

Final submission - Peter Brohier Senate Rural and Regional AFL Tasmania Hearings

I believe in an equitable right of all Australians to have fair access to and attend AFL football matches regardless of where they are held across Australia.

With Western Sydney or the Gold Coast we retain that right through the national highway network and a level playing field approach to air transport. Despite federal sea highway promises, federal funding and more than adequate ferry capacity - with Tasmania we do not.

For it to be fair and equitable to have a Tasmanian AFL team it must be fair and equitable to be able to attend its matches.

The sponsorship by Tasmania of Hawthorn, the Tasmanian AFL team proposal and related economic assessments are likely to skew the real story.

Many economic assessments, save for possibly that of the TCCI prior to the 1996 and 2001 federal elections, do not refer to the "single greatest impediment" that impacts on a Tasmanian AFL team and the Tasmanian economy.

Contrary to the general public perception of the word "tourism", Bass Strait transport policies do not appear to be about seeking greater numbers to come to Tasmania, and presumably to attend AFL football matches. They are about restricting numbers by seeking longer stays by mainlanders at core tourist establishments and value adding. It is also about air and sea holiday packages.

It is about holding games at locations where substantial tourism service add-ons can be applied or encouraged, resulting in often insurmountable cost barriers to attendance for the general football supporter whilst increasing and targeting revenue mainly for the upper level of one section of Tasmanian tourism.

Tasmanian taxpayer's funds, through sponsorship of Hawthorn, and Federal BSPVES funding are both seemingly being applied for this targeted purpose and Canberra's bureaucrats, including those involved in the annual BSPVES ministerial review process, seem to now be taking every step to facilitate this outcome.

Canberra, by acting this way, is taking football out of the hands of ordinary supporters and their families and offering them matches on television.

It is also not requiring air to compete against "highway equivalent" surface travel costs, in particular, regarding access to matches and at other times, including times of peak demand.

Bass Strait transport policies need to deliver somewhat the same as the Hume Highway and all other inter-capital routes. Tasmania, as a state, and regardless of its natural beauty, should be treated the same as Switzerland, where a wide range of socio-economic groups can enter and exit. Supporters should not face unnecessary barriers to cross the Victorian-Tasmanian border.

Are Tasmanian AFL team matches to be just another example, together with Hawthorn away matches held in Tasmania, where supporters and their families cannot attend?

Tasmanians face another barrier. A lack of sea fares based on bitumen equivalence or A to B fares, northbound. These fares are said to be sought by Tasmanians. Without them, many

Tasmanians will be precluded from leaving the state for a potential 11 away games, leaving many Tasmanians to spend holiday dollars at home.

This may increase attendance at "home" games and core Tasmanian tourism sector revenue but at the expense of equal access to "away" games on the mainland.

I wonder whether Jeff Kennett knew all this when he accepted Tasmanian sponsorship for Hawthorn and traded personal liberty of all to attend matches for sponsorship funding obtained from taxpayers, many too poor to attend matches?

Industries have every right to protect their patch. But many other industries, people and entities lose significantly as the cost of this type of protection.

Canberra's bureaucracy seems to be making a farce of the democratic process by not implementing a fair National Sea Highway or "bitumen equivalence", for which there is a national mandate - also a mockery of undertakings made to the people of Australia from 1996 to those given by Rudd Labor.

Instead they are, by act and omission, advancing the interest of one part of one industry group ahead of the national interest. Why?

This approach needs to be stopped.

This Committee should not even attempt to consider the regional economic implications of a Tasmanian AFL team without understanding how Canberra's blocking of the National Sea Highway acts against allowing industry demand curves to move outward, limits population growth, limits investment, damages long term sustainability of many activities, reduces attendance numbers and the economic and social growth for many sectors of the Victorian and Tasmanian economies, including AFL football and the businesses of its sponsors.

This concern is currently before the PM and Leader of the Opposition. Two previous PM's have attempted to fairly address this issue. Kevin Rudd is yet to respond.

It is now time for the current PM to apply the BSPVES Federal expenditure to avoid it just inflating the cost of regular access. The BSPVES needs to be targeted by Canberra to achieve bitumen equivalence.

Yes, it's fair and equitable to have a Tasmanian AFL team but not one appearing 22 weeks in a location where Canberra unjustifiably restricts access.

Federal policy, Federal funding and shipping resources are in place to offer an equitable transport link connecting the whole nation, now. They have been there since 1996.

On one rough annual estimate, there may be about one million empty berths or reclining seats, uncapped federal funding and Howard and Rudd Labor promises of bringing the cost of crossing by sea to that of travelling by bitumen and evidence that low fares allow many more travellers to cross.

Canberra has a national mandate and the entire federal responsibility for this national route. Tasmania, if it chooses, can also act to deliver it. It is time to stop the waste of resources.

You, as members of this Committee, have a choice, you can add to a loss of public trust or you can act fairly. You can let Bass Strait policies be controlled for the interests of one group or you can show that democracy can work.

This enquiry is said to be based on equity and fairness. You will do no justice to this issue if you ignore what I have said. This issue is fully documented.

This issue is more than tourism. It is a basic transport and access issue about the entire Tasmanian community and its relationship and access to other states” 1. 1. Martin Ferguson - Media Release, dated 16th February 2000

There is perhaps no better example of the failure of the Australian democratic process than this one.

Why would one hold AFL football matches in places where Canberra denies “basic transport and access”? Fix access and give Tasmania transport and football fairness.