

Submission to the Senate AFL enquiry  
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The Commonwealth is denying Tasmania an AFL team and all Australians fair access to AFL matches by ineffective use of uncapped federal funding, obtained by the people for equitable sea highway access over the Victorian -Tasmanian border.

Canberra is increasing the cost of crossing Bass Strait by advancing uncapped funding for an equalisation scheme that encourages value adding and with no incentive or control mechanism to lower fares.

Tasmania's single greatest impediment to the growth of population, investment and jobs is being maintained. Canberra is keeping Tasmania's population low, visitor numbers low, keeping investment in Tasmania low and keeping people out of jobs.

The nation has two choices over this route of national importance. It can offer the status quo, of mainly air and sea holiday travel and accommodation packages to attend AFL Hawthorn away games, offering access to football matches for a limited few. It can advance a future AFL Tasmanian team whose matches many people will not be able to afford to attend. In this case, the people suffer while preference is given to upper level Tasmanian tourism revenue priorities.

Or, it can provide, in addition to existing ferry fares, the option of equitable basic transport at bitumen cost, providing access for all to attend AFL matches and any other nation building task required by ordinary Australians. It can provide a strong and populated Tasmania, able to sustain AFL football, and allow an unprecedented level of interstate supporters to attend matches.

Each-way passenger fares of \$50 and, a car and all its passengers of under \$300, offering transport equity are sought, costed, affordable, federally funded and deliverable - Using BSPVES funding, these fares could be made available now yet are not delivered, while about 1 million sea passenger trips go unused.

The National Sea Highway is being blocked by Canberra. Why?

Canberra is packaging Bass Strait sea access in concepts of fairness and equity at election time to look like an interstate highway, the only sound justification for Federal BSPVES funding.

The Coalition said Bass Strait was to be "part of the National Highway" and was to be an equitable "Tasmanian Sea Highway". Rudd Labor said "Bass Strait is Tasmania's highway to the mainland, linking it by sea instead of bitumen", "It is time for it (the equalization payment) to be increased to move toward the current cost of driving similar distances on the National Highway"

Martin Ferguson - Media Release September 9, 2007

Despite this and more federal funding, Canberra denies fair A to B travel for most.

It's time to stop this deception and waste of taxpayer's funds.

It is time Canberra stopped delegating the Commonwealth's responsibility and also facilitating one part of one industry to advance its priorities over all the rest.

Many Tasmanians will have their hopes dashed by AFL Tasmania matches held in parts of Australia they should be able to, but cannot afford to attend. Victorian and other supporters are also prejudiced by unfair transport links.

Why hold football matches in inaccessible places, that is, in places to which Canberra denies fair access? At least with matches at the Gold Coast and Western Sydney there will be highway access!

Targeted tourism is not fulfilling the Commonwealth's responsibilities to the AFL and, other service industries, or linking this nation to a national transport grid. Unnecessary losses, possibly in the hundreds of millions, have and are being incurred by many businesses over much of the term of the BSPVES. This may have included the AFL.

There is perhaps no better example of a failure or denial of democracy than this one. Do you know how hard it is to take an issue from nowhere to the top of the political stage, twice? The people voted, and businesses across Tasmania supported, an equitable sea highway, to be part of the National Highway from 1996. Canberra has demonstrated the clearest abdication of the Commonwealth's responsibility. The national mandate has become worthless.

An AFL Tasmanian team, and sponsorship of Hawthorn, will be and is just another promotional tool, paid for by Federal and Tasmanian taxpayers, to feed the upper part of the Tasmanian tourism industry.

Two Prime Ministers tried to act fairly. A House of Representatives committee also lent support for the equitable link. Despite a negative Federal Government response, fearing an over optimistic demand, excessive cost blowouts, an increased level of financial risk or lack of private sector interest, John Howard tried to fix access with an offer of \$50 sea passenger fares. He then said, "I'm sorry" when the offer was opposed by parts of the Tasmanian tourism sector, preferring Commonwealth funding to be kept to the shell of vehicles. The other fears stated have been proven to be unfounded.

It is a national disgrace that faith in democracy is being so eroded.

Wall Street is an example a lack of effective government surveillance. Bass Strait is another. Why apply Federal money to an industry and then, in the absence of competition, fail to introduce Government controls? Why have an annual monitoring system that fails the people's mandate and interests? Is this democracy in Australia? Is this practice happening across this nation?

A random enquiry shows that airfares can be from \$49 to \$388, one-way. What will these fares be at times of peak football matches? Why not air fares competing with bitumen equivalent surface fares, as over very other inter-capital route? Why just air packages competing with sea packages?

Who is blocking the National Sea Highway and has sufficient power over a national mandate?

There is nothing wrong with commercial priorities and industries looking after their own patch. That's their job. But, what gives Canberra's bureaucracy the right to override sensible policies capable of driving the economies of two states?

Sustainability of an AFL team is about enough ordinary people having children to play ordinary football matches in local cities and towns, enough children to be interested in matches, parents with jobs to afford to take them there and proper connections to the National Highway grid to attend matches.

I call on Kevin Rudd to meet Labor's commitments, not with extra money but with implementation of sound policy capable of delivering his stated intention.

Canberra is treating Tasmanians as second-class citizens and their whole economy is being stifled. Their children leave, as do their football players. Why does this nation treat its own people this way? Are we also going to give them a fair and equitable Tassie team, but no access to it? What kind of equity is that?

The Prime Minister can offer ferry-based public transport, combined with an open sea highway, or choose to just benefit a privileged few and deny Australians basic transport over the Victorian border.

Martin Ferguson knows the difference. He said:

"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". Martin Ferguson - Media Release, dated 16<sup>th</sup> February 2000

Well Rudd Labor has equalised the driver in a car at 70 cents a km, but all the passengers are required to pay a transport "toll". There is also no bus fare equivalent to keep a car at home, only a \$360, a car, Commonwealth incentive to take one (now indexed to the CPI, not road travel, under Rudd Labor).

On the 5<sup>th</sup> November 2008 the Prime Minister personally has agreed to answer the following question:

Prime Minister,

There seems to be evidence that Tasmania's National Sea Highway is being blocked, denying Tasmanians fair access to the national transport grid.

Tasmania is entitled to open and fair interstate transport links, as all other states.

Federal application of Bass Strait equalisation schemes discriminates against Tasmania. One scheme, equalises the cost of car travel at 70 cents a km and then ignores passengers in the car, and offers no bus fare equivalent, the other, excludes southbound consumables and northbound international exports.

Families and businesses in Tasmania, and across Australia, are incurring unnecessary separation and financial loss, as a result.

The people obtained federal funding for interstate transport equality. Both Keating and Howard tried to fulfil this federal responsibility and national mandate.

When will you, Prime Minister, remove the blockage and bring the total cost of crossing Bass Strait to the cost of bitumen travel, by just effectively directing and monitoring, existing and adequate, equalisation funding?

“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 16<sup>th</sup> February 2000

I call on members of this committee, regardless of their political persuasion, go to the Prime Minister and ask that he answer the question and put the very reasonable national mandate into practice in days. He can give Tasmania every chance of having its own AFL team.

Tasmania's Premier Rundle implemented the equitable transport link over winter, using the BSPVES, and numbers crossing by sea increased dramatically. One would expect that more AFL matches held in Tasmania would add further to numbers crossing.

We need fair outcomes and a democracy we can believe in.