



Speech for launch of Planning Matters Alliance Tasmania

Meg Webb, 6 July 2017

Hello everyone, and thank you Sophie for asking me to speak tonight.

I think there are two broad reasons why we are all here: things we know, and things we feel.

What we know, each of us here, is the value of the opportunity presented to this state in developing a new planning scheme. Whether our focus is on the natural environment, the built environment, culture and heritage, or community health and well-being – we know that planning matters. That reviewing, changing, re-creating our state planning scheme presents us with a rare and valuable opportunity to make things better. Structurally, strategically better. That's what we know.

But we are also here because of what we feel. What we feel, I'm guessing, is concern that Tasmania is missing out on this valuable opportunity. I think many here are feeling concern at being shut out of this process and the consequences of a missed opportunity. What we feel may well be a fear that our lives, the lives of our families, our neighbours, our community, will be harmed by this process. This process that could be, should be, making our lives better.

I'm here as a representative of Anglicare Tasmania. We have recently joined PMAT. Which I imagine may have many people scratching their heads and asking, 'Why is Anglicare Tasmania getting involved in Planning?'

Planning certainly isn't our core business. Tasmanian people and communities, especially those that are doing it toughest, are our core business. We deliver services and support of many kinds in every region of the state – services that include disability and aged care, alcohol and drug, mental health, family support,



community development, housing and homelessness, financial counselling and gambling counselling.

We know, from the work that we do, that the social challenges which Tassie faces don't exist in isolation, they are very much connected. We can't solve them one by one. We need to think of them holistically. Our view is that in order to meaningfully address the social challenges we face as a State, what we need to make good use of are connecting mechanisms. Things that provide a connected foundation.

Which brings me to ask... 'What is the Planning system for?'

Planning is strange and mysterious, and most of us don't want to think about it in the normal course of events, until it affects us directly. But it isn't just about the development next door, or the proposed sky scraper in our city, or our frustration trying to get our renos approved. Our planning system can affect our lives and our community in quite profound ways.

Planning has the potential to be the foundation for many aspects of our social and community outcomes. We only have to look to the past at things like broadacre public housing estates to recognise ways in which the Tasmanian community and our social outcomes have already been shaped and affected by Planning decisions.

Let me draw on work that SARC at Anglicare Tasmania has been involved in in recent years and mention a couple of social issues facing Tasmania that are good examples of the relevance of the Planning system to our social outcomes.

The first is affordable housing.

Every year in April, Anglicare Tasmania does a Rental Affordability Snapshot. We look at the properties available in the private rental market and gauge their affordability for households on low incomes. We consistently find that for people on low incomes (and here I'm talking mostly about those reliant on income support payments from the Government), there are very, very few properties in the private rental market that could be regarded as affordable for them.



To give you a taste of what I mean: on the first weekend of April this year, for a young person on Youth Allowance, there was not one property advertised for rent that could be considered affordable. Not one. That includes rooms in a share house. And it's getting worse.

Why? Because we have a rising proportion of people pooling in the private rental market and competing for properties. People who might otherwise have purchased homes can no longer afford to and are now renting for longer. (First home buyers are dropping as a percentage of house sales in Tasmania- now down to about 11%, while investment buyers are rising as a percentage – up to around 21%). Then there are people who are eligible for public or social housing, but we don't have enough of it for them, so they are stuck in the private rental market too. (Our public and social housing waiting list is sitting at around 3500. Half of those are in the Priority 1 category)

There are no silver bullets when it comes to solving our affordable housing crisis. But there are a whole bunch of levers we need to be using if we are to begin to turn it around. Including Planning. The Planning scheme provides a range of opportunities to promote affordable housing – and we don't seem to be trying any of them yet.

The second issues I'd like to talk about is food security.

SARC was part of the Tasmanian Food Access Research Coalition which produced a report on food security in Tasmania a few years ago. That research found that there is an association between family income and food access. A key aspect of that related to barriers in travelling to food shops. Around 10% of people surveyed in that research had difficulties getting to food outlets. It highlighted a phenomenon called food deserts. In some Tasmanian municipalities, when food outlets are mapped, you find that many people have no food outlets in their local area.

When the research mapped all Tasmanian shops which carried an adequate range of fresh fruit and vegetables, it found that only 5% of those shops were located in



low income areas. There are systemic, structural barriers to the food access and food security of too many Tasmanians. That research recommended that the importance of food security be recognised in both urban and agricultural land use planning.

Those are quick examples of two important social issues that challenge our state which have relevance to Planning. They go some way to illustrate the breadth and depth of the opportunity we have in creating the best Planning Scheme we possibly can.

Which makes me want to talk now about... What's missing? How is it that we, as a state, are letting this opportunity slip through our fingers?

Firstly, a vision.

Why, oh why, hasn't this process to date sought to articulate a vision? A high level, aspirational, community-created and endorsed vision for the State. (And I'm sorry, but 'Fairer, faster, cheaper, simpler' just doesn't cut it!)

Through an articulated vision, we should be able to see and know how the foundation of a statewide Planning Scheme is connected to the aspirations and outcomes we want as a community. Outcomes in health, our economy, in education, for families and communities, in housing. The vision is missing in action.

When I try to recall any aspirational visions for our State expressed in recent years, there is one that comes to mind. The declaration by the State Govt that they want Tasmania, the state with currently the worst health outcomes, to be the healthiest state by 2025. Bold. Exciting. Aspirational. And then we see no strategic approach to achieving this vision. All international evidence says that at least 5% of your total health budget must be spent on preventative health to turn around your long term health indicators. Tassie has an investment in preventative health that sits at under 2% of the total health budget and is falling over coming years. And here we see this Statewide Planning Scheme being developed and



implemented with the very clear opportunity to influence long term health outcomes. The perfect opportunity to develop an overarching State Policy on Healthy Places and Spaces, something the Heart Foundation has been making a compelling argument for for a number of years now. Where is our State Policy to support our bold health aspiration?

So, we are missing a vision.

And the second key ingredient we are missing is leadership.

The challenges ranged against Tassie are significant – in health, education, housing, employment, in our economy. But, there are also things in our favour: we are small and special; there are only half a million of us; none of us live that far away from each other; all our challenges and issues are connected; and, we are a pretty damn creative bunch. So we must, we must be able to discover unique opportunities to tackle our challenges together.

What do we need to leverage the advantages that we have? Leadership. Creative, courageous leadership. Happily, I think some of that leadership is here tonight, and that is very heartening to see. Let's take what brought us here tonight – those things we know about the opportunity presented by a new Planning scheme and those things we feel about its importance to our state – and let's offer our vision, and our leadership for this fabulous state of ours.