

Legislative Council

Hansard

Tuesday 2 December 2025

The President, Mr Farrell, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

[excerpt...]

MOTION

Project Marinus Whole-of-State Business Case and Federal Government Agreement

[p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I'm happy to stand and add my voice to the honourable member for Mersey's call for the release of the full and unredacted Project Marinus whole-of-state business case and Project Marinus agreement signed by the State Minister and the federal government.

I may say 'I'm happy,' but that's a heavily qualified statement. I'm actually quite disturbed and even angry that for a project of this magnitude with such immediate and long-term ramifications for Tasmania, we have to stand in this place and formally seek to secure full public disclosure of fundamental documents pivotal to the project and to the community's confidence in that project, which is clearly still lacking; that we have been put in this position by the state government, which barely misses any chance to trumpet its self-congratulatory claims that it's the most open and transparent government ever. All that needs to happen is for those claims to be written in all caps and you'd have a Trump-esque tweet to put forward, both in presentation and in hubris. It's utterly inaccurate. I feel I have a responsibility to add my voice here to the honourable member's pertinent and reasonable call for full transparency, especially in relation to the government's actions and those key documents upon which the actions are based regarding the project.

As the member for Mersey has outlined, so I will not go over the ground again in detail, that despite promises to release the whole-of-state business case to the general public 30 days before making its final investment decision, the government failed to do so. Instead, after having backed itself into a convention-period corner in late July this year, the government required MPs to swear secrecy, who were at the 11th hour provided with an extremely unsatisfactory speed-reading access to the mountains of whole-of-state business case folders, after which the Energy minister promptly signed the agreement with the federal government.

Then, after the agreement was signed, in flagrant breach of the commitment to release it before the decision was made, the whole-of-state business case was released. Well, sections of it were released, anyway. This broken promise and sleight-of-hand have escalated the serious disquiet within the community around both the ramifications of Marinus, but also whether they can trust what the government tells them about a project of this magnitude. People cannot trust that the decision was the best decision made thanks to these public contortions.

What we do know is the government essentially delegated its final investment decision to an expert assessment panel. That panel was comprised of five energy executives. Two were from Hydro Tas and one from TasNetworks. Both of those entities will benefit directly from

Marinus going ahead. The expert advisory panel produced its report in July this year. Unsurprisingly, they gave the project the tick of approval and the government followed suit. Unsurprisingly, the panel's report has been released and it's unredacted. Funny that a glowing report gets released in full. Clearly nothing of concern to see there.

It's also worth noting the government also relied heavily on a report prepared by the Department of Energy Executive Steering Committee, which is chaired by the Secretary of State Growth. The other members were the Secretary of DPAC, Secretary of Treasury, Secretary of NRE Tas, and acting CEO of ReCFIT. This departmental Energy Executive Steering Committee prepared an 111-page report called the Final Investment Decision Assessment Report and notably, this report is heavily redacted. This is where we see the secrecy surrounding the information provided to the government upon which it based its final decision, and it begs the question, given the full release of one energy expert panel's report, why the other has been redacted so heavily?

The material redactions of the Final Investment Decision Assessment Report (FIDAR) that would assist in critically assessing the government's decision to go ahead with Marinus include, and I am going to highlight a few for the members, interest. Transmission pricing impact are redacted at page 42 of the report, as is the identity of the person who did the modelling for State Growth on page 43, begging to question why is there modelling that we haven't been provided? The apparent value of the wholesale price benefit has been deleted from page 44. The size of the additional loan required by the Northwest Transmission Developments from TASCORP is redacted from page 52. There is projected to be a net loss to the government over the first 25 years, but exactly how much that net loss is has been redacted in Page 10. The profit projection of Hydro in a no-Marinus scenario on page 85 has been redacted, yet the profit projections with Marinus have been provided and half of the page for project costs due diligence is redacted at page 103.

There are also those pages which have been redacted in their entirety, despite it being arguable these examples of redacted information are in the public interest. Despite the fact this motion is not calling for the release of the FIDAR, it's worth highlighting the degree to which that document has also been redacted, and relevant information appears to be being kept from us. This provides another example of the secrecy surrounding this significant project.

Yes, some of these reductions may be valid on a commercial and confidence basis, but when people are provided pages which are more blacked out than not, it only serves to undermine and weaken confidence in the application of that assessment. It also serves to highlight some of the questionable redaction choices and prioritisations and raises serious questions over whether the choice of what information is or is not released is influenced by government narrative and spin rather than the application of a rigorous public-interest test.

Moving on to the whole-of-state business case, which is the main subject of this motion, I share the disbelief over the degree of redactions in that release document and the frustration over the manner of its release, which to be frank, felt shady and slippery to say the least; particularly when the whole-of-state business case was promised to be released in a timely manner for the community to inform itself on the decision options which were before the government regarding Project Marinus.

As we know, that didn't happen. Then, to add insult to injury, a heavily redacted version was released. As the member for Mersey stated:

No doubt the producers of black toner would have received a boost in sales!

The following summary is of some of the more potentially egregious reductions that may be of interest to members:

On page 60, a large slab of text related to the Northwest Transmission Developments is missing, despite this being expected to cost more than the Macquarie Point Stadium, and the costs for which Tasmanian electricity consumers are solely responsible.

On pages 109 and 110: this redacted section which relates to the wholesale energy cost implications on major industrials, which is highly relevant to Tasmania's economic fortunes.

Page 170 is entirely redacted. No idea what that relates to; a mystery black page.

Page 236 provides a graph with the cost axis redacted, so we don't know the cost breakdown of the Marinus scenario versus the no-Marinus scenario, and we are then provided the same redacted graphic on page 239.

Similarly, the project costs for TasNetworks is redacted on page 253 and page 256, along with the details of how much debt TasNetworks will have to take on, which has been blacked out on page 258.

Tasmanians might be interested to know what the project costs for Hydro will be, as they appear to run into the billions of dollars on page 277.

It would be good to know what the funding risks are on page 279.

In fact, so much information about the details of Hydro's profitability under Project Marinus is so redacted that leaves the reader incapable of making any form of assessment.

I could continue, but those are some of the key areas of removed information and detail from the whole-of-state business case, which, understandably, many in the community feel frustrated and insulted by.

It's also worth noting this parliament has a joint select committee on energy matters, which has been specifically established. The minister mentioned the committee; it was established at the start of the last parliament to scrutinise and report on the Marinus Link proposal. It's yet to release any report, so it may be that that committee does go into more detail here.

When considering the motion before, I asked myself, 'What is of particular relevance or impact from my electorate of Nelson?' I certainly make no claim to be an energy sector expert by any means. There's clear implications and ramifications of this proposal relevant to all Tasmanians no matter where they are. It clearly has statewide significance beyond the immediate region and electorate which may end up bearing the connector and related infrastructure. The rise and fall and rise again, both in the immediate and long-term, of clean renewable energy supply and costs clearly affect all Tasmanians. It will also affect future Tasmanians, and this project is recognised as having profound intergenerational equity implications for Tasmanians on a range of levels.

However, it's the secrecy and dissembling of the government on Project Marinus at different stages which this motion specifically seeks to tackle. That is why I felt a responsibility on behalf of my electorate of Nelson and those who raised this issue with me to add my voice to this call, especially in light of the final decision-making stages, key components of which occurred contentiously during the recent snap election's caretaker period, as detailed by the honourable member for Mersey.

Also, within the context of promises given and broken, regarding the release of the whole-of-state business case and the timing in which that release was promised to occur 30 days prior to the finalisation of the final investment decision, to reiterate the honourable member for Mersey's statement: if the project is so important and so positive for Tasmania, then what does the government have to hide? Demonstrate the courage of your conviction and release the detail. Provide the report in full along with the cosigned agreement. Only then will the people of Tasmania have an opportunity to examine whether these projects truly stack up and are truly in the best interest of our state. It would go a long way towards restoring a bit of faith and confidence in how the government goes about its decision-making processes.

I also note that at the 11th hour, once again, the government has circulated, just today, further information regarding concerns about releasing this information as requested by the motion, offering yet another confidential briefing. The government is not reading the room; not the room outside of this parliament's closed committee rooms anyway. It has to get better at working out an accountable framework by which the relevant information can be released or communicated more broadly to the community without always relying on locking up the community's elected representatives to give us exclusive privileged information in order to make pesky democratic accountability motions such as the member for Mersey's go away.

A select few in the know, being slightly more expanded, is a fairly cold comfort for the concerned citizens who also have a right for the greatest degree of transparency possible. It does not help those landowners, for example, affected by the northwest transmission project. It does not help the people in any electorate worried about the long-term ramifications for our robust and affordable energy network. So, I thank the honourable member for Mersey for providing the chamber with the opportunity to require further transparency from the government on Project Marinus and I support his motion.