

ISSUE 1801

“In Support of Progress”

Newsletter

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The New Year

Farewell to 2017, and welcome 2018. A year of promise and of uncertainty. A strong economy, but a loss of permanent work and more families in need, while internationally, the American leadership has us all scratching our heads.

And at a local level, the period of the media silly season (ie “Man bites dog” type headline) is drawing to a close. However, one silly season begets another. Within 3 months the State will go to the polls, to elect a new parliament. That vote will determine who runs the state for the next 4 years, and already the political players are playing the media game.

The local newspaper has been promoting an “Issues that count” campaign, and it is good to see it teasing out relevant issues. However, although the questions are asked (What to do about...), the responses are essentially options rather than solutions, and as such have little traction.

The phrase “We need to have a conversation about “x”” means what exactly? Those that pose this as a solution are really saying “x is an issue I believe in and I need everyone to agree with me”. Whenever I hear the call for a “conversation” I think “power vacuum”.

Imagine if the conversation posed by a conservation group led to a desire for more forest to be sustainably managed for timber production? Or a conversation about the ills of mandatory sentencing led to a desire for stronger sentencing? Or a conversation regarding traffic posed by planners led to a desire for more carparks? The call for such a “conversation” would be closed down quicksmart.

It is a similar situation with the call “We need to reach a consensus around “y””. Actually, not really. We need to do something – not simply talk about it.

What is required is a policy which states what is to be done, and not simply what we should talk about. Which is what the coming election campaign should be about.

I have been something of a cricket tragic during the Melbourne and Sydney tests, and as a viewer have been bombarded by the Liberal campaign threatening the end of the world if voters returned a “Labor-Green” minority government.

It has become the mantra of those in Cabinet to chant such a nonsense. This latest rendition is from the Minister for Environment and Parks:

This momentum (to increase tourism numbers) has only been possible under a majority Liberal government and if re-elected, we will continue to ensure the state is open for business.

By contrast, if Labor are (sic) elected they will again govern in minority with the Greens, meaning any investment ...will be immediately stopped, no matter the cost to jobs or the economy in our regional areas.

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And she concludes with:

The choice for Tasmanians could not be clearer- a strong majority Liberal government with a proven track record, of getting the balance right and creating jobs, or a Labor-Green minority government that will again lock up the state's natural areas so they cannot be enjoyed by anyone.

Such an approach is not just boring, it is silly and it is self-defeating.

As readers would be aware I am no fan of negative campaigns. Apart from simply denigrating one's opponent, its themes can come back to bite you. For example it talks of the last "Labor-Green minority government". Wrong! It was in fact a majority government because Green members were in Cabinet.

If the advertisement is meant to convey that coalitions are a bad thing, then the Federal government must be bad because it is a coalition, as the Nationals have members in the Federal coalition majority government. If the advertisement is meant to convey that a minority government is a bad thing, then what are we to make of the Rundle Liberal minority government, which was supported by the Greens.

The polls are showing that if an election was held today neither the Liberals or Labor will gain a majority in their own right, so there could well continue to be a Liberal government, supported in some manner by the Greens. In this scenario it would either be a Liberal minority government supported by the Greens on the floor of Parliament or a majority coalition government, such as a Liberal Green majority government, with Green members in the cabinet.

Goodness!

Actually the fear campaign, sponsored by the Liberal secretariat, can be interpreted to be how bad a Liberal minority would be as it is about anything else. The current ads say nothing about how good the Liberals are, or what they stand for, or what they will do if returned to government. It is all about denigration. In fact, the more I see it, the more I am persuaded to the view that the government is now running scared. With four years' experience under their belt, is this the best they can come up with? We deserve better!

For those who think I am simply showing a political bias let me state for the record my criticism of a former Labor government when it was in power and ran a series of negative campaigns over drug use. I made my feelings (of abhorrence) known to the Premier of the day, who advised he was equally horrified and did not know the ads were being made. I took him at face value. However, what this suggested was that the organisation and the political wings were not communicating. And that was bad. Alternatively, if he did know, and he told me otherwise, then he should not have allowed them to air – or he was rolled. Also bad.

The Premier says he wants to run a positive campaign. I want to take his comment at face value, and believe him. However, a similar situation applies now as it did once before with another Premier. My concern is to what extent the Premier had been briefed about these ads. Either he was not advised, in which case he has an issue with his organisational wing, or alternatively he was advised, and either supported it or was overruled.

Either way Premier, not a good start.

Tourism

Tourism is on a roll. Record numbers of travelers have come to the state, by the TLine boats, by plane and by cruise ship. New hotels are being built, new ships are being ordered, and everything sounds just hunky dory. Which, of course, it should be.

But in fact it isn't.

The fact of the matter is that tourists require certain amenities to really enjoy their Tasmanian experience. If it is for the food experience, then they will be seeking good food and good service, if it is for our natural environment, they will require access and tracks, if it is for touring the state, then they will need places to stay, including caravan parks, if it is for day trips from a central point, they will require roadside amenities, and if they have their own vehicle they will require places to park.

None of these areas seem to be being addressed. The powers that be keep ducking for cover. For example, the obvious need for toilets on Bruny Island – a need that has been apparent for some time, and has been demanded by the locals there - is met with the comment that there should be a study done. Meanwhile the environment of Bruny continues to be degraded. Such an example is being repeated state-wide.

One cannot step away from the fact that tourism is about more than body count, it is about amenity. We are in serious danger of killing the goose that is laying the golden egg by not investing in the necessary physical and human infrastructure that is required to provide an enjoyable unique experience.

The large and continuing influx is also creating pressure on our local citizenry, and particularly so in housing. Landlords are increasingly attracted to servicing the short stay traveller, and less attracted to catering for a long lease arrangement. Students, singles and families are all beginning to complain of the lack of housing availability and affordability, and this is fast becoming a serious problem.

The difficulty is that the pressures being placed on our infrastructure can reach a tipping point, beyond which significant harm can result.

The word gets out that the tourism experience is not so great, overseas students will go elsewhere to study, people will not only not come here to live, but residents will start leaving the state.

It need not be so, and it should not be so. What it will require is the recognition by government that in order to maintain the tourism momentum, it will require more than just festivals and smiling faces on tv.

The government has now announced a new advertising initiative to encourage Sydney-siders to move to Tasmania permanently. Again, the point needs to be made that for such a campaign to be successful they will need somewhere to live.

Hopefully, both major parties can see this for what it is – not just a matter of numbers, and of getting people here, but the need to address our infrastructure in a serious and holistic way.

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