

ISSUE 1920 - A

"In Support of Progress" Newsletter

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Hospitals

The new Minister has been quick to stamp her presence on the portfolio, sending a night in hospital with hospital staff, and commending them on their dedication. An impressive start, to be sure, and one that bodes well.

Now dedication is one thing, but work practices is something else again.

If she continues to take the time to listen to the people at the coal face of health care, she may derive some insights into what is really needed to modernize the workplace, by resolving outmoded and archaic work practices and procedures. I wish her well in this gargantuan task.

She may also be interested to figure out why the helicopter pad on the top of K block was sighted at the opposite end of the hospital to the emergency department. Word has it that it will be basically unusable.

Whatever the pathway from helipad to the ED, lets hope for starters that the lifts won't be breaking down and taking 6 months to fix.

I appreciate these are operational, as distinct from strategy issues, but the Minister's credibility will ride on the fact that our hospital system operates effectively. Blind Freddy can tell you that that is not the case at the moment, and it is a pretty lousy legacy left her by her predecessor. Still, a great opportunity.

Renewables

I get it. Well, at least I thought I had. The brave new world of renewables.

Renewables are important because they are "clean". The idea is to phase out coal for electricity production, because it releases carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, and therefore warms the planet. Now carbon dioxide is actually not a pollutant but a natural gas, (the phrase "carbon pollution" is a nonsense, and all reasonable people know it), and is required for plant growth, which I presume is why it is still OK for us to use coal in steel production. After all, promoting plant growth is good, isn't it?

The plan is to remove coal from electricity production and replace it with renewable energy – solar and wind. Much cleaner. However, unfortunately, the production of power from these sources is intermittent and unreliable, and so to even out the load we need baseload, or batteries, which are essentially non-renewable.

And expensive. Which is why we place financial imposts on coal producers so that we can provide subsidies to renewable producers so that they can compete. It took me a while, but yes, I get that too. it does have a certain logic, if somewhat perverse.

It also adds value to the proposition of pumped hydro, or as we know it in Tasmania, the "Battery of the Nation". Pumped hydro does not employ any more generating kit. Pumped hydro essentially increases the capacity of existing dams = by pumping

water back into them after the water has gone through the power station - using surplus or unwanted power. The more surplus energy we have, the more water we can pump up the hill and the more we can release down the hill. Got that too.

Which makes the operation of renewable sources more viable, i.e. there is a commercial use for that power when there is no other need for it, thus increasing the capacity in the system.

So far, so good, I think. So, let's build more wind farms!?!

Whoa, not so fast, now.

Bob Brown has published an article to the effect that the Robbins Island wind farm in the north west of the state is not a good idea. He cites a number of reasons:

- They are tall. The tips of this 200-unit "hairbrush" will be spinning to the "dizzying apex" of 270 metres.
- Stanley's Nut, a geographical feature, will now become the 201st highest coastal structure.
- It will be an eyesore to mariners, and will divert from every coastal scene.
- It will be one of the biggest windfarms on Earth.
- Tasmania already has enough power.
- It is a huge resource-extraction venture which will be lighting up no Tasmanian homes.
- The developer is a multinational company, and there is some private deal being done with someone.
- UPC shareholders will be the beneficiary – what's in it for Tasmania?
- Wind turbines kill birds. Eagles nest on the island, parrots fly over it, and 24 other species (named by Bob) utilise the island in one form or another.
- The transmission cable will impact the land over which it traverses.

I think I have them all.

Now that is quite a list, and I do love the hyperbole in his language, so typical of the many and varied campaigns of the political environmentalists. The "dizzying hairbrush" allegory – or is it analogy - is quite a winner.

Each of his points can be made into an argument with some merit, especially if it employs provocative adjectives, I guess, although each one can also be argued down. Mind you, the mariner argument is a bit thin. Might need to work on that.

However, the point is, such arguments can be used against any wind farm. So, according to Bob, windfarms are not good things. Renewables are good, but not wind farms. Wind farms are ugly, wind farms are destructive, windfarms require infrastructure. Provisioning Tassie is good, but not anyone else – so there goes exports. Local investment is good, but not overseas investment. There goes the economy, but no matter...

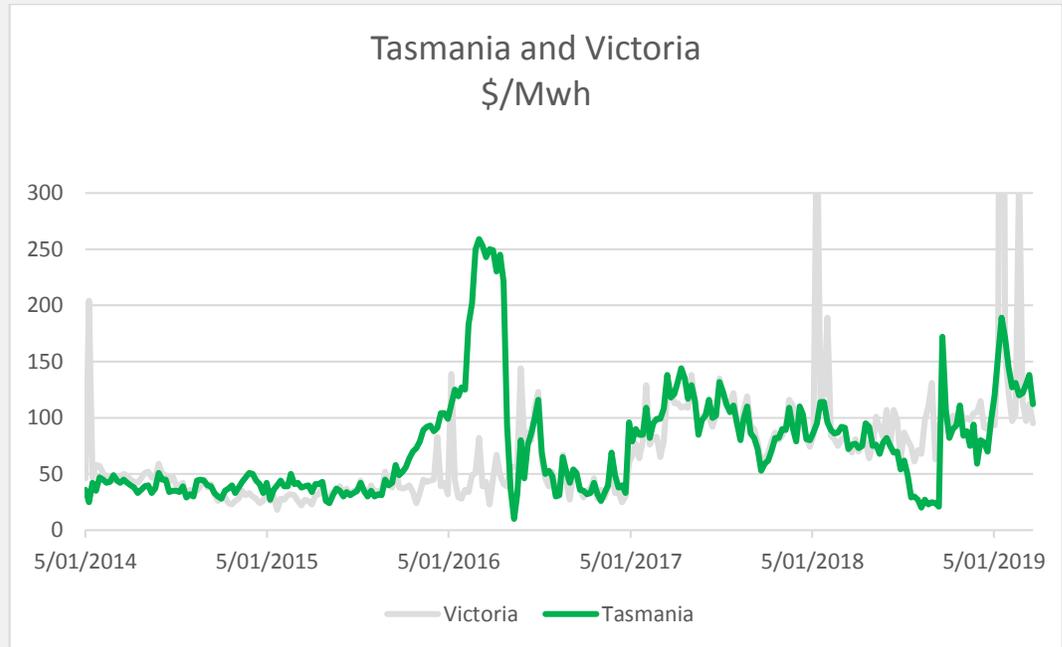
And there goes windfarms as a solution, and thus wind as a renewable resource. So where does that now lead us to? Maybe nowhere. Nuclear? Imagine that one.

I thought I had it. I thought I understood the argument. But, now, I am not so sure.

Maybe I haven't "got it" after all.

Power Prices

For those interested in electricity prices, the following graph shows the movement in the spot price in Victoria and Tasmania over the last few years.



Source" AER

Obviously, the 2016 spike related to the BassLink outage.

But with BassLink back in operation, the price fell back to below \$50 for but a short time before rising to an average beyond \$100. It is not that it has cost more to produce the power, it simply reflects the national market, and in particular the Victorian spot price. With the Victorian market becoming more volatile, it has turned out to be quite a cash cow for the Tasmanian power producer.

If Tasmania is going to be the "Battery of the Nation", let's hope that the fact we can produce power cheaply in this state will be reflected in the spot price in Tasmania going forward.

Purists may argue against such a proposal, and I do understand the argument for there to be a market-driven pricing structure. Windfarmers in particular like high prices. However, as a counter argument, Tasmania must use all the levers it has to encourage activity and investment in this state. Power pricing is one such lever.

Bridgewater Bridge

The Bridgewater Bridge redevelopment, long mooted and long promised, and promised yet once again as a key part of the much-vaunted Hobart City Deal (which was a con) is, according to Infra-structure Australia, no longer a priority, who once again have questioned a number of aspects of the project.

One presumes those concerns are genuine, which means someone has stuffed up, Big Time. So, government, what has gone wrong?? Explanations are called for.

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