

**Legislative Council
HANSARD**

Wednesday, 8 November 2023

MOTION

State Policies and Projects (Project of State Significance) Order 2023

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I appreciate that and given that some of the Government members have been speaking in their right I was slightly confused about that too.

I rise to speak on this matter we have before us about the direction that would send the proposal for a stadium at Macquarie Point into the POSS process. I appreciate the forthrightness of the member for Hobart's comments on this matter and the reflections of the member for Murchison. There will be some matters that I will touch on that have been covered by those members but I will reiterate them in the context of my own reflections.

It is not a matter that I have a prepared speech because we have been receiving new information right up until today and I am finding it an interesting one to continue to consider. I have also found it to be an unpleasantly contentious matter as it has been progressed as a matter of discussion in the public domain and the manner in which that has occurred. That has stemmed from the way that it came about, the way that it was put into the public discussion by the Government and the early stages of its progress as a matter for public discussion. The way that occurred has set consideration of this project and the fundamental idea behind it - the idea of an AFL team for our state - has set that onto an unfortunate course that has involved a great deal more contention and unpleasantness than we all would have hoped that it might have.

The fundamentals are that we could - and would - all have been rallying around the idea of an AFL team for this state. There was broad support and where there was no overt support, there might have just been a fairly neutral stance held by most people. I have not come across anyone, I must say, who has said to me that they do not think we should have a team. I have come across people who do not really care, do not really mind, do not have a strong view, but no-one who has said, 'here is a reason why we should not have a team'.

What should have been something that was universally unifying has become incredibly disruptive and divisive. Fundamentally, I see that as problematic. It is a result of a government that started with an outcome that it wanted to insist upon and pursued in such a way that was belligerent, that did not follow good process and good governance, that continued, over time, at every opportunity and every turn, to promote division in the community as we worked through various stages of this. That is an irresponsible way to govern this state. It is an unproductive way to achieve an outcome that is positive for our community. What we have arrived at now is that it is showing us that it is not a guaranteed way to get what might be in the best interests of our state, the best kind of proposal to consider, the ideal and optimal way that we could progress a project that would deliver the ultimate outcome we are after, but tick as many boxes of public interest on the way through as we can.

We are seeing that because right now, at this late-ish stage of discussion, we are seeing alternative proposals put forward that are significantly well-developed. Perhaps not as developed, yet, as they need to be to be put into a POSS process, but they are significantly well

developed. They have been undertaken - I say 'they' but I mean one in particular - we are talking about the one that is being put forward by Dean Coleman and the Stadium Precinct Group.

Mr Valentine - Mac 2.

Ms WEBB - Mac 2.0, as some are referring to it.

Ms Rattray - Is that at Regatta Point?

Ms WEBB - The one that is around the corner on the Regatta Grounds.

That project is significantly well developed in what is being put forward. It has actually paid attention to all the ways that the Government and its project failed on good process and has made best endeavours, on the face of it, to address all those matters in a way that is consultative, collaborative, creative and responsible when it comes to the consideration of what may ultimately be a proposal that is in the best interests of our state.

The Government has been utterly shown up at this point in time for the poor way that it approached this from the very start, the disrespect that it demonstrated to the Tasmanian people and, in particular, to some particular stakeholders with sensitivities. When I say that, I mean the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, the RSL, the Regatta Association, the Hobart City Council, as well as the people of Tasmania. The disrespect shown to those stakeholders in the process that was undertaken by the Government.

I cannot use the word 'progressing' their proposal, because it was not progressing. It was absolutely bulldozing through their proposal. It was bullying their way through with their proposal. It was insisting and then demanding that people come along for that proposal to be progressed. That is not appropriate, it is not respectful. It is not good governance.

Guess what? It has not given us what would be the best public outcome and public interest outcome here with the proposal put forward. That is utterly shown up by the fact that we can see other well-developed proposals put forward that appear to address many issues much better than the Government's does.

Having said that, I believe what has happened is the Government has started with the outcome they wanted, the decision they wanted to make, then worked back from there. That is problematic and what I have just described as having been a failed process, developing us a less-than-optimal outcome to consider now in this POSS directive.

What we could do, of course, is start with any end point and work back and find a way to make it work and fit. The Government could certainly do that right now, with an alternative proposal in the public domain before us. They could start with the presumption that yes, that is one we want to see delivered; let us work back and make it fit, make it work, fill in all the gaps and provide the details that need to be provided. That is what they did with their own process and could readily turn around and do it again with this one.

I am not saying that they are the same proposals. They are different proposals, they do have different complexities and risks, but they also have different benefits, potentially for the Tasmanian community and different positive outcomes to achieve in terms of public interest.

If we wanted to see that alternative proposal progressed, we could begin with that as our end point and work back, just like the Government did with its own.

Again, that is not good process. But here we are, at a point where we have already been driven into this disarray of good governance. We have already been driven into this divisive place.

The alternative proposal put forward is potentially a saving grace for the Government to provide what could be the most unifying outcome from all this. It could provide the greatest opportunity to bring the most Tasmanians together on delivering a stadium and ultimately, delivering an AFL team to the state.

Because, my goodness - and other members would reflect on this too - when you talk to people in the community, they are far more attracted to the second proposal than they are to the Government's proposal. That is not to say that everybody agrees with it - they certainly do not; lots of people would not agree with either of the proposals. When I talk to people who utterly rejected the Government's proposal but now are very warmly speaking about the second proposal from Dean Coleman and Stadia Precinct Consortia, it is fascinating to see the difference of opinion there and the opportunity to optimise unity again.

I seriously hope the Government takes stock and are not just paying lip service and sort of fobbing off that proposal, saying they are happy to continue to consider it and in February more details can be provided and considered. I hope that is not just fobbing-off and baseless invitations to the second proposal. I hope it is genuine.

Mr Valentine - I think what they are trying to figure out is how much revenue comes back to the team and those sorts of things, through this particular proposal. That is why they are after the financials. Quite honestly, that is why a new stadium is required. Without it, they cannot get the revenues they want. That is basically it, as far as I am aware.

Ms WEBB - I think we would be speculating on that. I suspect, because there are significantly more elements and complexity to the second proposal to what is proposed as it is not just building something on a piece of land, it is digging out and creating land into the river. There are complex elements to it - none of which are insurmountable, all of which could be contemplated. If we were to agree that is looking like a more optimal outcome, we could potentially find ways to make it work.

It is quite bizarre to hear in our briefing from Mr Lennon this morning on that second proposal - 2.0 - the Government is insisting those proponents of the proposal demonstrate they have consulted with Hobart City Council, RSL and the Regatta Association and that they are all onboard with it. At no point, particularly through the earliest stages, did the Government demonstrate that for their own proposal, absolutely not - in fact, the opposite.

This is in the public domain through hearings from the Public Accounts Committee held during the inquiry on the feasibility of this proposal, we heard clearly all those proponents heard about the Government's proposal the day it landed in the media. That is the RSL, the Hobart City Council, Regatta Association. Virtually none of them heard about it and if they heard about it before the day it arrived in the media, it was a matter of days or maybe a week or two before. No opportunity to actually be involved and genuinely consulted.

To hear from the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, which is on the public record in hearings from the Public Accounts Committee, when we heard from Professor Greg Lehman, who had been intimately involved in what then was the master planning for the Macquarie Point site. The aspect there was the Aboriginal truth and reconciliation park. He had been involved for a couple of years at that point in a co-design process with the Aboriginal community towards developing that park as part of a central part of what had been the master plan. To hear from him in the Public Accounts Committee hearing that he heard about the utter scrapping of that plan and imposition of a new plan for a stadium in the media is utterly astonishing and disrespectful. Unbelievable.

While I am on the topic of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, they are still being disrespected here. To have now another precinct plan put out with what is potentially a Tasmanian Aboriginal culturally informed nature strip to this stadium is utterly astonishing. If you dig into the documents for this newly released Macquarie Point precinct plan and what they say in their consultation strategy, it is very neutrally put, but it is telling when it says 'under engagement with stakeholders' and under a sub-heading 'connection with the site's past'. It says it was clear from early conversations with members of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community that there is a need for a fresh conversation with the community around the delivery of a culturally-informed space at Mac Point before proceeding with a truth and reconciliation specific concept.

That reads to me like they were rebuffed when they went back and said yes, sorry we scrapped the last idea when we were developing with you, whoops, shall we talk about the next idea? They have been told, from my reading of that, bugger off. Excuse my language. It is probably my assumption, but it would be interesting to have that corrected because in the Mac Point draft precinct plan document on the website and page 20, 3.1.2 Aboriginal culturally informed zone, we find out more about the fact it sounds likely while the Government might have thought it could throw out the previous idea which was centrally focused around the idea of a park and then just whack it in where it could fit around the site of a stadium under its new proposal.

It sounds to me from the description here that the Aboriginal community is not thrilled about that, necessarily, and an assumption was made this something could be just transferrable from the previous concept into this one. In fact, when the Premier fronted the Public Accounts Committee, when we were having hearings on the inquiry on this matter, he confirmed he had not, ahead of the decision or at that time since the decision, personally contacted the Tasmanian Aboriginal community about the scrapping of the previous plan and the assumed inclusion of a partial version of that in this new plan. He had not had contact with them. Neither had the relevant minister for Aboriginal affairs.

Macquarie Point Development Corporation was beginning engagement with the Aboriginal community. I recognise that, but think this Government has absolutely taken the Tasmanian Aboriginal community for granted, has treated them disgracefully and disrespectfully. It is a travesty we would have thrown out the idea of centralising, focusing and showcasing an Aboriginal truth and reconciliation park for that site with a stadium dumped in on top, relegating it to an effective nature strip to the stadium.

Sitting is suspended from 1.00 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

MOTION

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Resumed from above.

[2.57 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, before the break, I was noting something and the paper I wrote on what I was noting on has disappeared.

Ms Rattray - About to note. And it was on the other side of you.

Ms WEBB - It was and I must have taken it back to the office and misplaced. I will pick up a different point then and hope it does not follow on to clangingly from where I left off.

I have spoken about the fact that I feel the Government's processes were flawed and that they have been shown up by subsequent proposals that have come forward. These would need to be fully developed and assessed under their own merits, but have received a very warm reception, demonstrated a great deal of interest and a great deal of, what appears to be, a respectful process.

I note in our briefing this morning those proponents for that second alternative 2.0 project mentioned writing to the Premier. Then the Premier wrote back to them to outline things that needed to be provided in more detail by 5 February 2024 by those proponents, to be considered in a continuing way as a potential project. I was interested to see in the Premier's letter back to them, which was provided to us, in the list of various things particular attention drawn to environmental impact concerns and particularly in relation to the handfish. It noted there was a risk of extinction for that handfish and therefore that would be something the proponents would have to demonstrate they had dealt with and had interacted appropriately with the federal government about.

It is particularly ironic to have the Government point that sort of matter out to other proponents at this time when we are seeing the state Government being incredibly rebuffing of concerns about the Maugean skate and its extinction in Macquarie Harbour rather than Macquarie Point. Perhaps, if the Maugean skates was at Macquarie Point and was going to be impacted by another proponent's proposal, the Government might give it precedence over other concerns.

It is very interesting to see, as others have noted, the particular concern that this whole process appears to be at the beck and call of the AFL. It appears that the AFL has been directing our state, if not bullying our state. All influence over the direction of the proposals on the stadium so far appears to have come from the AFL. That is disturbing for many Tasmanians. It has been commented to me, and I imagine to other members, regularly, that this is a very unfortunate situation for our state and its people to feel it is being blackmailed by an entity such as the AFL, and that we are dancing to their tune.

Connecting back to events of this week, the Premier seems keen to fiercely stand up against the federal government in relation to the Maugean skate in Macquarie Harbour when it comes to the federal government potentially putting its foot down with arrangements there. We

have had a lot of fierce words from the Premier this week on that. Yet, there is no evidence at all that the Premier has been able to stand up to the AFL on behalf of the state when it was putting its foot down over matters to do with this proposal and the agreement for a team, which is very disappointing.

Others have spoken about the financial matters in relation to this project. If this project goes through a Project of State Significance integrated assessment, financial matters will be fully looked into as part of that, and I acknowledge that. Information we have to date, though, is highly concerning at best. We know there is a figure the state Government has put out there which is the figure that will be the Tasmanian taxpayers' investment in this via the Government. We know that there is no-one who credibly believes that is still the figure that will be required to build a stadium.

That is highly concerning. If the Government is still insisting that that figure can deliver a stadium at Macquarie Point, essentially that means they will have to cut their cloth to fit the figure. That is disturbing because it is going to mean compromises on whatever that stadium may ultimately present as, and be. There is no way that the number that was come with up a couple of years ago is now a credible figure for producing the stadium as described.

In relation to this POSS directive, can we get some clarification that in sending the stadium into the POSS process, it is specifically only the stadium that is going through this process? In her summing up, could the Leader confirm, that while we have a precinct plan from the Macquarie Point Development Corporation, which was produced to satisfy the federal government's funding commitment, the precinct in total is not what we are sending through the POSS process? I would like that confirmed by the Leader: that it is just the stadium component of the precinct plan.

If that is the case, when the integrated assessment occurs covering each of those aspects - economic, cultural, social, and environmental - that that assessment is only being done of the stadium in isolation. In making the economic, social or cultural assessments, the other aspects that are laid out in the precinct plan would not be brought into the assessment, because that is not what we are sending into the POSS process. I want that clarified. From what I understand, having put forward the precinct plan, in order to satisfy a requirement of the federal government to have a plan, we do not have any guarantees that the other elements beyond the oval stadium structure and its concourse, will actually come about. Can the Leader confirm if my understanding is correct?

It is a plan. We know that plans have existed in this space before and were readily discarded. I want to be very clear that what is being sent into the POSS assessment process is the stadium and only the stadium, that the assessments will be made on the basis of the stadium and only the stadium, not the additional developments the plan lays out around it. Can the Leader comment on what guarantees, if any, that the other elements of that plan will even be delivered?

On that same point, given that the only thing we are definitely trying to progress tangibly through this POSS directive is the stadium element of the precinct, it is quite astonishing to observe yet again its virtual visual absence from the plan. Everything else is nicely pictured. Everything else is visual and lovely when we look at what is proposed for the precinct. We see all sorts of other structures presented for us clearly. However, what is a glaring, opaque void is the actual potential visual representation of the stadium itself. It does not go unnoted in any

discussion on this topic how reluctant the Government is to present anything remotely like a true and accurate representation of what this structure might look like in its context from various important sites and sight lines.

All kinds of proposals are put forward by the Government with these opaque and modest looking structures that others have taken issue with and I have not seen the Government defend itself appropriately when others have put forward what they believe to be more accurate visual representations and explain why those are not accurate. It is disturbing that the heart of this, the stadium, is the thing we are sending to this process. The stadium is the thing that is being assessed, not the rest of the pretty pictures around it, but that is what we do not have a clear visual representation of at all.

To sum up my position, I remain highly concerned about what this process that has been used for this proposal to be brought forward means to us: from its very first inception where it was mentioned as a thought bubble in a previous premier's address and then began to move through and was promoted subsequently by the Premier, Mr Rockliff, and wrapped as part of a deal with the AFL which was signed off very much again behind the scenes without much process or public visibility, let alone public consultation.

It is highly disturbing that we have had this outcome foisted on us and we have reverse engineered a process to provide a rationale for it and information to send it into a planning process. The planning process we are sending it into through this POSS directive is only being used because the Government downstairs lost its numbers on the Floor and had to promise to use this in order to maintain confidence and supply.

We are here now with this proposal to go through a Project of State Significance process, a process which is lengthy, intensive, expensive, and requires involvement from a range of stakeholders, including the Tasmanian community. Yet, as we are here contemplating sending the proposal into that process, we also have the potential suggestion that there is another, better, alternative proposal. It is a mess that it is there. This proposal, which is not stacking up very well alongside it, is still asking to be put through this POSS process. Once we begin it, it will be interesting to see how it stacks up if it goes through an integrated assessment. Again, it would come back to this place so we can all do the numbers and know the likelihood of today's vote result. If and when it does come back as a result of going through an integrated assessment, we will have an opportunity to give it full consideration then. I presume we would also have an opportunity to know a great deal more about the potential alternatives.

My concern is that is an unfortunate waste of money. I presume the taxpayers are paying for it. Could the Leader provide some indication of the cost of this POSS process to the taxpayer? I understand the Tasmanian Planning Commission is undertaking it and perhaps we can put aside the cost of the planning commission's time and energy, although it would be interesting to know how much will be spent on this. Beyond that, I presume payments will have to be made for particular sorts of assessments or expert studies. It would be good to know how much in total has been, and will need to be, spent on this in order to get it through a potential POSS process. I am assuming that whatever that cost is, it is in addition to the \$715 million allocated for a stadium.

Beyond any of my other comments, my personal view is that this structure and this proposal is fundamentally inappropriate for the site it is proposed for. It is not my judgment to make that yay or nay; it will be interesting to see how it goes through an integrated assessment.

I cannot see how that stadium structure in that site at Mac Point is not going to be utterly unsuitable, not just for the Cenotaph and matters to do with Cenotaph sightlines and sense of place, but also for the Sullivans Cove area and the sense of Hobart as a place, the character of Hobart. This is the wrong place for this particular structure.

Having said that, sharing that opinion does not make me anti-everything. I do not appreciate name-calling in that way. The times across the public discussion on this matter in which name-calling has been entered into are childish and inappropriate. I am happy to consider projects and proposals undertaken through processes that are appropriate, respectful, involve the community and put public interest at the forefront. Particularly those that are not dictated by interstate corporate interests. I will always consider those on a good-faith basis.

Do I believe that the pros of this project should be considered in the POSS process? No, I do not. We should be looking for better options that deliver better public interest. I would like to see us find an option taking us forward that would allow for a team for our state, that would meet requirements for that. I am open to that.

I do not believe that this proposal and this process for this proposal is the way forward, so I will be voting against this matter.

The Council divided -

AYES 9

Mr Duigan (Teller)
Mr Edmunds
Mr Harriss
Mrs Hiscutt
Ms Howlett
Ms Lovell
Ms Palmer
Ms Rattray
Mr Willie

NOES 5

Ms Armitage
Ms Forrest
Mr Gaffney
Mr Valentine (Teller)
Ms Webb

Motion agreed to.