the traffic snarls caused by commuters coming into town from the outer suburbs.

The Hobart Lord Mayor, in a classic (reduce)demand side response, has called for commuters to "get out of their cars". Very helpful, not. How about more car spaces in your city, Lord Mayor. After all, office accommodation is in high demand, and continues to bring commuters into town.

On the (improve) Supply side, as mentioned previously the government is busy "planning" housing developments, but without actually building anything. Now they are advertising their solutions to the traffic crisis. A big one page spread in the local paper says it has a 7-point plan. An extraordinary presentation, headed "Tackling Traffic Congestion", it describes seven different actions that are being followed:

- 1 the dual carriageway of Macquarie and Davey Streets - in planning
- 2 Traffic and Incident Management - in planning
- 3 A new Bus Transit Centre - in planning
- 4 Southern Outlet 5th lane - in planning
- 5 SE Traffic Solution projects - in planning
- 6 Bus Priority Lanes - in planning
- 7A commuter ferry - in planning

There are two common themes here - reducing cars, and doing nothing. Neither are practical. They will die planning...

Meanwhile, the housing crisis continues to escalate.

Health

As if the Minister hasn't enough on his plate, nurses are already walking off the job, citing stress and impossible work loads.

He is now facing the option of not having any private provider operate the Hobart Private (an adjunct to the Royal Hobart Hospital), with talks with the present provider having broken down. "We want a neighbor that will look after our combined mix of patients better", says the Minister, which in translation sounds like he wants the private hospital to act as though it was a public hospital, and that sort of defeats the purpose of having a private hospital at all. The way he is going he won't have any neighbor at all, and that will only place an even greater burden on the Royal.

Particularly so, given the nature of the redevelopment of the Royal. The disaster that is the redevelopment - K block - has just hit another development hurdle with another subcontractor leaving the site and workers downing tools. The government says the development is on time and on budget. I stopped believing that months ago.

Macquarie Point

With some fanfare, the Authority announced the opening of a cycleway that crosses through the property, from south to north. It is quite an achievement, to be sure, to have a cycle way. The northern end doesn't actually lead to anything, other than a carpark at the end of the property. It will require some other authority, presumably the council, to connect the cycleway to the existing northern suburbs bicycle way link. Still, small beginnings!