

# The Big Picture

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"News to use & amuse"

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## Government does what exactly?

In media reports on the Sydney power blackouts we read...

"These are the same cables that were at the centre of Monday's interruption, so we're having a very close look to see what connection is there," a spokesman said.  
[Telegraph](#)

"See what connection is there?"? Don't they know? A massive city of over 4 million people and they don't know how their power systems work!! What's connected to what!

You'd think there'd be some kind of drawings that showed all of this. Perhaps it's like Sydney airport with security cameras that don't work, murders in the departure lounge with the perpetrators able to leave by taxi!

What have the power suppliers been doing over the last 100 years? How have they been spending our money? What is their management doing?

The level of incompetence is astonishing, yet our politicians roll blithely on, stuffing themselves with taxpayer funded meals, blasting their brain cells with taxpayer funded drinks, driving in taxpayer funded cars and cozying up to favoured groups while allowing an unaccountable bureaucracy to 'run' our systems.

If you check out [TheAge](#) you'll find an interesting tale of how a woman's life was destroyed by bureaucrats seeking revenge, while the Fitzgibbon affair indicates a similar problem with unaccountable bureaucracies.

It means that our politicians aren't running anything really, they're only influencing those that really run things, the unelected officials of the public sector. This phenomenon distances the public even further from any real participation in their own democracy.

Bad enough that governments fail to even respond to citizen requests, information or complaints. To many, writing to government is like throwing letters directly into the round filing cabinet. Now we read that the government doesn't even respond to itself...

Community Services Minister Jenny Macklin supported her in a letter to Lindsay Tanner last May, but there has been no reply. Nor did Mr Tanner's office return calls to [The Age](#).

If neither The Age nor Minister Macklin can get a response, what possible hope is there for ordinary Australians?

Now add a hefty serve of obscurantism...

It goes all the way to the top. Not long ago Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, to whom bureaucracy is the milk of life, tried to explain his policy on unfair dismissal with the immortal sentence: "We said an employee who is employed by an employer who employs fewer than 15 employees must have been in employment for 12 months." A masterful display of simplifying a message into obscurity. [TheAge](#)

In the [SMH](#) we learn that federal Ministers often have to travel hundreds of miles to catch planes on which Rudd is travelling so that they can discuss things with him. This is literally policy on the run. It also means that Rudd is pulling the same 'Presidential' decision making style that was one of Howard's major weaknesses.

Individuals, even Prime Ministers, just don't have the expertise, knowledge, time or experience to answer all questions about a mammoth complex system like Australia. Insisting that all decisions go through the great leader exposes everyone to risk and amplifies the sense of hubris that seems to colour federal politics.

This method of operating also wastes the time of senior Ministers and introduces massive uncertainty into every aspect of governance – will the PM approve? Let's find out....

[The Age](#) even has a whole article devoted to the dashing Kevin Rudd, who is reported to be losing office staff at a great rate.

Meanwhile, the bureaucracy prevails. A recent article in [SMH](#) reports that...

Anaemia is an iron deficiency that leads to poor growth and development, and as such is an indicator for the general health of children. Since the intervention, anaemia rates in the area have jumped significantly.

In the six months to December 2006, 20 per cent of children were anaemic. A year later the figure had increased to 36 per cent, and by June last year it had reached 55 per cent, where it stayed in the last six months of 2008.

Now, more than half the area's children face big threats to their physical and mental development. In two years, 18 months of which was under the intervention, the anaemia rate nearly trebled.

The response to this horrible situation, ascribed to quarantine of welfare payments, appears to be a PR release in [The Australian](#)

THE Federal Government is claiming success for a controversial welfare reform with the first hard evidence of the impact of income management.

More than 90 per cent of welfare payments quarantined across northern and central Australia were spent in shops selling mostly food and clothing, according to the first nationwide figures released.

Clearly, where the money was spent is more important than the health of the Aborigines.

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## In case you missed it

### Financial mess

Teens bear brunt of unemployment [TheAge](#)

Banks cost mortgage holders \$165 month [HeraldSun](#)

Rudd's debt laden gamble [TheAustralian](#)

### Governance & spin

Rush rush brings risks for Rudd [TheAge](#)

Defence dirt file needs full investigation [TheAge](#)

Lost in bureaucratese [TheAge](#)

Tas justice chief lashed [Mercury](#)

Bureaucrats destroy citizen's life [TheAge](#)

Top Tas public servants get foreign cars [Mercury](#)

Labor MP accused of credit card rort [SMH](#)

### Climate/water

Murray flows lowest in a century [SMH](#)

Govt water price double private sector [Mercury](#)

Clean coal a faraway dream [SMH](#)

Antarctic ice shelf close to collapse [TheAge](#)

### Health/education revolution/communication/defence

Universities hit by lack of income [TheAustralian](#)

Stop pointing, start fixing health funding [TheAge](#)

Half Vic hospitals in red [TheAge](#)

Vic country kids miss out on RCH services [TheAge](#)

Broadband scheme 'hare brained' [TheAge](#)

Rural Vic maternity services face 'crisis' [TheAge](#)

Broadband decision up in the air [SMH](#)

Broadband plan deceitful [TheWest](#)

Telstra complaints soar [CourierMail](#)

### Economy/social/shelter/transport

People died after turnback at CFA checkpoints [TheAge](#)

Building a better future up to us all [TheAge](#)

Australia part of global moral crisis [SMH](#)

### World

No end in sight [ICH](#)

## A case against Tas planning

The ALP Tasmanian government has released a new approach to planning that leaves public and Council input from consideration and delegates all the power to the State government and its bureaucracy.

Many authors have written about the damage this does to our democracy. Since I don't believe that we have a democracy, I have written a different set of objections to the proposal. My argument appears below, anyone wishing to copy this or amplify it in a submission of their own is very welcome to do so.

Sir,

*As a complex systems and business consultant I felt it necessary to voice a major economic objection to the new planning proposal placed by the State government.*

*One purpose of a good planning scheme is to assure existing industries and populations that incompatible activities will not be introduced into a region without thorough review. This idea makes the state a much more stable investment proposition than a free for all approach will.*

*Investors in schools, hospitals, tourism, fine foods and wines and so on, all need some reliable assurance that their investments will be safe otherwise it is in their interests to invest elsewhere than Tasmania.*

*The state government proposal fails to provide those assurances, instead only providing assurances to those groups that have the ear of state government.*

*Yet it has been clear that small, diversified businesses make a major contribution to Tasmania's economy, and unlike large industries like forestry, require little or no public subsidies and are more resistant to recession as a group than large industries (e.g. automobile industry). They also employ more people per dollar earned.*

*As our populations have grown, and technologies have changed our world, so businesses and communities have become more interconnected hence a problem anywhere can rapidly expand into problems for many groups. The current financial crisis is a clear example of this phenomenon - sub mortgage problems in the US - world recession and bank failures around the globe.*

*The counter to these risks is more consultation and checking, after all only existing investors and communities are truly familiar with their sensitivities and needs. It may be inconvenient to some industries, or an affront to politicians who promise the 'ram projects through', nonetheless a thorough planning system protects Tasmania's economy and its stability, as well as the health and safety of its people.*

*Tasmanians can see for themselves the anger and uncertainty produced by forcing projects through a planning process with the example of the pulp mill, which only experienced a 'benefits only' assessment. Had the proposal gone ahead, the proponent would now be in massive debt at a time when the bottom has fallen out of pulp prices and recession looms large.*

*I therefore urge you to ask the government to reconsider its proposals to protect the economic health of Tasmania by assuring protection in planning to existing industries and communities,*

## Denialism lives!

A brilliant story, clearly worthy of the front page of the [Australian](#), today claims...

LONG-HELD views that farmers have blithely plundered the Australian environment - raping the soil, polluting the rivers, killing off species and hastening global warming - are for the first time being challenged as a green myth.

Fascinating stuff. Particularly as our soils are depleted, our rivers polluted, species are disappearing and global warming is proceeding apace. All a 'green myth' perhaps?

Rather than the popular belief that Australian agriculture is destroying the environment, there is an emerging counterview that responsible modern farming helps preserve the land.

The 'emerging counterview' appears to be held by very few people, one of whom states...

it is all a myth promulgated by popular environmentalists such as Tim Flannery.

Then he redefines sustainability...

"The true story of Australian agriculture is generally one of aware people farming sensibly, problems being identified and researched (largely with their own funds) and amelioration carried out and adaptations devised. This is the basis of sustainability," Dr Smith says.

Overall the article contains so many logic errors that it is truly a *tour de force* of denialism and fantasy. How about...

Dr Smith says most salt in the Murray-Darling Basin came from rain, not from ancient inland seabeds as many people believed. It was arriving at the rate of a million tonnes a year.

"This salt that has arrived, is arriving, and will continue to arrive in rain is the problem."

Salt arrived in rain? How is it possible? Sodium chloride doesn't evaporate, nor is it carried in water vapour.

Dr Smith presents neither evidence nor credible arguments instead relying on 'truth by assertion'. It's shameful that the Australian would carry such tosh as if it were fact, let alone put it on the front page.

Presumably Dr Smith is after some grant or other, or seeks to curry favour with the fertilizer industry, government or similar.

If this is journalism we're in more trouble than even I thought!