

ISSUE 1804

“In Support of Progress”

Newsletter

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Australia Day

Another Australia Day has come and gone. Awards for outstanding achievement have been given, new citizens have been welcomed, and for most of us, we have enjoyed another summer long weekend.

The date recognizes the arrival of the First Fleet and the commencement of British settlement. It is also seen by some as a date of invasion.

Interestingly, although the date has been recognized as Australia Day for many years, it wasn't until 1994 that all Australian states agreed to have a public holiday ON THAT DAY. Until then it was recognized as a long weekend closest to that date.

Earlier, the colonies had separate celebration days. In Tasmania for example it was Regatta Day. By the time the colonies came together to establish the Australian nation, on 1 January 1901, the date had been recognized for its special significance, but it wasn't until 1935 that the day was officially recognized in all states.

For the majority of Australians, the day is a day of celebration, not for the establishment of a penal settlement in Sydney Cove, but for what Australia has become, an inclusive, tolerant, multicultural secular democracy, governed by the rule of law. The last act of inclusion was the referendum of 27 May 1967, which amended the Constitution to give everyone the vote.

It has been an extraordinary achievement, and whatever the date ongoing, a continuing celebration of Australia Day should be an important part of the nation's symbolism.

Election Fever

Oh dear, Shock and Horror. White (Labor leader) meets with Lambie (Tasmanian ex-Senator). The Liberals say a secret deal has been done. It transpires that the meeting was in May last year, when Lambie was a Senator, and not running candidates in the state election. So false news from the government.

Oh dear, shock and horror. She also met with the Premier – once. No mention of that from the government.

Surely the point is that state leaders should be briefing all Tasmanian senators about Tasmania issues, especially around the issues of the GST carve-up, and of special purpose grants and programs. ALL THE TIME. In fact I am somewhat bemused that the Premier only met with Lambie once. I would have thought Tasmania's interests would transcend partisan politics. They should do.

Methinks he will be meeting with her again, and soon. In fact it will be hard not to on the campaign trail, and already he has been photographed in the company of a JLN candidate at an official function. As it should be.

Opinion polling suggests there will be a hung parliament with no party holding a clear majority, so the present "noise" by the major parties is all part of the scaremongering regarding secret deals for some form of coalition government after the election, with posturing on all sides.

To explain: A similar vote for Labor and Liberal will return 2 seats each in each of the five electorates, leaving one further seat to be decided. The fifth seat will be a tightly fought contest. In most instances it will come down to "last man standing", with the successful candidate entering parliament without a quota, and that is because many votes will exhaust within the chosen party.

The fifth seat will probably go to the JLN in Lyons and Braddon (taking from the Liberals), to the Liberal in Bass, and to the Greens in Denison and Franklin. Kevin Bonham, a well-known and respected election analyst, has even suggested that in Denison Labor may get 3 seats, leaving the Liberals with one.

What this means is that after the election, the present Premier will remain the Premier, but without a majority, and will have to test his continuing support by a vote in the new Parliament. What happens next will be the BIG issue. What will be the position of the minor parties, with or without a deal?

The following tables tell the story:

Present polling suggests AS the following lineup:

	BRADDON	BASS	LYONS	FRANKLIN	DENISON	TOTAL
Liberal	2	3	2	2	2	11
Labor	2	2	2	2	2	10
Greens				1	1	2
JLN	1		1			2

And the Bonham option:

	BRADDON	BASS	LYONS	FRANKLIN	DENISON	TOTAL
Liberal	2	3	2	2	1	10
Labor	2	2	2	2	3	11
Greens				1	1	2
JLN	1		1			2

Regarding the campaign itself, for the Liberal Government, the real enemy is the JLN. It will now need to fight on two fronts, against its traditional rival Labor on the one hand, and the JLN on the other. Interesting times lie ahead!

Traffic

The Mercury newspaper has run a series of articles recently on Tasmania's future, called Tasmania 2022, presenting a "vision" (or rather options) for government to consider over the coming 5 years.

A major concern (in Hobart anyway) is traffic. Planners, it would seem, want everyone to walk or ride bicycles, and many has been the article proselytising this mode of transport as a "healthy lifestyle", maintaining Hobart's unique character etc., promoting public transport and denigrating private transport - "the car".

That may be all well and good for inner city commuters, but inner city commuters are a minority of those travelling. The majority refuse to budge. People will continue to gravitate to live in the outer suburbs, and commuters will want to drive. Offers of free bus rides or a light rail service might help traffic flow at the margin, but only at the margin.

The northern light rail is being promoted as a means to wean commuters into carriages, with the prospect of future developments along its corridor. It has been promoted as a project for the Hobart City Deal, and of course, as per such inter-government arrangements, it is suggested that it be the subject of a business case.

A business case? How many business cases have there been already? It probably won't stack up commercially (and I suspect it hasn't to date) but is that really the issue here. If a business case is so important, which I suspect it isn't, you might want to run the ruler over the Metro. I would guarantee that does not stack up either, but we have it anyway.

The Mercury, in a recent editorial, while acknowledging the present expansion of Hobart, and while promoting the continuing expansion of Greater Hobart through a growth strategy, and while congratulating the Metro for providing a free bus service for a month's trial prior to 7am in the mornings (how does that business case stack up?), writes:

It is far too easy – and too cheap – to park in central Hobart. Perhaps...we should rip some car parks up.

In other words, let's make it really difficult for people to come to town. He can't be serious. What was he smoking?

Well, Mr Editor, the reality is this:

People are moving further and further away from the City Centre, for a variety of reasons, not just cost, and public transport simply cannot cater for the demand for transport flexibility. Malls in cities and shopping centres only work because of car parks nearby. You are obviously not wanting to make friends with the city's retailers and businesses. What you are advocating will simply encourage people to stay away from the centre of town. Which will mean businesses will suffer and many will close. Hobart will become a dead heart.

Now, you print Bob Cotgrove's columns. Perhaps you should also read them.

Planning

Actually, the issues of traffic and parking are part of a larger subset of regional planning, and as yet, we haven't got our head around our approach to these matters. Local government remains local, and state government wants to steer away for such detail, other than to talk up its statewide planning scheme, which will be administered by local government anyway.

Planning has to recognize growth and change, which for many is an anathema. Planning is seen as a mechanism to conform to a set of rules – the issue is the rules. How strict, how flexible.

I note the comment of architect Robert-Nunn, in talking of the need for a "balance" between development and conservation:

"We are at risk of destroying the cultural values of the place if we don't get this balance right. "Look at the middle of Paris. They have maintained the charm of the area with their developments. They don't allow massive buildings in there."

Maybe, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder. And that eye can change over time. It is actually buildings and structures which break the mould of conformity that can eventually give added character to a place, if not transform it. It's about juxtaposition. Taking Paris as an example - the Eiffel Tower when first built was regarded as a monstrosity. Out of character. But would any Parisian argue now for its removal. Just as Notre Dame Cathedral was "out of character" when it was first built. And the glass pyramid in front of the Louvre?

Ashley Youth Detention Centre

Government has decided not to accept a consultant's preferred recommendation that the Centre be closed and that two new centres be built, one in the north and one in the south. The government has decided instead, and at some considerable expense, to redesign and upgrade the existing facility.

It is an odd decision. The consultant (the Noetic Group) was originally chosen, presumably, for its expertise in and knowledge of the juvenile justice system, for previous work done in this space, and for its ability to conform to a scope. (Presumably there was a scope?)

Front and foremost, it recognized that the needs of the inmates should be paramount. So to not accept its consultant's preferred option demands some detailed response from the government as to why it chose not to do so.

The government has had the report from the consultant since mid-2017, but has kept the lid on its findings and its recommendations until now. The timing is questionable. Why now, just before an election?

The Minister at the time stated that Ashley was not a contemporary model of youth justice because of its design and environment. If that is so, then what has changed?

The Minister is reported to have said that the existing jobs in the facility were a consideration. The Opposition in response has also reflected on the value of those jobs. But Ashley is not there for jobs. Ashley is there to house inmates, and hopefully help lead them back to having a useful role in society. Jobs, surely is a secondary consideration, and a consequence of it being there.

If jobs is an issue, then that could guide the siting of a new facility, but it should not be the basis for not accepting the report. Were "existing jobs" in the scope given to the consultants? This is not good policy, and both political parties should reconsider their positions.

Consultants

It also raises the broader issue of the use of consultants. If government knew all along what it wanted to do, why not simply do it? Why engage consultants at much expense, simply to ignore their findings? I think the public service has become very decision-shy, and is not relying on its own knowledge and understanding. Consultants can be a good option at times, but they can also be a very expensive option, especially when they have their own barrow to push. Is it not better to develop and ensure internal skills, rather than to continually rely on external advice?

Maybe that is the issue. How skilled, and how well-resourced, is it these days? Maybe it requires a consultant to advise it!!! And if that is the case, then there is sufficient local knowledge that can be tapped.