

Tasmania's landscape. Planning, heritage and forestry.
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This post has been put up to invite comment. Steve Biddulph's 26/11/10 post (on another thread) and other threads related to planning generally and the Southern Tasmanian Regional Land Use Strategy in particular.

These two realities must collide. Good governance reads the future and plans for it. Bad governance lets the burglars in and helps them ransack the house, and calls it development.

Lets talk about reality. What it looks like.

Lets talk about and galvanize the fight for a state where you can still eat, drink, breathe, raise a family, live a useful life, twenty years from now. Because it will be a very different world.

It's about Quality of Life (QoL) as I see it. That is for everyone, and everything, living. How formal and legislated "processes" such as those for heritage, planning or forestry either hinder, diminish or destroy our QoL. Or sustain and add to it. QoL could be our vision, if we had leadership with wisdom, understanding and an ability to let the community into the process; that is to help plan and execute that vision. If decisions are "top-down" decisions (i.e. we know best what's good for you; we run our own agenda; we are 'experts' –scientific or otherwise, it's jobs, it's the economy, even the triple-bottom line??) they will never work. They particularly don't work when it comes to local government land use, development control planning, to forestry regulation and to heritage decisions.

Heritage planning is mandatory for Tasmania or it needs to be. Heritage goes back thousands of years as the recent Brighton By-pass controversy illustrates. Tasmanian landscape is ancient, whether it's ancient trees or forests that are being considered, or geology, or the 'culture' of place that has emerged and from which, very special patterns have evolved across time. And just what the community at large values of those very special patterns, places and landscapes.

Landscape patterns have given Place-Tasmania an absolutely unique diversity and a rare beauty commented upon by people for over 150 years. Some patterns are natural and others are cultural, the majority, a mixture of the two. It is very special. There is no other "place" like Tasmania.

This then has to be a critical vision for future state and local government planning, for heritage and for forestry planning.

We are going to have to become very pro-active if we value and wish to keep it.

Above all what is needed is an “holistic framework” that is, where we are engaging both the left and right hemispheres of our brain to achieve a QoL outcome. (A fascinating hypothesis for who is the “master” of our thinking appeared recently on the ABC Radio National’s *All in the Mind* programme.¹)

Tasmania has had a lot of “top-down” decisions in the recent past. These in planning, and in forestry, while heritage place (or heritage landscape) has not been anywhere on the radar screen of politicians. There is a lot of community angst.

It can’t continue. Somehow if we are to survive as a resilient and healthy community into the future there has to be a healing. For all life. “Place” and sense of place, its meanings, associations, its evolved history and aesthetics has to be at its centre.

Tasmania has a model planning scheme (in the process of formulation).

There are three regional schemes (in the process of formulation) which apply to the north west, north and south of the state, with local government interim schemes which will morph off the one model. Tasmania is to have three regional strategies which sit behind the three regional planning schemes (in process of formulation). There were extensive legislative planning changes in 2009 to LUPAA, the outcome of which are unknown, untried and untested. This is where the new “process” originated, (Land Use Planning and Approvals Amendment (State and Regional Strategies) Act 2009) . Purchase the new Act, (or see it online under www.thelaw.tas.gov.au) see what it says, become part of the process, make your voice heard. Every voice counts. Only the community can change what is happening. Talk to your local councillors, the planning department, your neighbours.

In my estimation what we have and are potentially to make even easier (much of it mainland thinking) currently makes Tasmania a developer’s paradise. It also makes it much easier for government departments to institute large infrastructure changes (such as the By-Pass at Brighton) and / or introduce affordable housing via Ministerial Directives.

The Tasmanian model planning scheme formulation grew out of a long sequence of decisions, consultations, changes, modifications and so on. It started almost immediately LUPAA was legislated for in 1993, gathered steam by 1997, was rejected then by local government, and took off again under the Labour party with a brand new title “Better Planning Outcomes” by 2003. It wasn’t popular with local government and only two local government councils ever formulated planning schemes using the first Template and PD1; Central Coast and the West Tamar Council.

The Tasmanian Planning Commission is currently conducting a Review of the Template, another in that long line particularly from 2003. Essentially in my view

¹ ABC. Radio National. *All in the Mind*. 19 June 2010. The transcript is available. See for example, Iain McGilchrist. *The Master and His Emissary. The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*. Yale University Press. London 2009. McGilchrist has put the Introduction of his book on his website.

past governments interfered in planning and so a lot of the change was really politically motivated. Really, it aimed at making life easier for developers, the housing industry, and those at the coal face of development planning. It seemed to have almost nothing to do with the biophysical base and enormous biophysical diversity that comprises Tasmania and upon which such development would take place. While in LUPAA, there is Schedule 1, Parts 1 and 2, the resilience of the biophysical base, its enormous ecological variation, its apparent state of “health,” various land uses contradictions were not seen to be intimately connected to the instrument for development control.

Previously there had been a slow evolution across time in Tasmania with a concomitant slow micro or macro landscape change, (and implications which followed from this) but planning changes in my view have been profound. They have fairly galloped forward from 2005. Most importantly in the formulation of planning control, the island’s heritage fabric of place – its landscape – was somehow distinctly removed from that development control. One occurs in isolation from the other.

At present planning schemes in Tasmania generally are formulated to deal with development applications; for present use, development and changes to land. What is considered and approved or rejected, is completed, *land parcel by land parcel*. Whether this is in the city, suburbia, town, or village or elsewhere.

Consequently it can result in death by a thousand cuts and in my opinion does.

Part of Tasmania’s current problem re planning, heritage and urban landscapes is *that planning is disjointed from heritage and they are both disjointed from being considered in a landscape sense*. When ‘development’ emerges as a development application, (DA) the buildings are rarely considered in relationship to what surrounds the buildings (i.e. open space, garden size and age, garden design, exotic old trees, heritage significance etc). The evolved “whole” is simply not seen as a whole concept. That is the hard form building set in a context of soft forms. That place set in a streetscape, a micro or macro landscape. If it is a discretionary application each individual DA is considered in respect of the planning scheme but with little or no consideration to what is next door or down the street or what happened last month or last year in that street, that area, that place.

Planning schemes have development “standards” (for the various zones) and these are vitally important. Ultimately at any Resource Management and Planning Appeals Tribunal, this is where the appeal will be won or lost. If the planning scheme has “standards” that are indeterminate and vague, (ie so woolly, fuzzy, they’re not worth the paper they’re written on) the case is hopeless. Prescriptive standards as developed in planning across so many parts of Australia in this author’s view have failed urban, suburban Australia if QoL is taken as marker. We can see the result of this anywhere we care to look on the outskirts of any major capital city in this country. The cheek by jowl, monocultured suburbs have arrived in some parts of urban Tasmania, even in Tasmanian historic villages and towns. Great for local government and the rate base. Great for developers and the building industry.

But is that all that counts? Where is QoL?

Quality of life in such planning is absent. Quality of life of “open space” in suburbs is vanishing along with the biodiversity and the ecosystems that went with it. Quality of life vanished when mono-culture in plantations arrived in the 1970s.

There is better way. As a community working together we have to find it.

And the wider rural landscape? Another ball-game in planning, heritage and forestry altogether. And another story. The National Trust (Tasmania) listed rural landscapes in its ‘endangered’ list in 2009.

Everyone is encouraged to get on board this process of change as it is now evolving from 2010 onwards. There have been some references to the *Southern Tasmanian Regional Planning Land Use Strategy* in other posts. The STRPLUS is a background document to provide information about how planning schemes will be formulated in the future. (This can be found on the Tasmanian Planning Commission’s website at www.stca.tas.gov.au For the north, interested parties need to contact the Tasmania Planning Commission staff to determine the status of those regional strategies, one for the north, one for the north west.

And some questions for the Tasmanian government of the day.....

What is the Tasmanian government’s policy on its evolved landscape?

What is the Tasmanian government’s policy on heritage, one that reaches beyond a site assessment of an old building? Why have we waited 7 years for a Bill and still one isn’t before parliament?

What is the Tasmanian government’s policy on further plantation development on pastoral, agricultural and currently forested land? What is the policy especially as regards land Capability Class 4 and Class 5?

What is the Tasmanian government’s policy on ‘significant agricultural land?’ What crops and ‘use’ will be included in the mix as being “significant?”

What is the Tasmanian government’s policy on multi unit housing as it is evolving in urban, suburban, historic towns and villages and elsewhere in Tasmania?

What is the Tasmanian government’s policy on infrastructure and future needs in Tasmania as we are at, or have passed, peak oil production?

And climate change which will conceivably impinge on every part of the planning heritage, and forestry process.... ?

It’s about time to start to join all the dots surely and stop the fragmentation of our precious places. Only the community on board, can do that.