

Submission on:

Major Projects Bill
Tasmanian Planning Commission Review
Draft World Heritage Area Tourism Master Plan
Local Provisions Schedules

In the midst of this crisis, I would ask you to consider all of the land-use planning changes currently in train but unresolved in Tasmania – including the review of the Tasmanian Planning Commission (TPC), major projects legislation, the draft World Heritage Area (WHA) Tourism Master Plan, and local provisions schedules for most of the state.

I would suggest that even had this crisis not occurred, the proposed planning changes and instruments required much additional work - for example several are complex, some are vague in parts, and together they lack coordination and clear strategic direction. Indeed there are so many problems with the combined changes that there has seemed little point in commenting on their detail. For example references to the TPC in the major projects legislation are fairly meaningless when the TPC is itself under review.

Furthermore, given the crisis, the current planning changes are likely to be fairly irrelevant to new circumstances and time wasting in their implementation. For example, the local provisions schedules, still incomplete after some five years, are now based on out-of-date population predictions. In the major projects bill, despite a very different foreign investment climate, there are no provisions for basic due diligence checks on major project proponents, nor preventing time-wasting on proposals that may be rejected by the Foreign Investment Review Board under new foreign investment rules. At a time when, ironically, national parks have been shut due to the impacts of global travel, the draft WHA Tourism Master Plan is based on an out-of-date position paper providing the tourism and visitor forecasts.

I would have thought that it was obvious that the proposed planning changes in their current form cannot provide the planning guidance and encouragement now needed by a damaged society and economy that must undergo substantial restructuring. At this point of course, none of us can know exactly what the future holds – but the International Monetary Fund is forecasting the worst global downturn since the great depression, and there is no reason to believe that Tasmania will not be affected.

I would therefore urge you to put the currently proposed planning changes aside. I note that even Michael Bailey, head of the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, seems to think that existing planning laws are sufficient to deal with upcoming projects.

Instead of the proposed changes, expert state and local planners should consider turning their attention to the types of land use planning that are likely to be needed – at state and local level - to shape a healthy and resilient post-crisis future for Tasmania.

In the spirit of providing constructive suggestions in the crisis, you might wish to consider both immediate and longer-term proposals such as:

- removing any barriers to changing appropriate tourist accommodation over to long term residential (eg. using a planning directive), to boost the affordable rental supply in a tourism-depressed and high-unemployment market;
- bringing forward most of the planning permit exemptions in the state planning provisions (eg. via planning directive) to boost small construction projects (noting the now anomalous matter of tourist accommodation in the exemptions);
- developing planning-related grants or loans schemes to boost small construction projects, eg. a bushfire-ready grants scheme targeted at cash-strapped property owners in bushfire-prone areas to upgrade their home's defences (eg. drawing on the successful No Interest Loans Scheme);
- reshaping the TPC review, and requesting consultants to advise on broader options for Tasmania's post-crisis planning administration, and resilience-building planning approaches to guide future planning interventions;
- reviewing the regional land-use strategies, as promised, but now drawing on new demographic and economic forecasts and linking to greater metropolitan governance structures (and postponing finalisation of local provisions schedules until this work is completed);
- reviewing planning provisions related to residential zones, as promised, but now taking into account likely demographic and social changes arising from the current crisis (eg. facilitating somewhat lower residential densities and more garden space in some zones, in light of likely slower population growth and new pandemic-related changes such as increased telecommuting);
- reviewing planning policies, provisions and mapping relating to agriculture to ensure better protection for agricultural lands (eg. from even less justifiable tourism and residential encroachment) and enhanced opportunities for sustainable industry development;
- requesting the Macquarie Point Development Authority to provide options on how it might contribute to post-crisis recovery, and any planning changes required for Macquarie Point in light of new economic and demographic forecasts;

In relation to the WHA Tourism Master Plan, and national parks management more generally, you may wish to consider drawing a lesson from the depression and war-time eras of national parks history – placing greater emphasis on upgrading basic park infrastructure (involving jobs), providing inexpensive recreational opportunities

for a socio-economically-stressed population, and the objective of making a stronger contribution to population health and fitness.

With best wishes for your well-being and safety.

Dr Peggy James
April, 2020.