28/05/2025

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Macquarie Point Multipurpose Stadium – Enabling Legislation Consultation Feedback

I write to you today to express my concerns in relation to the proposed Macquarie Point stadium.

The Hobart waterfront is a unique historic and aesthetic precinct, the focus around which the city was built, and the Macquarie Point site has been described as the most desirable/valuable waterfront location of its size in the country. In the vacuum left by the Macquarie point Development Corporation's failure to get anything at all off the ground over several decades, the government has clearly proactively nominated this location to the AFL as a convenient means to fill that politically embarrassing void. By any measure, the concept design illustrations indicate the stadium would completely dominate the waterfront, overshadowing Hunter Street and dominating the streetscapes over a wide area, constituting an unacceptable intrusion into a unique part of Hobart. There are plenty of other potential locations for a stadium, if one must be built, but it's difficult to imagine a more inappropriate one than this. Heaven-forbid there might be other stadia in the state that could be redeveloped at significantly less cost than this, York Park in Launceston for instance.

It would be an exceptional build indeed if the costs did not 'blow out' significantly, with the price of both construction and materials continuing to rise, and this is what we are already seeing. Firstly, the Premier's consistently enunciated 'not a red cent more' undertaking is already under extreme pressure for obvious reasons, including the recent announcement that no private investors will be sought (the very reason, we are told, why the Mac-2 proposal wasn't considered), the intentional omission of up-front funding for essential components of a stadium such as commercial kitchens, screens and electronic display equipment, and the mysterious subterranean (or should that read submarine) carpark. Similarly unfunded is the relocation of sporting codes to make way for the Kingborough high-performance centre which, itself, has been recently re-costed at tens of millions of dollars over the advertised price. Emblematic of the inevitable cost increases is the recent pre-budget announcement that the stadium cost has been revised upwards by $170 million, bringing the cost to almost $1billion (predictions of which the government was still dismissing out of hand only weeks ago), and more can clearly be anticipated given the ever-escalation cost of construction. It is clear the economic elephant in the room is that Tasmanians for generations to come will be lumped with the debt for all of this, along with the associated underinvestment in essential public services.

Similarly, nothing but lip service has been paid to the transport solutions such a proposal would obviously require. The government, through its GBE, can't even run an efficient bus service, so is unlikely to invest sufficiently in practical solutions to an issue that could see Hobart completely parked-out and gridlocked streets on match or event days. Once again, this is unbudgeted additional spending the Premier wants us all to look away from as we bathe in the golden light of his folly.

The government's claims around the benefits of the proposed stadium are unrealistically optimistic to the point of being ludicrous, and strike me as a calculated attempt to reverse-engineer the dollar value of benefits against the overall cost in order to maximise offsets and shore up what is an illogical proposal, with little regard for the likely reality of these claims, in order to keep the lipstick up to this pig. The Premier often cites the Adelaide stadium as an exemplar for our state, conveniently ignoring the fact that Adelaide's population is approximately six times larger than Hobart's, and three times larger than Tasmania's overall.

But there's more. AFL is only one sporting code. All this investment is not going to benefit soccer, arguably the most popular sport in the nation, nor cricket following Cricket Tasmania's announcement they can not contemplate playing in a roofed venue (clearly, they regard ricocheting cricket balls as unsafe). In fact, the taxpayer is already up for the cost of relocating the Cricket Centre of Excellence to Seven Mile Beach.

Despite the Premier's steadfast refusal to renegotiate the AFL deal, this is what needs to occur if there is to be any hope of a rational outcome. Being the only state in the country to be told a roofed stadium is a prerequisite to hosting a team (no doubt also at the suggestion of our government), despite Hobart being the second driest capital city but also the least affluent state, almost smacks of being set up to fail, which would probably ultimately please the other AFL teams. Once again, York Park is probably the obvious alternative location if we are not to saddle future generations with an insurmountable debt for the sake of political vanities.

Further, it is more than likely the stadium fiasco is feeding into the government's rationale behind the euphemistically titled public sector 'efficiency dividends', and proposals to sell of public assets, essentially to shore up this undefendable project.

And finally, as if we needed another reason to be cynical about this proposal, we have the Premier serially bypassing planning processes in order to ram the project through, ignoring a series of expert reports identifying its weaknesses (including one commissioned by the government itself), and opposed by a significant majority of Tasmanians according to the polling.

For that reason alone, the stadium project should be reimagined, as it clearly lacks social licence.

I am a signed-up member of the Devils team, as many are, and I believe Tasmania deserves its own team, but there is no associated corollary that I should support this controversial stadium proposal, despite the Premier and various ministers implying

there is, and hurling insults and epithets such as ‘anti-development’, ‘anti-jobs’ and ‘anti-everything brigade’, at anyone expressing similar opinions.

The AFL is not the government of Tasmania. Please demonstrate this is the case by rejecting this proposed legislation and forcing the government back to, either, the POSS or, preferably, standard planning processes.

We can do better than this!

Yours Faithfully,

Andrew Hudspeth