

'Cut to the heart': Hundreds pack meeting to protest

Fury over job cuts at TMAG

David Killick

Staff and friends of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery have condemned government staff and budget cuts at a public meeting in Hobart.

Hundreds packed the Mawson Pavilion on Thursday to underline their support for the institution, which is to lose staff and funding as the government tries to balance the state budget after years of overspending.

Dr Sally Bryant told the crowd the cuts would damage the institution.

"This protest today and this issue is about heart, it's about us, and it's about access to our culture, our heritage," she said.

"These proposed redundancies cut to the very heart of TMAG."

"These collections are the story of where Tasmania has come from and where it is

today, and that is a story that is changing constantly.

"These collections are not sitting in dusty drawers, they're not static. They are living collections, and their curation, their presentation, their maintenance, depends on highly skilled, professional academic staff, not machines, not AI, real people."

The host of an ABC TV quiz show filmed at TMAG earlier this year called *Tonight At The Museum* hit out over the cuts.

"One of the stand-out segments of the show was when we heard from actual curators like Dr David Hocking, Senior Curator of Vertebrate Zoology and Palaeontology," Alex Lee shared to

her Instagram account, pointing to an e-petition that's so far fetched over 6000 signatures.

"In an incredibly shortsighted move, the state government is set to cut a bunch of jobs at TMAG, losing or merging curatorial positions, including David's."

Greens Arts spokesman Vica Bayley was at the meeting and said TMAG was one of

the state's most cherished cultural institutions.

"Cuts are likely to affect seven jobs, and include the award-winning head of the Tasmanian Herbarium, as the Liberals take an axe to the public service," he said.

"We saw at this public meeting the outrage at the Liberals' callous cuts and the impact on staff. The work TMAG does is too important to be threatened by callous job cuts driven by warped budget priorities."



Greens deputy leader Vica Bayley speaks to the media at Mawson's Place in Hobart on Thursday and (inset) the packed Friends of TMAG meeting. Pictures: David Killick.



Independent member for Nelson Meg Webb vowed to take the fight for the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and Herbarium to parliament.

"If the Rockliff government fails to see common sense and immediately call a halt to the proposed shortsighted and destructive cuts to our iconic TMAG and the Herbarium, then the parliament must intervene," she said.

"When the Upper House sits next month, I will seek a vote calling for an immediate freeze of these threatened TMAG budget and jobs cuts and instead call for a rigorous exam-

ination to be undertaken to identify the necessary investment required to properly secure and place on a sustainable footing the vital work undertaken by these publicly owned institutions."

Labor's Ella Haddad also took the government to task over its handling of redundancy payments for exiting employees, which she said had been bungled for the last decade.

"The government has already admitted it treated some redundancy payments as tax free when they should have been taxed."

"If this goes back years, pub-

lic servants who took a redundancy and moved on could be hit with a tax bill they never saw coming.

"Many will have spent that money, trusting what the government told them was right."

A government spokesman said the issue was being addressed.

"This is a legacy issue that includes the former Giddings Labor-Green government."

"The issue has been identified and we have ensured that public servants accepting voluntary redundancies have the same post-tax outcome as expected."



Alex Lee