

“In Support of Progress” Newsletter

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The Tourism Conference

One of the guest speakers at last week's Tourism Industry conference was Greens Senator Whish-Wilson. The Senator is the Australian Greens' spokesman for tourism and it was in this capacity he was invited to address delegates on the theme of "Sustainable Tourism", representing his party, alongside the Premier and State Opposition leader.

He was there to share his insights as a wine maker, merchant banker and senator. However, no sooner did he rise to speak than he attacked one of the sponsors of the conference. According to the good senator, the reason for his outburst was that the company was opposed to can deposit legislation.

Not satisfied with embarrassing his host on the day and the industry it represents (and which he purportedly supports), he then had the gall to write a letter to the organizers suggesting he would help them find an alternative sponsor for future conferences. That letter, written four days after the event, then became the basis for a media release and an article on the Tasmanian Times blogspot.

The Senator is coming up for election. He has obviously seen an opportunity to get some publicity to push his particular barrow. However, maybe publicity is not so smart when it means biting the hand that feeds you, and his actions will now be well known within the tourism sector.

Publicly attacking companies whose policies that don't subscribe to their policies has become *de rigueur* for the Greens. And denigrating operators in their market is seen to be smart and even effective. It is said that all publicity is good publicity. However, publicly humiliating one's hosts, many of which probably have, or rather had, sympathy for their views, is another thing altogether.

The Greens say they want to be taken seriously by industry, and be seen as more than a protest party. Yet their behaviour suggests they are more comfortable in the role of a fringe protest group than to be taken seriously as a legitimate, third force in Australian politics.

One thing is for sure, assuming he is re-elected, which of itself is no certainty, he won't be invited back to next year's conference!

The Jobs Forum

In the last newsletter, when commenting on the jobs forum, I wrote of what I saw as "a cultural cringe" *when it comes to supporting and promoting our own. And yet, when we do source personnel from interstate, the record is less than exemplary*". My argument was based on the need to encourage local suppliers rather than always sourcing interstate advice and goods.

Having written same, I was then taken to task for suggesting a "closed shop" approach to market forces, to the detriment of the broader Tasmanian economy. It is a fair criticism, but I stand by my view that the market is not "equal" and neither are the competitive forces within it. So, on that score, we must agree to disagree.

Hospital Costs

I am at a loss to understand the reasons for the delays and cost blowouts surrounding the redevelopment of the Royal Hobart Hospital. We read of interstate consultants continuing to get large sums of money for what must have been "incomplete" advice in the first place, and of an interstate project management team that is allowing the project to get away for them. News of these costs blowouts and project delays are becoming more common, and are concerning. The lack of news about how to fix the problem is of even more concern. It is as though the project is just drifting.

Whether it is an issue for the Minister or for her department, the situation must be brought under control, and that may just mean employing a new project management team. Maybe even a local one?

Forest Compensation Money

Readers would be aware that the Federal Government provided a sum of \$100 million in November last year (see eg #1320) to be spent on "economic diversification" projects, subject to the passage of the Tasmanian Forest Agreement Bill. When debating and eventually passing the bill earlier this year, Legislative Councillors complained that this was tantamount to blackmail. A further condition was that the act needed to prove its "durability", the basis of which would be contained in a Durability Report.

Three things then happened. The Liberals, who are opposed to the agreement and have stated they will tear it up, said they would remove the condition. In other words, "you can keep the money". Second, the durability report was tabled in parliament – the report suggested that durability was not being delivered (see eg #1318). And third, the money was allocated to a number of projects, again, subject to the Agreement standing.

The Legislative Council now has to decide whether the lack of durability is such that they will disallow the Agreement, and a disallowance motion has already been introduced into that chamber for a later debate.

Now there has been another twist. With the election drawing near, the federal government has now decided that it too will remove the conditionality of the funding. In other words, the money is now available, irrespective of the passage of the legislation or who wins the election. I must admit it is a strange decision on their part – on the one hand insisting that the Agreement stand, and yet on the other removing the leverage for obtaining it.

So, one can now predict with increasing certainty that the \$100 million will be spent, the legislation will fail (either by a new government tearing up the agreement or by the Legislative Council disallowing it), and we will be back to where we started. The conservationists have vowed to ramp up their protest action if the Act is disallowed. Methinks a summer of discontent awaits us!

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