

ISSUE 1927

“In Support of Progress” Newsletter

Date: 14 October 2019

Prediction

The Point

The Hobart City Deal

Anyone following the progress at Macquarie Point could not have failed to notice the heightened publicity surrounding it over the last month or so. Obviously a charm offensive is underway, and the news is all “good”. A picture of the Minister on-site looking at a picture of the original MONA vision, with hi-vis jacket, looking concerned, interested, confident.

Which is what this article is about. Not Mac Pt., but the Minister. As Minister for Infrastructure he talks roads and bridges. As Minister For Transport he talks about the Bass Strait ferries, as Minister for State Growth he comments on population issues and jobs, as Minister for Science and Technology he is on about the “smart state”, as Leader of Government Business he talks of pending legislation. He has a view on law and order, he even talks about hospital services – still.

He wears hard hats and hi-vis vests, he dresses in gear to suit the particular circumstance, always with a smile or a concerned face. He is everywhere. Totally engaged. He is in the news almost every day – what is going on?

One could be forgiven for thinking it was part of a strategy to rehabilitate his standing and reputation after years of bearing the cross of public health at a time when the public hospital system was – and still is - drowning in controversy and allegation. So is this Redemption time? Maybe that is all it is, but I suspect there is more to it than redemption.

I think there is a far bigger picture being played out before our eyes. Conjecture maybe, but...Michael Ferguson is being groomed to take over the leadership of the Tasmanian Liberal Party and the Premiership – and possibly sooner than we may think.

So, first things first – why would the party change its leader? Well, it won't be by choice. However, the Premier has been in Parliament since 2002, and by the time of the next election, due in March 2022, he will have clocked-up 20 years' service. That's a long time for any politician.

A family man with three children, the word has been around for a while now that he would be happy to depart. There is no doubt he is feeling the strain of office, and is becoming tired and a little jaded. Now much of what he says is simply going through the motions – chanting a well-worn mantra. Even his former Chief of Staff, Brad Stansfield, has noted that the Premier's style is fading. His speech at the Liberal State Conference was, according to Brad, “lacklustre” and was “short on outlining any real agenda for the year”.

There will, of course, be pressure for the Premier to stay. But why would he? Where is the incentive? On the reasonable assumption that the Premier would not want to stay around to do “four more years” after the next election, an appropriate option available to him and his party would be for him to stand aside from the leadership and allow the electorate time to adapt to his successor.

Logic would suggest that if the Premier was to depart the role, his Deputy Jeremy Rockliff would step into the top job. However, there are good reasons why that is most unlikely. Like the Premier, Rockliff has also been in Parliament since 2002 and he too has a family, including three children. For him, living on the NW Coast, there is not much fun being away from one's family so regularly and so often. What's more, he simply does not want the job. In fact he would "run a thousand miles away" to not get it.

What about Treasurer Peter Gutwein? Have no doubt, he would like the job, but there are some impediments to his elevation. He too has been in Parliament for 18 years and at 54 years of age is also required to spend a lot of time away from his family, which includes two children.

Internal polling also suggests that the Treasurer, as much as he may wish the job, does not have the popular appeal required to win an election as Leader. Unfair maybe, but that's the perception in voter land. There is also another impediment, which Treasury foreshadowed last week and which was also commented on by Mr Stansfield recently, and that is the state's future financial prospects would appear to be a basket case. Given there is some truth in Treasury's comments, why then would the team appoint him when he has taken the state from the golden age and back down the slippery slope to economic hardship. In fact why would he want to stay to witness it?

So, who is left? Looking through the ranks, there are three obvious contenders, being Michael Ferguson, Guy Barnett and Elise Archer. Each of them is from the conservative side of the Liberal Party, and so any one of them would take the government further to the right.

Instinct would suggest that of the three the logical choice is Ferguson – provided his severely dented image when in the Health portfolio can be tidied-up over the coming months, and thus the present media blitz.

Meanwhile, Opposition Leader Rebecca White continues to rate highly in the popularity stakes, even though the ALP at present is struggling to find any sort of substantive policy footing. That in itself is not an immediate problem, although over the next few months the ALP will need to come-up with a meaningful and achievable vision along with the policy agenda to support it.

If a new and untried Liberal leader is to take the party to the right, then Labor will have an opportunity to reposition itself as a centrist party. After all, capturing the centre ground wins you government - or rather, walking away from the centre ground loses you government. Always has and always will.

There are some early indications that the Labor Party is doing so. It has dissociated itself from the Greens (about time), it has stepped away from its poker machine policy, and it would seem to be concentrating more on its traditional areas of health, education and jobs. However, they still have a long way to go if they are to capture the "vision" thing, starting with "What DO they stand for?"

No doubt the Liberals will try and encourage dissent within Labor ranks, but for now it is falling on deaf ears. Better that they concentrate on their own knitting. My guess is there will be a fair bit of knitting to do. So, Interesting times ahead.

Meanwhile, at the Point...

In 2016, after four years of uncertainty, the MPDC (Macquarie Point Development Corporation) redrafted its masterplan - the so-called Masterplan reset - in line with the bold MONA vision for a reconciliation park, a cultural and an arts precinct, amongst other things.

The precinct itself falls within the boundaries of the Sullivan's Cove Planning Scheme. For the reset to have validity, the MPDC required planning approval from the Hobart City Council. It had been through these hoops before – in 2015 – when the original masterplan was being considered, so this in fact is a repeat performance.

A case was finally put before Council's Planning Committee in May this year for a further amendment to the Sullivans Cove Planning scheme, which also – against the advice of MONA and others – included residential accommodation. The Planning Committee reported its approval to Council and the full Council approved the proposed amendments in June.

However, because it was an amendment to a planning scheme it had to go to the Tasmanian Planning Commission for final approval, and that has just recently occurred.

(The report to the Planning Committee is a comprehensive and informative 108-page document and I would recommend to the MPDC that they place it on their own website.)

Anyway, according to the CEO, remediation site works have started. Fanfare. A contract for remedial work was let, and lo and behold, it wasn't long before the contractor found a disused underground pipe. It was immediately branded with great hyperbole as "historic", whatever that means. It is not a word I would have used. Sounds like a further delay.

No question, this has been a time-consuming process. Any government considering reducing red tape could well spend some time analysing the present planning laws as they have related to this site. They are a nightmare,

Hobart City Deal

Mac Pt is involved in the much larger Hobart City Deal. This deal, involving the three levels of government, has at last count 6 – or is it 7 - elements: a new Bridgewater bridge, an international airport, reduced traffic congestion, an Antarctic precinct at Mac Pt., activation of the northern suburbs transit corridor, a collaborative approach to the provision of affordable housing, and an agreement to work together to achieve these goals.

The costs have been tabulated in a previous newsletter (see #1921). The Deal has been the subject of a lot of publicity, with polliès spruiking it up every time a camera is close by. However, actual action has been slow to eventuate.

Some of these action items are quite specific, others are more rubbery. I suspect very few are actually "ready to roll", and there has been a number of consultants engaged to further prove up certain facets, (eg a fifth lane on the southern outlet) while for other activities a Business case is being drafted (eg the Antarctic precinct). Which suggests that not much has actually been done other than writing reports on what needs to be done.

Last week the Federal Minister came to town to release the Deal's "Implementation Plan". Due in August, two months ago, it has finally seen the light of day, and it is a classic strategy document, detailing who will do what and when, much of it aspirational. However, one of the elements touched upon in the Plan is the proposal to release an Annual Progress Report, and that should make for interesting reading, come the time.

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