



A Submission To

New Royal Progress Report - July 2008

Department of Health and Human Services

Presented By

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On

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Introduction

As the Tasmanian Greens Shadow Spokesperson on Health and Human Services and also the Member for Denison, I welcome this opportunity to respond to the preliminary site plans for the New Royal Hobart Hospital.

The construction of a new hospital is a significant project for the whole of Tasmania and needs to serve Tasmania for the next century at least. It is therefore essential that the site selected for the development is the best site. It is also vital that considerations of the proposed hospital development must be inclusive of the views of Tasmanian community, the people that the hospital will serve in the future.

The Tasmanian Greens are not persuaded that the Hobart Railyards is the best site for a new hospital. We are concerned that the proposal is not an example of far-sighted planning for Hobart's waterfront or its working port. We believe there is a serious potential clash of operational outcomes inherent in having a major public hospital alongside a noisy, often brightly lit at night, working port.

The Greens are also concerned that, in an age of climate change with certain future sea level rise, it makes no apparent sense to site a major public health facility on the foreshore. With respect to the engineers and experts the government engaged to undertake a sea level susceptibility assessment for locating a hospital on the waterfront, the science of climate change is such that current projections of sea level rise may well be conservative. There are climate feedback mechanisms in place that we have not yet begun to understand, but we can be sure that what we know now will be overtaken by new scientific analysis and knowledge in the future. It is wise for governments and planning agencies to ensure future public infrastructure, wherever possible, is not constructed in areas likely to be prone to sea level rise or increased storm surge activity.

We agree that heritage and cultural considerations are important, especially unknown archaeological factors within the Railyards site relating to both European and Aboriginal settlements and the original coastline of Hobart on the River Derwent.¹

Also, the Cenotaph is akin to sacred ground, to honour the memory of fallen soldiers and as a permanent memorial to the great sadness and sacrifice of war. Its sanctity must be preserved at all cost.²

Fundamentally, the Greens believe the process to date has failed to garner enough public support, and indeed it has generated considerable angst among the wider community and users of the port.

There is a suspicion that the Railyards site selection process was politically tainted by the enthusiasms of former Premier, Paul Lennon, who seemed to want to talk about the new hospital on the Railyards site at times when specific heat was being applied to his leadership, and his government.

¹ New Royal Progress Report (July 2008), **Heritage Considerations**, p 18.

² New Royal Progress Report (July 2008), **View Considerations**, p 12.

New Hospital is Needed

- The Tasmanian Greens agree that there are issues with the current site of the Royal Hobart Hospital which pose significant challenges to the delivery of adequate health care services and to the hospital's continued capacity as a major teaching hospital and referral base.
- The current structure of the Royal Hobart Hospital appears to be no longer capable of meeting 21st century health demands for medical services, and these issues will be brought into even sharper focus by an aging population and increased demands on the public health system.
- We agree that redevelopment on the current site would be problematic for both the continued provision of health services over several stages of demolition and construction and to provide health care into the future, as the current site in the Hobart CBD is restrictive to further expansion³. This is particularly so due to the space restrictions caused by the short-sighted decision of a previous government to lease a substantial area of the Royal Hobart Hospital to Hobart Private. There is no question this has restricted the operation and capacity of the RHH.
- The Tasmanian Greens support a greenfields site for the development of the new Royal Hobart Hospital. Indeed, this concept was first proposed by the Tasmanian Greens former Shadow Spokesperson for Health and Human Services, Tim Morris MP in January 2005⁴.
- We believe that a greenfields site for a new state-of-the-art Tasmanian hospital is the best long-term solution for the provision of future health services; to overcome staff retention and operational issues; to increase capacity as a nationally renowned teaching hospital; and also to showcase a real commitment to the challenges of climate change by the construction of an environmentally sustainable hospital.

³ New Royal Project Progress Report (July 2008), **Need for the Project**, p 4.

⁴ "Greens Launch New Health Policy: And Call for Debate on Building New Hobart Hospital", Tim Morris MP, Media Release, 27th January 2005.

One chance to select the right site

- The new Royal Hobart Hospital must serve the whole of Tasmania for at least the next century, which is all the more reason to spend the necessary time and resources to ensure that the most appropriate site is chosen for this development. This is also a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rethink how the hospital can be designed to increase the effectiveness of health care delivery, whilst reducing staff and patient stress.
- The Conrad Gargett report showed that a new hospital should be built to cater for Tasmania's health needs and that a location in or in close proximity to the Hobart CBD would be preferable. Unfortunately, only the Executive Summary of this report was ever released to the public which gave a broad overview of the issues with the current hospital and why there was a need to build a new one. It remains unknown what other recommendations were made in the full report. In the interests of openness and transparency, and to ensure Tasmanians have faith in the process, the Greens believe those recommendations should be made public.
- The initial community consultation on the site of the new RHH was restrictive in detail, asking members of the public to rate what they considered the most important factor in considering a new hospital (i.e. access, service), rather than asking their preferred location, or offering an array of sites for members of the public to rate in order of preference or desirability.
- More extensive debate on the appropriate site is required. More vision is needed. There is evident and justifiable community concern over the selection of the railyards site. There needs to be much greater – and genuine – community involvement in the discussion and decision-making processes.
- How much thought really went into suitable, alternative locations? Has any thought gone into the possibility of having a multi-campus hospital incorporating the current site and for example, the Campbell St site? Was St Johns ever fully considered within the framework of current needs? Why were the Northern Suburbs never seriously considered as a suitable place for a new hospital?
- The Greens believe a holistic approach to the waterfront is missing from the current debate. Government, and planners, need to consider the values and potential of the whole waterfront area, not embark on a program of piece-by-piece developments – as evidenced by the ferry terminal proposal that morphed into a 60 room hotel.
- There are also three converging arterial roads leading to the Railyards site, and major traffic issues already exist. Those traffic problems are only likely to be made worse by the construction, and eventual operation, of a new hospital on the Railyards site.
- Given that we have one chance to get this right and choose the site for a public hospital that serves all of Tasmania well into the future, it is not reasonable for government ministers or employed advocates for the New Royal at the Railyards site, to say the project would be pushed back years if community opposition demands a re-think. We are unable to predict all the future needs and technologies, but we know demand for health services will only increase. The site chosen must have room for expansion in the future. The Railyards site is a restrictive space bounded as it is by waterfront, a working port and major roads.

A room with a view but no room to breathe

- It is of serious concern that the State Government is committed to building the new Royal Hobart Hospital at the Railyards site whilst simultaneously maintaining that the functioning of Hobart's working port will not be affected.⁵ TasPorts and the Tasmanian Polar Network have raised legitimate concerns about the Railyards site as the location for a new Hospital, fearing it will have a negative impact on the capacity of the port. Any development on the Hobart Railyards site must not impinge on the current functions of the port infrastructure, nor its capacity to expand to meet future transport and trade needs.
- It does not seem feasible for the port and the hospital to, as the Premier said, "work in harmony together" under the current model, as there is simply not enough space. The demand for health services will grow in the future due to demographic changes, making it an absolute basic that a new hospital be built on a site with room for expansion.
- The release of the preliminary site plans for the new Royal Hobart Hospital and the Urban Design Strategy have unsettled port users and community members alike. Both TasPorts and the Tasmanian Polar Network have expressed concern that a new hospital on the Railyards site is incompatible with the current and future activities of the Hobart port.⁶ An examination of the New Royal Project plan reveals a major space issue and potential incompatibility with the port's functions as a site for cargo, transport, storage and quarantine facilities, as well as a base for cruise shipping and Antarctic scientific expeditions.
- If the hospital goes ahead on this site, it would also severely limit the potential future need for increased rail infrastructure (both freight and passenger) to help cope with peak oil, and any future expansion of Southern Ocean shipping needs.
- There needs to be a continued rail function in the area because, whilst it is possible to relocate some freight services to the Brighton area, it is not desirable to relocate all the rail freight services away from Macquarie Point. This is particularly true for freight from the south of Hobart as it has potential to create a similar problem in relation to traffic on the Brooker Highway. Before committing to having the hospital at the Railyards site, extra work must be done to determine the area that will be required for future rail freight needs.
- Furthermore, the Railyards has the potential to be redeveloped into a passenger rail hub. This will require at least two additional tracks and an area for a station and access to and from the station and the existing city street network. With the onset of peak oil and the challenges of climate change, more and more people will be looking for alternative methods of transport to the private car. Herein lies an opportunity for government at both state and local level to show leadership on this issue by recognising the potential of the Railyards site as a future-focussed development area.

⁵ "New Royal Project to Protect Working Port" Lara Giddings MP Media Release, 22nd July 2008.

⁶ "TasPorts Confirms Commitment to Working Port in Hobart", TasPorts media release, July 28 2008 & "Tasmania's Maritime Industry Urges Government to Take Their Concerns Seriously", Tasmanian Polar Network Media Release, 13th August 2008.

- From a health perspective, there is a questionable assumption in the Draft that siting a hospital alongside a port would enhance the wellbeing of patients. It is difficult to determine how this could be the case given the noise generated by working port, machines and loaders working through the night as well as the bright lighting in the near vicinity of patients.
- In practical terms, if both the new Royal Hobart Hospital and the Hobart Private are built on the Railyards site, they will face the same space restrictions over time that the current RHH is facing now. It does not seem possible for the Government to be committed to both the new RHH and the future functioning of the port of Hobart.

Opportunity for a Green Hospital

- The Tasmanian Greens welcome the decision to factor an environmentally sustainable feature in the design of the hospital. This comes in the form of an atrium along the width of the building, although this seems to be an afterthought as the feature isn't mentioned in the Progress Report, only in the *"Planning our new hospital: tell us what you think"* media release of July 2008. We feel that this is an area which could be further developed. Whilst natural light is a well known contributing factor to improving patient health, additional potential benefits to both patient and environmental health should not be overlooked.
- As these are preliminary site plans, there is still the opportunity for the State Government to design a hospital that is not only a leader in the provision of health care, but is also a model of environmentally sensitive and ecologically sustainable design. A genuine commitment to a modern, energy efficient public hospital would lead to a comprehensive examination of the best heating, cooling, ventilation and lighting technologies, as well as water and energy provision and use. Such innovations have the potential for long-term economic benefits, which could free up money to meet the costs of care, equipment and programs.
- The concept of a green hospital has been successfully implemented in other parts of the world, and a commitment to uphold Tasmania's 'clean, green' image and to combat the challenges of climate change must translate into real-life examples which set the standard for other developments in this State.

Conclusion

In the interests of proposing rather than opposing, the Tasmanian Greens suggest the Minister direct the New Royal Project team to go back to the proverbial drawing board.

We can only hope that the proposed site for the new hospital isn't locked in place, and that these preliminary site plans are just that – preliminary. The Tasmanian Government needs to think more deeply, and with a clearer view of the long term needs both of our public health system, and our waterfront.

While this more comprehensive, further consideration of the site may push the project back some way, this pales in comparison to the problems and restrictions that may be faced from building the new Royal at the Railyards site. It is also an opportunity to ensure Tasmanians feel they are part of the process, and support its ultimate outcomes. To date, this has not been the case.

Any new hospital would need to have ready access to public transport and intercity cycleways; be readily serviced by existing water, energy, gas utilities; and the construction and operation must cause minimal disruption to other services, as well as public amenity.

In the interim, there is no justification whatsoever, for allowing the current Royal Hobart Hospital to become more run down and less well-equipped to provide high quality patient care. The Tasmanian Greens appreciate that the hard working medical and support staff at the Royal Hobart Hospital are under strain and deserving of strong public, and government support.

We do believe patients and staff will be best served by the construction of a new, state-of-the-art public hospital to service all Tasmanians. We do not believe enough long-term thinking by government has gone into the process of realising this necessity.

It is not the job of the Greens to determine the best possible location for a new hospital. A number of sites may well be available, and preferable to the current selected location. The Glenorchy City Council has put forward a good case for locating the new hospital in that municipality. Hobart's northern suburbs and other sites around Greater Hobart should be reconsidered and proper, transparent and thorough evaluation should take place.

Yours sincerely



Cassy O'Connor MP