



Planning Institute of Australia Conference 2018

Presentation given by Sophie Underwood on the conference theme 'State Policies - developing a vision to deliver community will'

The Planning Matters Alliance Tasmania, also known as PMAT, officially launched last year. The impetus were concerns over the weakening of the state's planning laws through the proposed Tasmanian Planning Scheme.

PMAT is not opposed to a single, statewide scheme, but we do believe Tasmania needs a strategic, integrated and democratic planning system.

Planning needs to deliver sustainable outcomes and be a balance between development, maintaining community and environmental amenity and ensuring we, the community, have a say, through appeal rights, and in doing so, protect the special values that make the Tasmania we all love.

Our logo represents the shared values that have bought the alliance together.

These values create our identity, our sense of place, our economic prosperity and make Tasmania a special place to live and visit.

PMAT now has 61 member groups ranging from social justice groups like Anglicare, community groups like the South Hobart Progress Association or the one I convene, the Freycinet Action Network, planning advocates like the Tasmanian Planning Information Network, environment groups like The Wilderness Society and the Tasmanian Conservation Trust as well as recreation and ratepayer association groups.

The most up-to-date PMAT member list can be seen on our website.

I don't think Tasmania has ever had an alliance this large or diverse.

PMAT is also a Friend of the Global Island Partnership (GLISPA), which promotes action to build resilient and sustainable island communities from around the world.

PMAT is GLISPA's first Australian 'Friend'.

GLISPA is made up of 12 island governments, and over 20 island entities as well as non-government organisations, intergovernmental organisations and private and philanthropic entities.

PMAT believes that to achieve the best future for Tasmania, the planning system must be underpinned by six key principles, as outlined in PMAT's platform document. In the context of this conference's themes, we are concerned by a number of issues, including residential development standards, lack of transparency regarding foreign ownership and release of Crown land (such as Rosny Hill), open discretion on significant developments (such as Fragrance), the Expressions of Interest process (such as Lake Malbena in the Walls of Jerusalem National Park within the World Heritage Area) and reliance on the non-statutory Reserve Activity Assessment process for the assessment of tourist developments in one of Tasmania's most sensitive and key assets – our parks and reserves.

#planningmatters



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FOCUS

I want to focus on one of our key principles: the development and implementation of a strategic vision.

That is to 'Establish and implement a community endorsed, sustainable, long-term strategic vision for Tasmania, including social, economic and environmental goals and supported by community endorsed state and/or regional policies on a wide range of issues.'

One of PMAT's founding propositions is that the planning reforms were done in the wrong order – that the vision needed to be captured through community consultation, and THEN a planning scheme developed to implement that vision.

Which is what the Liberals said they would do as part of their election commitments before the 2014 state election.

They stated that immediately after the 2014 election that they would commence drafting State Policies to provide the guidance to Council's to implement the single statewide scheme.

To date the Liberal Government has introduced no policies but has completed its state planning provisions and councils are developing their LPPs with no guiding policies. That means that every inch of Tasmania is about to be re-zoned with no over-arching strategic policies or vision.

Also, there are still significant concerns about the State Planning Provisions.

Approximately 300 submissions were received on the draft provisions – but many feel their concerns were not listened to by government.

Currently, state policies are the best vehicle we have to articulate vision and set out statewide policy positions on a range of issues – population/settlement and tourism being the two most relevant to this conference.

Despite the importance of these policies, 25 years after the State Policies and Projects Act 1993 was introduced, we still only have three.

Whether this is the result of legislative difficulties or lack of leadership, the absence of clear policy statements has led to ad hoc decisions, inconsistent approaches to development, and poor infrastructure planning.

The State Government has acknowledged this policy vacuum and last year proposed a new instrument,

State Planning Policies. There has been no further progress or draft released following the first round of consultation, but we do understand that the government still intends to pursue that approach.

PMAT was concerned by some aspects of the State Planning Policies, not least that they came AFTER the State Planning provisions were declared and would not trigger a review of those provisions. Despite this, we support any efforts to develop strategic policies.

However, we consider the three critical elements of any such policies to be:

1. Public consultation

Community buy-in for the policies will require broad-ranging consultation with all stakeholders, and opportunities to comment on draft policies.

For example, at the moment PMAT is exploring collaboration with GLISPA by co-hosting an event called 'Resilient Tasmania'.

The event brings together a small group of leaders, change-makers and strategists to determine if an opportunity exists to co-create a vision for Tasmania's future and what a pathway to doing this would look like.

The GLISPA model enables us to take learnings from other island communities around the world that are leading in this area and to see what it may look like for Tasmania.

The Tasmania Together process, undertaken in the 1990s, is another model of community consultation to develop a shared vision that could be replicated.

This process was largely seen as successful, until implementation and selective follow-through by government.

2. Legislative provisions requiring the policies to be implemented

It is essential that the policies are not simply glossy statements but are given effect through laws requiring decisions to be consistent with the policies.

In my view, we can articulate a shared vision for our wonderful state of Tasmania, but if that vision is not grounded in some type of legislative framework then our shared vision will be difficult to implement, especially with changes of government.

Government and industry often point to a range of documents, such as T21 or Parks 21, to suggest



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that formal state policies are not needed. However, those documents do not perform the function of state policies, are not developed collaboratively and usually skew towards the assumption of development.

They were not subject to broad consultation and review, and cannot directly influence planning decisions.

Unless a planning scheme explicitly requires a development application to be consistent with such documents, a council cannot have regard to the document in making its decision.

Instead, policies must be recognised as legal instruments that must be considered in decision making, and which governments must report against. In the same way that the Planning Commission must explicitly consider whether a scheme amendment is consistent with state policies, the law should require government agencies to explicitly consider consistency with policies across various decision-making functions – such as budget allocations, Crown land releases, and infrastructure planning.

3. Holistic application

Policies should not just influence the content of planning schemes, but should be implemented through all aspects of strategic planning, resource allocation, monitoring and reporting.

This should include, at a minimum, population/settlement (also touching on issues such as housing and foreign ownership), transport and utilities infrastructure, tourism, cultural heritage, biodiversity and natural values – each of these topics cuts across a number of industries, regions, government departments and stakeholder demographics and would benefit from a whole of government approach.

There may also be a role for more localised application through regional strategies.

A CONVERSATION WITH ALL TASMANIANS

So, what would state policies on population / settlement and tourism look like?

That's not for me, or for PMAT to say – the content of such policies should be the result of a conversation with all Tasmanians.

But that conversation needs to tackle some key issues.

Population/Settlement Policy

A population/settlement policy would examine the rationale behind the 650,000 population target and explore what population Tasmania can actually support.

It would identify key settlement nodes in which development could be focused and infrastructure needs planned for, rather than sprawling / ribbon development or isolated settlements.

Any rezoning to release residential land should be consistent with the policy.

Urban growth boundaries in the Regional Land Use Strategies attempt to do this to some degree, but have had limited success in constraining development.

A population and settlement strategy should examine demographics and ensure appropriate services can be provided, as well as examining immigration, foreign ownership, and encouraging ex-Tasmanians to return by providing more employment in both urban and rural areas.

The consequences of the lack of settlement policy can be seen, for example, by the contentions proposal at Cambria on Tasmania's east coast.

Cambria Green is the largest resort ever proposed for Tasmania and one of the largest rezoning (approx 3000 hectares) the east coast has ever seen.

The Cambria Village – also described as the Cambrian Culture and Art Town – proposes to create an alternate shopping and cultural centre outside Swansea with shops, cafes, restaurants, pharmacy, galleries, medical facilities and aged and palliative care.

If we had a clear settlement policy restricting development outside existing nodes and identified growth boundaries, proposals like Cambria would not have to be adjudicated in the Tribunal or the Commission – it would be obvious to developers and the community from the outset whether the proposal was an acceptable one or not.

The community would not have to for example endure defending inappropriate developments and hold public meetings as we are for this on the future of the east coast on the 21 August at the Hobart Town Hall.

Tourism Policy

A tourism policy would ensure we are protecting the values that drive visitor experiences. It would look at ensuring the quality of the visitor experience, rather than simply increasing the quantity of visitors.



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Any visitor numbers target would be based on a rigorous assessment of carrying capacity and infrastructure / service costs, rather than aspirational accounting.

It would also articulate that decisions about development in our parks and reserves, public assets, must be subject to public consultation, and a rigorous, transparent assessment process.

I'd like to finish up by discussing tourism at Freycinet National Park, and the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

I have grown up in Tasmania and my interest in planning started in Swanwick, a little coastal village on Freycinet Peninsula on Tasmania's east coast.

I have been scrutinising planning developments for over 20 years at Freycinet, including advocacy, appeals and community engagement and founded the Freycinet Action Network in 2016.

This conference asks 'As planners, do we need to ensure the State Government's targets of 1.5 million visitors by 2020 result in positive outcomes for Tasmania'.

Freycinet is a good example of these challenges.

I have been visiting Freycinet National Park since before the Coles Bay Road was sealed and there was next to no visitors.

I have also worked as a Summer Interpretation Ranger in the park over two summers, and visited the area at least once a year for almost 50 years.

I have the long view.

The Tasmanian Tourism Snapshot for the year ending March 2018, states that there were 1.28 million visitors to the state.

The Liberal government's Tasmania Visitor Economy Strategy 2015-2020 aims to grow annual visitor numbers to Tasmania to 1.5 million by 2020. Nearly 30% of all visitors to Tasmania go to the East Coast region and 75% of these go to the Freycinet Peninsula.

Freycinet currently receives approximately 300,000 visitors a year, and, depending on which annual average growth rate you use, could be significantly more within the next ten years.

3% 415,878

5.5% 512,443

It is important to note that the actual annual growth rate

from 2012/13 to 2016/17 was 11.2%.

Now at peak times, one has to queue to walk to the Wineglass Bay Lookout.

Freycinet cannot cope with the visitor numbers that it already has.

Without a strategic vision, we could kill the golden goose and lose the community support necessary for a sustainable, long-term tourist industry.

Increasingly I hear that visitors, due to what could be viewed as 'overtourism', arrive and turn around without visiting. I for one, sadly, don't visit the park at peak times anymore.

This raises questions around visitor experience, our brand and the struggling infrastructure which the park and locals have to contend with. The Freycinet Peninsula Master Plan highlights some of these challenges and choices.

In my view, and speaking with my Freycinet Action Network hat on, the Master Plan is more about getting more people into the park rather than thinking about the quality of the visitor experience.

In trying to cater for more tourists, the gateway into the park and some of the park's values will be diminished.

The existing Freycinet Visitor Centre has been earmarked for privatisation and thus will facilitate even more people into the park, especially at peak times.

A 45 metre jetty and associated infrastructure has been proposed to be constructed right in front of one of Tasmania's, and arguably Australia's, most iconic views – The Hazards.

An extension of approximately 40 metres to accommodate additional boat operators at Breakwater Jetty has also been proposed – even though a Resource Management and Planning Appeals Tribunal decision in 1998 rejected a marina proposal at Breakwater Jetty on the grounds of its incompatibility with the existing visual quality of the area, one of Tasmania's principal beauty spots.

There is also increasing pressure from heli-tourism and cruise ships – bringing noise and visual pollution with associated impacts on wildlife and visitor experience.

Cruise shipping has more than doubled to Tasmania in the past two years, from 58 port calls and 163 000 passengers and crew in 2015/16 to 130 port calls and approximately 340 000 passengers and crew expected in 2017/18



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There is no monitoring of the seabed and the environmental impacts of ships are unknown.

To take pressure off the Wineglass Bay Lookout track, the Master Plan proposes other sensitive areas be opened up, such as the internationally significant Moulting Lagoon Ramsar site and tracks behind Friendly Beaches.

And this is how it begins – a slow degradation of the values that make places special and beautiful and in doing so ironically and tragically kill the very reasons people live and visit there in the first place.

Cradle Mountain and kunanyi/Mt Wellington are other natural area destinations with similar issues as Freycinet – that is they already have more visitors than they can cope with, yet tourism industry and the Government want more.

The management plans governing many national parks and reserves have not been reviewed in years – in Freycinet, no comprehensive statutory review has occurred since its introduction.

e.g. was written in 2000.

Was due for review in 2010.

It is now over eight years overdue for review.

Where management plans have been reviewed, we've seen a move towards less prescriptive approaches and zoning designed to expand commercial opportunities as happened with the World Heritage Management Plan.

Following a market-driven EOI process that harvested development ideas that have little to no consideration of management principles, the new World Heritage Management Plan removed the prohibition on helicopter use and makes far more land available for huts and "standing camps", specifically in response to the EOI proposals.

Proper management planning should start with the natural and cultural heritage values, ensure their protection is prioritised, then see what tourism opportunities are possible.

In Tasmania we are currently doing it back to front, changing management plans to accommodate developments and thus, threatening the very things we are revered for- wilderness, wild experiences and natural and cultural heritage values of international significance.

We also saw this with RACT proposal to expand into Freycinet National Park.

The World Heritage Committee has urged the government to expedite its promised Tourism Master Plan for the World Heritage Area, but applications for tourism development (such as Lake Malbena) are already being progressed.

It remains unclear whether the Tourism Master Plan will be a strategy for sensitive development that respects natural and cultural values or, as seems more likely, a roadmap for maximum exploitation of those values.

Like Freycinet, a question also remains about the role of a Master Plan and its interaction with the management plan, planning scheme and the reserve activity assessment process.

A requirement to be consistent with a State tourism policy may be what is required to tie these various processes together."

CONCLUSION

In the short time I've had today, I've barely been able to scratch the surface of the planning issues facing Tasmania.

But the overarching objective for PMAT is this: We need to understand our shared vision before we can effectively plan for it.

The themes of this conference raise big questions about population, quality of life, amenity, tourism and how we go about both promoting and protecting the Tasmanian brand.

If we had a clear vision articulated through State Policies, which truly reflected the will of the people, then we might go part way to answering these questions.

