

ISSUE 1916

"In Support of Progress" Newsletter

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What we do

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Climate

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Parking Meters

We're good at it. In fact we are VERY good at it. We do it all the time, so we should be good at it. Whenever there is a problem, an issue, a matter for resolution, a breakdown, a crisis, we do it.

WE HAVE MEETINGS! In fact we are all so very busy going to meetings.

A lot has been happening this week, and so it has been an especially good week for holding meetings.

HCC

It started with the Hobart City Council, which had a Council meeting to discuss climate. They decided to declare a "global climate and biodiversity emergency". One alderman described the use of the word "emergency" as showing leadership, while the Lord Mayor was proud to "stand in solidarity with governments and millions of people around the world". I suspect that after feeling and basking in that warm inner glow they then adjourned to have a nice cup of tea.

What does it mean? What is the call to action? A wind farm on the domain? Solar panels in our parks and gardens? Refuelling stations for our electric cars? No, none of that. In fact, in practical terms it meant nothing.

Health

Next came the Minister for Health, who called a meeting to discuss the health - or rather hospital - crisis. The Minister has been the Minister for the last 5 years, in which time things have got worse. The Auditor-General recently produced a scathing report. No-one that the Minister can point the finger at, so let's have a meeting.

People came from everywhere to discuss the matter. Overcrowded emergency departments, ambulance ramping, overworked medical staff, that sort of thing. At the end of the meeting the Minister proudly proclaimed that the hospital was experiencing culture issues, that patients should come first, and that attendees were going to go back into their workplaces to discuss culture. Well, wasn't that a successful meeting! No direction, just more meetings, more discussion. We're really earning our money.

Now I don't know about you, but in my book culture is a product of leadership. I understand from the website there is in the hospital a leader, with the title "Executive Director of Operations", to which all other Executive Directors and Directors report, and within the Tasmanian Health Service itself there is a "Chief People and Culture Officer". Presumably these people are responsible for the culture of the place. Yet from them not a peep. In a previous newsletter (#1914) I made the following comment:

The problem, put simply, is administrative, not medical. It is overly complex, with archaic practices. One can always "complexify" matters when one wants to do so. Silo protection within administrations is always based on "complexification". Hospital administrators are paid to run hospitals. If they can't, then change them. It is that simple.

I meant in then, and I mean it now. If the job is beyond them, find someone else who can do the job.

Housing

Yet another meeting was held this week, sponsored by the Hobart City Council, to discuss the crisis of homelessness. Federal and State Ministers were in attendance, as well as elected officials, welfare organisations and industry representatives. A good meeting, with lots of talking. The end result - everyone left feeling they had done well, and it was agreed there should be - yes, wait for it - further meetings.

A working party was set up to hold more meetings, Council was going to consider its planning laws, the Federal Minister was going to talk further with his State counterpart, after the State Minister has had further talks with his colleagues, federal officials were going to talk with state officials, and in the Minister's words

"The Government was focused on moving prefabricated accommodation units into available space next to existing shelters to help expand capacity. We're working on some new planning provisions that might be able to allow us to do this quickly with a temporary permit for these temporary structures."

So, everyone has been given a task to do more talking. Solutions? Afraid not.

How did this affect the homelessness crisis. Well, actually, it didn't. People sleeping rough today will still be sleeping rough tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that, and next week, and the week after that.

The local newspaper has been running a strong campaign to raise awareness of the problem, following the Speaker's earlier actions, and many people are now commenting on this issue. People are expressing concern and wanting to get involved. But how? It's complex, we are told. So many factors to take into account, we are told.

Well, it's not complex to people who are homeless now. It is pretty simple really. Crisis accommodation is required, and it is required now (see eg #1914). By its very nature, crisis accommodation is not a permanent solution, but it does provide vulnerable folk with shelter. The where's and the how's should have been decided a long long time ago. The fact that it is still being "looked at" is shameful. It is a government's responsibility to care for those in need, but this government seems to be frozen - mesmerized by the problem, like a marsupial caught in the headlights.

People talk of the need for money, but money is the answer to a longer-term problem, which is the provision of adequate housing. The State receives grants of around \$30m a year for housing, but is indebted to the Commonwealth for some \$150m, being monies borrowed eons ago and which the State is paying off at around \$15m per annum.

Some are calling for the debt to be forgiven - like it was in South Australia. The money could then be is-used to establish more housing stock. Others, including a local Senator, say it would be a dangerous precedent to do so, even though South Australia has already set that precedent. The battle rages.

One simple solution would be for the Commonwealth to grant an extra \$15m per annum to the State. That should satisfy both sides of that argument.

Population

The University's Institute for the Study of Social Change released a report this week, in which it estimated population trends over the next 30 years or so. In brief, it showed that we are getting older, many regions in the state are already suffering population decline and the population centres are doomed to follow.

It suggests three policy choices:

- do nothing, and let nature take its course (essentially a free market response),
- acceptance of a decline, and manage accordingly, or
- intervene, by actively promoting economic and population growth.

This newsletter has commented many times in favour of the third option, and has bemoaned the fact that the government seems to be sitting on its hands when confronting this problem (the so-called "vision" void).

However it was the first three specific recommendations of the report that were of interest.

- 1 The establishment of a formal advisory or working group...
- 2 The development of a collaborative framework between and within tiers of government to address the challenges and opportunities...
- 3 The development of an appropriate planning framework and settlement plan...

In other words, to create more talk forums.

As I said at the outset, this is what we are good at.

All of these talk fests may well be informative, and may give the participants a sense of engagement, but they do not lead to any action. Furthermore, and far more important, that which is being considered should be a normal part of the organisation's internal structures, be they government, government departments, government business enterprises.

And those that lead these entities should be accountable for what they are or are not doing. That's the thing. No-one it seems is accountable. And no-one is being held to account.

Hobart City Council

I commented in an earlier newsletter about what seemed to be a debacle when it came to the installation of new parking meters in the streets of Hobart.

I have been reliably informed that the Council officers are well aware of the problems associated with these meters, and have been sensitive to the adverse PR that these meters have caused. They are now concentrating on smoothing out the bugs.

I wish them well in this venture.

This newsletter is supported by **Tasman Management Services**.
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