

ARTICLES

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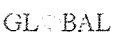
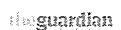
SERIES

BOOKS

WHAT'S ON

CARTOONS

COMMENTS



Articles

Bass Strait: The Tasmanian Government can act right now

[Back to Articles](#)

Peter Brohier. Pic: Wiki Commons
13.09.13 12:30 pm
1 comments



BASS STRAIT - The way ahead under an Abbott Coalition can be very positive but the Tasmanian Government can also act right now

The Abbott Government is expected to shortly engage the Productivity Commission and the Australian Consumer and Competition Commission in a joint review of both Federal Bass Strait equalisation schemes on grounds of equity and efficiency.

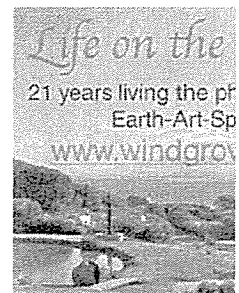
For equity and its economy, Tasmania deserves to have the same surface and air links as other states.

A federal review process will presumably allow consideration of existing restraints on the movement of people, all types of vehicles, and freight. Such review is important for the whole Tasmanian economy.

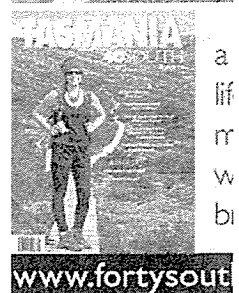
Facilitating the movement of people, with a vehicle or without, and being able to travel for any purpose is critical. Bass Strait shipping should be seen as adjunct to and be compatible with the existing national highways it connects.

Whilst a part of the accommodation sector seems to be adequately catered for by the existing status quo, the singular focus of federal support for accompanied vehicles for driving holidays for mainlanders, holiday packages or travel experiences, needs to change.

The accommodation sector plays an important role in the Tasmanian economy and can measure precisely its impact on the economy. What can't be measured as well is the opening of a comprehensive highway based transport link connecting the capital cities of Hobart and Melbourne - for the first time since the sea lanes alone connected the colonies. It is reasonably believed by many that the drawing potential of such a link can be very substantial.



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Many Tasmanian service industries are larger than the accommodation and food services sector. Such industries need access to people as a vital part of doing business. They need all year, highway fare equivalence to guarantee them access to greater numbers of customers, not just those with a focus on driving holidays.



These service industries together have a far greater chance of growing the Tasmanian economy than a trickle down economic impact from the relatively smaller accommodation sector benefitting from driving holiday packages.



Redirection of federal funding, whilst maintaining equalisation, will treat all industries equally. It will also provide the opportunity for retaining Tasmanian residents by increasing the amenity of living in Tasmania through low cost, every-day, consistently priced access to the rest of Australia.



With this support, sufficient critical mass may be achieved for many industries and activities. Overheads of businesses across Tasmania can be spread over more customers and offer the possibility of lower prices for many goods and services. Also a competitive air and sea access policy, as exists with between all other states, should be of advantage.



The Abbott Coalition says it intends to also review the existing freight equalisation scheme. All sea freight needs to be covered. Southbound coverage of consumables, will allow Tasmanians the benefits of fair competition that others interstate enjoy. Lower prices can be expected.



As part of a completely equitable surface link or national sea highway, international exports will then be able to be carried as on any other part of national transport network, at highway equivalent costs. WTO concerns or relying on just a direct international shipping link to Tasmania, if it ever eventuates, will no longer be a difficulty.



Any ships from Asia bringing in consumables direct to Tasmania should also justifiably need to compete with consumables from the mainland, to be fair to mainland suppliers. Such is the case with international shipping services directly connecting other Australian ports.



The impact of an equitable link can be immediate. There is large unused shipping capacity available, many under-utilised ports and uncapped and relatively untargated federal equalisation funding. Significant drivers of wealth in Tasmania can promptly take advantage of a fully equalised sea highway to the largest population corridor in Australia at Tasmania's doorstep.



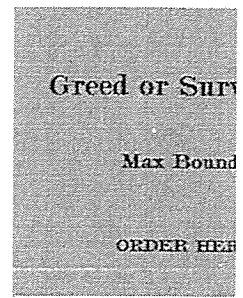
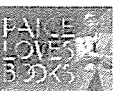
A comprehensive sea link can make Tasmania, rich with natural and developed strengths, far more productive and turn an existing sea barrier into a highway. Funding a better link to Tasmania is also economically dry as all other states are already fairly connected.



Efficiencies can result - shorter and quicker crossings, higher passenger vehicle ratios by encouraging more passengers per vehicle, savings to the Commonwealth by some leaving car at home and travelling as foot passengers, as passenger traffic increases less carbon emissions per passenger, better use of public and private investment on both sides of Bass Strait, greater freight movements and other efficiencies through better integration of the economies of Victoria and Tasmania. Air series to Tasmania may increase with a more viable economy. Many types of other services across Tasmania can also improve.



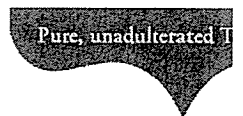
This review can be about getting the corridor and the economy of Tasmania working better, once and for all. It would be very hard for any ACCC or Productivity Commission review, established with sufficient terms of reference, to find against fair interstate linkages and the need for same competition policies as are enjoyed by all other states.



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What should not be forgotten is that the Howard Coalition promised Tasmania that Bass Strait would be part of the National Highway and accepted that “the Federal Government has a special responsibility to achieve equality for Tasmanians in developing opportunities for their state”. Consistent with this undertaking, the Abbott Coalition continues to well fund two major equalisation schemes, both introduced by the Coalition, and is, now appropriately, to review them.

Application of federal equalisation schemes that skew or limit access or favour some industries over others should have no place on an interstate inter-capital national sea highway needed and used by all.

With a rapidly approaching Tasmanian state election, it should be remembered that the impact of one of the federal equalisation schemes can be easily redirected, right now, by the Tasmanian Government through its TT Line. This move could go along way to deliver transport equality for both passengers and vehicles.

Given the current state of the economy, it would be a pity if the Tasmanian Government chose not to take more advantage of this very valuable asset, obtained largely as a result of a public campaign for Bass Strait transport equality.

• **Mercury: New Lyons MP questions TT-Line’s interstate commitments**

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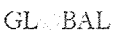
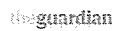
LISTS

BOOKS

WHAT'S ON

CARTOONS

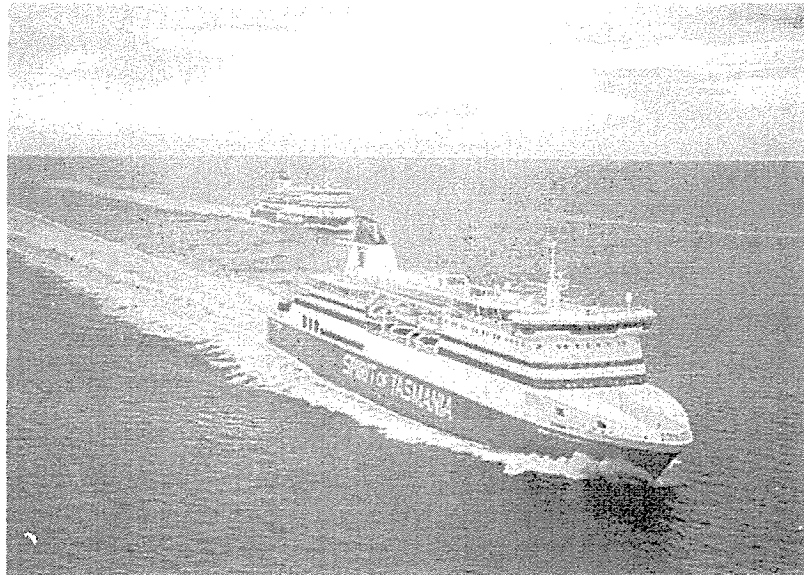
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Prime Minister told: It is Time!

Peter Brohier. First published September 2
04.09.13 5:05 am
3 comments

[<Back to Articles](#)


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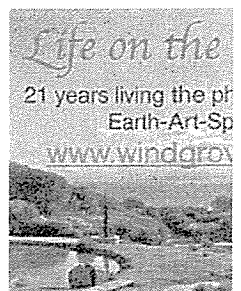
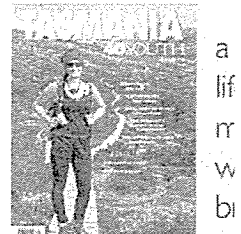
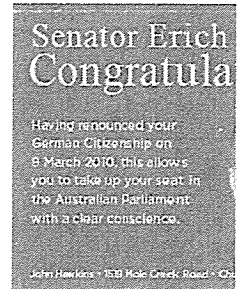
From the early 1990's, a national sea highway crossing Bass Strait using shipping and catering for the movement of both people and vehicles, pegged to the cost of highway travel, has been supported by the public. Also, by major business interests across South Eastern Australia - and more recently support for a comprehensive scheme covering freight.

National Highway promises followed, aimed at giving Tasmanians transport equality and a link to the National Highway. This link was expected to increase tourism and build population, investment and jobs. A federal equalisation scheme was then introduced in 1996.

Following the introduction, Bass Strait policies in both Tasmania and Canberra seem to have focussed on trying to meet the primary needs of some within the Tasmanian accommodation sector.

The scheme has encouraged, instead of the movement of people, the movement of accompanied vehicles as part of leisure travel or driving holidays. The highway equalisation formula and indexing has been removed and replaced by CPI indexing. The scheme has been left without a mechanism to put downward pressure on total fares.

Participants in this type of holiday market are few when compared with the numbers that regularly use a short distance land-based highway- say the Midland Highway. Many holiday package travellers may not be as sensitive to the price of access as regular A to B travellers.





Regardless, it is critical that the various needs of these A to B highway travellers must be met. Travellers that regularly use highways need consistently, low highway equivalent fares. Also, there are some that require fair sea highway access just to decide to stay in Tasmania.



Substantial service industries and public and private institutions across Tasmania need access to such travellers and as residents. Many of these industries and activities, individually and together, make a significantly larger contribution to the Tasmanian economy than the accommodation sector.



A full NSH, covering people and all vehicles - also all freight, save for bulk cargo and including for the first time, coverage of southbound consumables and northbound international exports is needed.



Strangely policies, other than sea highway policies, seem to have influenced Bass Strait for many years. There appears to be very little known within government about the positive economic and social impact of a National Sea Highway.



The TCCI report, which acted as a catalyst for the introduction of a federal equalisation scheme, looked at this wider issue. Little further government analysis has emerged for over 15 years.



A federal equalisation scheme, mainly applied to vehicles, cannot go anywhere near supporting a broad-based state economy that needs direct access to people - not just accompanied vehicles.



The whole Bass Strait policy focus from Tasmania to Canberra needs to change. The major political parties have the opportunity and duty to deliver a sea highway open to and advantaging all.



Regardless of what federal equalisation schemes were, or now have become, all Australians, their motoring bodies, and those that require the movement of passengers in cars and foot passengers, have sought national highway access into Tasmania. It is in the combined interests of major wealth generators within Tasmania that highway equivalent surface access for people is facilitated, and equalisation is not just about moving federally funded cars.



Canberra could not survive without both air and highway surface links - neither can Tasmania. The movement of people crossing Bass Strait by sea should build a comprehensive tourism industry, not detract from it.



It is time for the Prime Minister to announce a change of direction. Defence of the status quo raises very difficult questions and will limit the right of all industries to fairly integrate their activities into a national economy. Tony Abbott has already opened the door to a review. The Prime Minister is yet to respond.



Switzerland has an open border transport policy - why not for the Switzerland of the south? Transport equity, the need for equal links between states, policies that make sound economic sense to all, federal mandates and the needs of people and business across Australia require it.



- Last week on Tasmanian Times: Call for an apology for Bass Strait schemes that isolate Tasmania



- Earlier on Tasmanian Times: Madam Premier: It is Time to Act, includes link at the end to previous Peter Brohier articles, including a Q&A



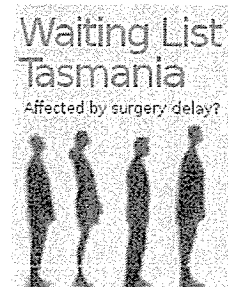
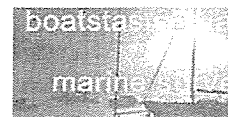
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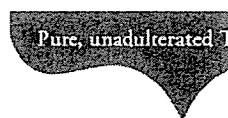
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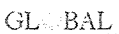
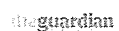
NEWS

BOOKS

WHAT'S ON

CARTOONS

WHAT'S NEW

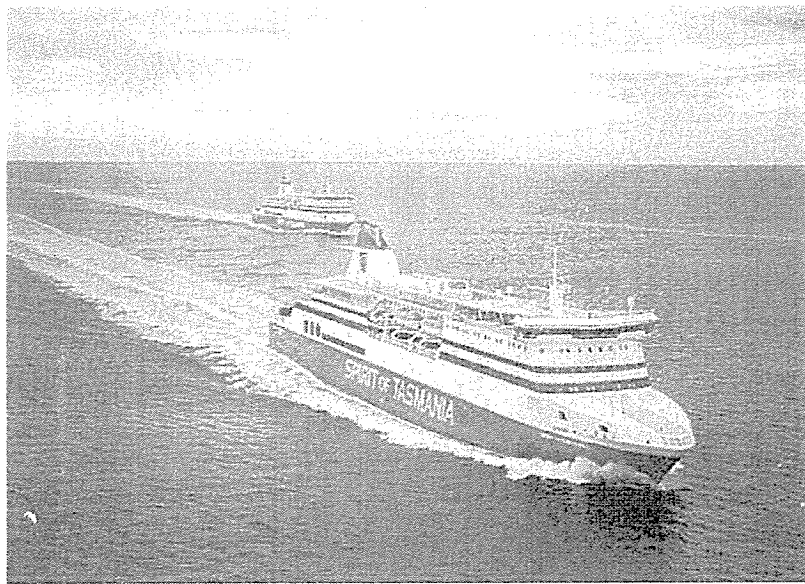


Articles

Call for an apology for Bass Strait schemes that isolate Tasmania

[Back to Articles](#)

Peter Brohier*. First published August 29
30.08.13 5:10 am
1 comments



Peter Brohier, Chairman of the former National Sea Highway and Bass Strait Transport Equality Committee's, in Hobart today called on the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition to, on attaining government, investigate and then if appropriate apologise, for Canberra not meeting its responsibility to deliver equal transport links for Tasmania.

Also, for allowing "equalisation" to be skewed and substantially redirected after an election resulting in a mandate for transport equality for the affordable movement of people across Bass Strait being largely ignored.

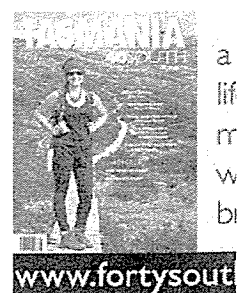
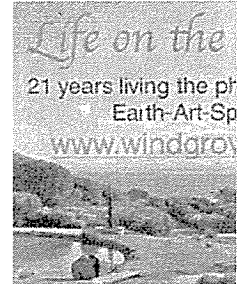
Mr Brohier said, "These omissions had curtailed the public use of Tasmania's only surface artery, caused under-utilisation of Tasmania's natural and developed strengths and required our nation to give greater welfare support to Tasmania than was necessary.

He also called on the nation's leaders to deliver a comprehensive and effective National Sea Highway crossing Bass Strait, using shipping. This would equalise the cost of movement of all people, vehicles and freight to the cost of highway travel. The Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme covers less than half the freight and excludes southbound consumables. These omissions adversely impacted on exports, the cost of living and jobs. Tasmanians should be allowed the advantages of competition policy, fair trade and freedom of mobility as others interstate.

The National Sea Highway campaign started in Burnie, Tasmania in the early 1990s. Tasmanians sought transport equality for people crossing Bass Strait based on a national highway link. The campaign was supported by major industry groups across



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South Eastern Australia, as it is today. In the end, Prime Minister's Paul Keating and John Howard, twice, both tried to meet the wishes of the people.

Offers to make Bass Strait part of the national highway and maintain transport equity for both people and vehicles followed. But the scheme, obtained through people power, has now become just an "accompanied vehicle scheme". It has cost federal taxpayers about half a billion dollars, so far. The highway equalisation formula has been removed leaving no mechanism to put downward pressure on total passenger or vehicles fares, or any hope of equalising them. A focus on travel experiences, facilitating driving holidays for tourists and the Tasmanian leisure market seems to now have taken its place. Our four year campaign was aimed at moving people from A to B at highway equivalence. It was not just about moving the shell of vehicles. Who would have supported that?

This is the third time that our campaign has been at the top of national politics. This only occurs when an issue is compelling. Failure to meet core Bass Strait promises and mandates, despite the provision of federal uncapped equalisation funding, brings our democratic process into question. While meeting the obligations and pressures that form part of a working democracy, Canberra has a responsibility to keep vital public interstate transport arteries open to all, equally.

An effective Bass Strait link is a critical part of our nation's birthright. It is entirely appropriate for a sovereign state which lost transport equality when road and rail took over from the sea lanes connecting the other colonies. An equalised link will restore Tasmania's connection to the integrated transport grid that covers the rest of our nation. This is a basic access and transport issue on the shortest interstate inter-capital route in Australia. Tasmania's participation in the "common-wealth" of our nation is limited by failure to effectively link Tasmania – not by its geography. As with all other inter-capital routes, air travel should not be the only option.

A full National Sea Highway is consistent with the aims of federation – to allow the colonies to integrate their economies into a national economy through the movement of both people and freight. Given the state of the Tasmanian economy, it makes sound, economically dry, financial sense to connect our nation, right now.

We welcome the Federal Leader of the Opposition's offer of a prompt review to examine equitable improvements to the Bass Strait equalisation schemes and the promise by the Palmer United Party to inject \$400 million into Tasmania's sea freight and passenger services. We await the Prime Minister's response. No amount of GST revenue paid to the Government of Tasmania can take the place of delivering fair access for all Australians to all parts of our nation, including our island state."

Written and authorised by Peter Brohier, 143 Kooyong Road, North Caulfield, Victoria.

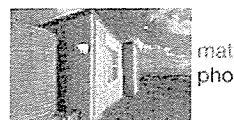
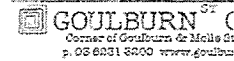
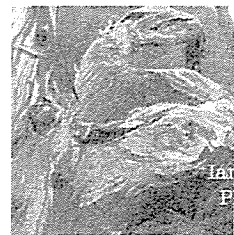
***Peter Brohier** was born in Devonport, Tasmania. He now lives in Nth Caulfield, Victoria. He is retired lawyer and Chairman of the former National Sea Highway Committee. Peter started his campaign at a public meeting at the Burnie Civic Centre about 20 years ago and has continued to fight for Bass Strait transport equity since 1992. Peter was described by Paul Lennon as the person most responsible for the introduction of the Bass Strait Passenger Vehicle Equalisation scheme. He is the recipient of the Australian Hotels Association -Tasmania award for outstanding services to tourism.

• Earlier on Tasmanian Times: Madam Premier: It is Time to Act, includes link at the end to previous Peter Brohier articles, including a Q&A

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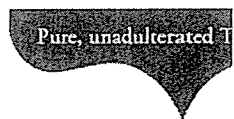
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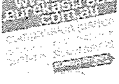
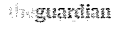
LISTS

BOOKS

PHOTOS

ENTERTAINMENT

REVIEWS



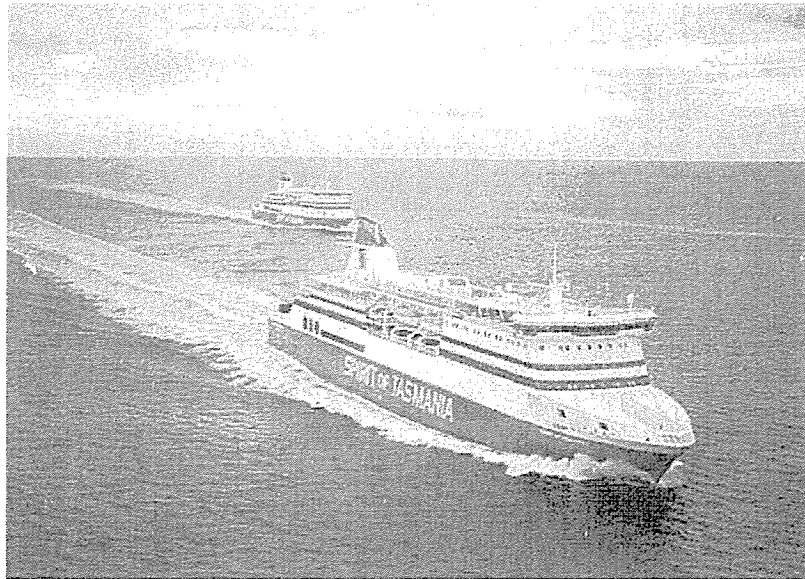
Articles

The Question of Bass Strait

Peter Brohier*

31.05.13 4:30 am

16 comments

[Back to Articles](#)

What's wrong with sea access across Bass Strait?

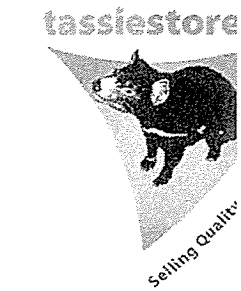
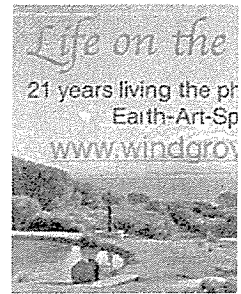
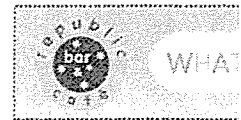
Federal equalisation schemes exclude the fair transport of people, many vehicles and about half the freight. Together the schemes do not deliver the equivalent of even the worst road in Australia. The costs of crossing also vary widely when compared with the cost of road travel leaving a level of isolation and access uncertainty not experienced across our nation. This hinders the growth of the Tasmanian economy and limits personal mobility. Its social and economic consequences are severe and are reflected in the state of the Tasmanian economy. Bass Strait remains the only gap in our national integrated transport grid.

Should Canberra throw more money at local worthwhile projects such as Bass Strait?

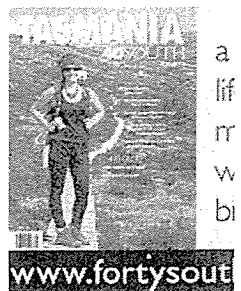
No. Its responsibility is to set the framework for a strong national economy. Bass Strait is such a project. More Federal funding for the Midland Highway without connecting it to the full National Highway grid grossly under utilises Canberra's investment. Bass Strait equalisation is about integrating two state economies for the first time since the sea lanes connected the colonies. It's about increasing investment, population and jobs on both sides of Bass Strait.

Why didn't Gillard Labor fix Bass Strait in the last budget?

The Tasmanian Government has not asked for a fair Bass Strait link. By using shipping, operating on the same principle as a bridge, Canberra can return immediate economic benefits to South Eastern Australia - less people on welfare, more jobs, more investment, more viable use of public and private infrastructure and offer a growing economy. Unlike Prime Minister's Keating and Howard, Prime Minister Gillard is yet to act.



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Has Bass Strait been described by the Howard Coalition as “the single most serious impediment to growth in jobs, investment and population for Tasmania” and by the Tony Abbott as “Tasmania’s lifeline”?



Yes – an impediment of this magnitude needs significant attention right now.



Were Tasmanians promised that the Coalition would recognise Bass Strait as “part of the national highway”?

Yes. This was the core Coalition promise in the 1996 Federal election. Prime Minister Keating also offered the equivalent of a bridge using a fast ferry offering low passenger and vehicle fares. The Howard proposal was to equalise the costs of driver and a car and to index it to the cost of road travel. Passenger fares were to fall through competition.



What has gone wrong?

No competition eventuated. Over the last thirty years well funded Federal equalisation schemes have not been adjusted to meet the needs of a modern economy or have been diverted to meet the expectations of other interests. The Bass Strait schemes urgently need to be bought back to deliver highway “equalisation”.



What is stopping the implementation of a full National Sea Highway “NSH”?

The people of Tasmania have provided a Federal mandate for a NSH. Canberra continues to pay for an uncapped, demand driven and flexible Federal highway equalisation scheme from 1996. There are no arguments of substance against it and no mandate for the status quo. Canberra can start to act immediately and, in this case, there is no need to plan and build a road.



Could Tasmania use its ferries to deliver a NSH for people and vehicles?

Yes, right now. TT Line supported the national sea highway concept and objectives prior to the introduction of the BSPVES. The Tasmanian Government could instruct its TT Line to so act - but it doesn't have to. Bass Strait remains a Federal responsibility - it's up to Canberra to set the proper framework for all Bass Strait shipping. There is no directive from Canberra to deliver highway equalisation for people and vehicles. Unlike TFES, the Bass Strait Passenger Vehicle Equalisation Scheme “BSPVES” now doesn't even contain a formula for equalisation – Canberra removed it. The Federal monitoring of the BSPVES also does involve or reflect the interests of a wide range of stakeholders on both sides of Bass Strait.



Why change the status quo?

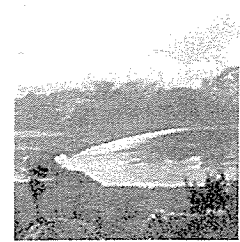
It has been recently accepted that TT Line is “selling an experience” and that its mainland customers want an “end – to – end travel experience”. TT Line has acknowledged that Tasmanians want A to B travel. It seems reasonable to suspect that mainlanders, who chose not to travel with TT Line, also want the same as many Tasmanians. The Chairman of TT Line recently accepted that there is “another world”, “heavy on seats, heavy on lane metres of cars and caravans and the grey nomads” and said that he was willing to investigate that “other world”. Tasmanian business and all other activities cannot afford to have a Federal equalisation scheme facilitate “travel experiences” or be focussed mainly on “driving holidays for mainlanders” at the expense of the provision of basic A to B surface transport. The choice seems to be to benefit from a trickle down impact from tourism policies or from a huge and direct “sea highway” driver of a whole economy.



Canberra and Tasmania should not leave this vital link to the determination of one operator to assess what may be “best for Tasmania” and to operate under Tasmanian Government guidelines to “just operate commercially” - also to a Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme “TFES” that covers about half the freight.



ISLAND



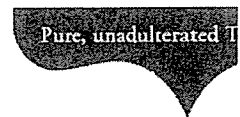
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The colonies federated to establish a national integrated economy aimed at moving people and freight across the whole nation, not just part of it. This link should now be made compatible with existing land - based highway connections that have cost billions and meet the needs of the whole Australian community, on both sides of Bass Strait.

Perhaps while Canberra fails to act to target highway equivalence, TT Line could consider offering highway-based fares whilst maintaining its existing operational passenger and freight capacity by using one of its ferries twice a day, all year, and not just for a few days over summer. TT Line could then use its other ferry to service the many ports around Tasmania, including its substantial island chain and provide passenger and freight transport and an "end to end travel experience" to the greater numbers of people who would, on a NSH, actually get to Tasmania.

The nation is in deficit – why ask for more money right now?

Currently about \$140 million a year is expended by Canberra on two equalisation schemes that look like Bass Strait Tasmanian related subsidies. A full NSH can cost Canberra about \$280 million a year. On an equalisation basis, all Federal Bass Strait funding should then be apportioned between Victoria and Tasmania as the state border is about half way across Bass Strait. A fair application of this funding will then require no increase in Tasmania's allocation as Canberra moves from subsidies to providing full NSH funding, fairly sharing the \$280 million equally between two states. Australia is not broke enough for this year's budget to contain multi-billion road and rail improvement schemes across Australia. Why omit the link to Tasmania? Bass Strait equalisation is just as vital to Tasmania as coal is to a steam engine.

What about other states or regions in Australia- don't they suffer too?

All other regions are already connected to the national integrated transport grid. Consistent, all-year, highway equivalent access is vital regardless of the terrain it crosses and whether expensive roads and bridges, or cheaper punts or ferries are used. A defective link destroys economies. More Federal and State monies are then wasted to prop up business and public facilities when this link could simply give Tasmania the artery it needs to revive its whole economy.

Is equalisation just about freight?

In a modern economy the movement of both people and freight are both just as critical. With a full NSH, international exports can be facilitated through Melbourne without World Trade Organisation objections, at highway cost.

Could Canberra reduce Tasmania's GST payments?

Yes – but Tasmania is on the shortest interstate, inter- capital route in this nation and very close to the nation's largest population corridor but It gets about the same number of interstate tourists as the remote Northern Territory. This imbalance is largely caused by access cost difficulties. GST payments don't integrate economies – highways that connect, do. Surely GST handouts should be based on need after an economy is given a chance to flourish.

Could Tasmania lose existing Bass Strait subsidies?

Bringing equalisation schemes back to their original purpose, and expanding them, removes a hand out mentality and replaces it with the highest level of justification - interstate connectivity as Tasmania's birthright from federation. Surely it's better to justify Federal payments this way. When the BSPVES was introduced TFES was not reduced. Why fear a loss now? Why encourage or allow Canberra to turn equalisation into insecure subsidies and then lament their possible loss? This approach encourages criticism of Tasmania from across Australia.

Most people travel by air so why care if Tasmania has a NSH?

The choice of modes of travel respond significantly to the price differential between air and sea. Tasmanians gave a mandate for a National Sea Highway. Highways are used over short distances. All states need an effective air and surface connection. Why not Tasmania? Consistently priced interstate surface travel is vital for Federal economic and competition policies to work. Bass Strait is not just about tourism - it's about living. That is why ferries, not cruise boats, are used for transport across the rest of the world. Air is required to compete with highway surface travel over every other interstate border - why not also between Victoria and Tasmania? Discount light luggage air travel may not be a cheap travel option after on the ground add-on costs are included. It also fails to encourage the development of better intrastate transport links. It does not produce the same level and spread of economic benefits through Victoria and Tasmania that surface travel would deliver.

But can people get into and out of Tasmania easily?

Price and capacity have been found to be the major determinants of crossing Bass Strait by sea. If consistent, all-year, highway based prices were offered, large amounts of existing under-utilised shipping capacity could be used right now. Extra capacity can be brought from the northern hemisphere in times of high demand. It's not just for the grey nomads - it's for guaranteeing ordinary Australians, including Tasmanians, the right of highway access to the rest of Australia. Many Tasmanian families just leave if they don't have fair and ready access to family and friends interstate

What about lower consumer prices?

Southbound consumables are not covered by TFES. Others interstate enjoy fair trade policies. Also with the greater access to people, overheads can be spread over a larger population base bringing down the cost of goods and services. Demand curves can move outward if certainty of access is established and maintained.

What about air services?

Air services could increase with a more vibrant internal economy. Closure of the Federal and Hume Highway links to Canberra would severely damage its economy. Canberra couldn't rely on air alone - neither can Tasmania. A level playing field is necessary across this nation for both air and surface transport treating all states equally. Currently Bass Strait schemes skew access in favour of some industries and not others.

Should Tasmanians holiday at home?

Yes, as an option, but not of necessity. Tasmania is part of Australia and its people also fund a national transport network costing billions. They should be able to enjoy fair interstate access to it at the same cost per km as others. Tasmania would then take advantage of its geographical position near the nation's largest population corridor and not see Bass Strait, or loss of its own holiday makers, as a detriment.

Could southbound equalisation hurt some Tasmanian protected industries?

Under a full NSH, these industries will benefit by greater access to an expanded local market. They can be given some time to re-adjust, if necessary. Protectionism should not be allowed to keep the price of consumables high.

What will happen to the Wilkie - Katter motion to make Bass Strait part of the National Highway?

There are now few opportunities left to have the motion debated in the House of Representatives. Gillard Labor could fix Bass Strait before its caretaker mode starts.

Given the sea highway justification of the BSPVES, the Federal mandates, the consequential uncapped federal equalisation funding over many years and the social and economic importance of a NSH, it is astonishing that a first world working


democracy can't deliver equity to the Tasmanian people and fair access to our island state.

Sadly, it would seem that the current Tasmanian or Federal Governments are unwilling or unable to fix Bass Strait – perhaps, not even after the influence of the ballot box. The nation is left to ponder - why?

** **Peter Brohier** was born in Devonport, Tasmania. He now lives in Nth Caulfield, Victoria. He is retired lawyer and Chairman of the former National Sea Highway Committee. Peter started his campaign at a public meeting at the Burnie Civic Centre about 20 years ago and has continued to fight for Bass Strait transport equity since 1992. Peter was described by Paul Lennon as the person most responsible for the introduction of the Bass Strait Passenger Vehicle Equalisation scheme. He is the recipient of the Australian Hotels Association -Tasmania award for outstanding services to tourism.*

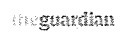
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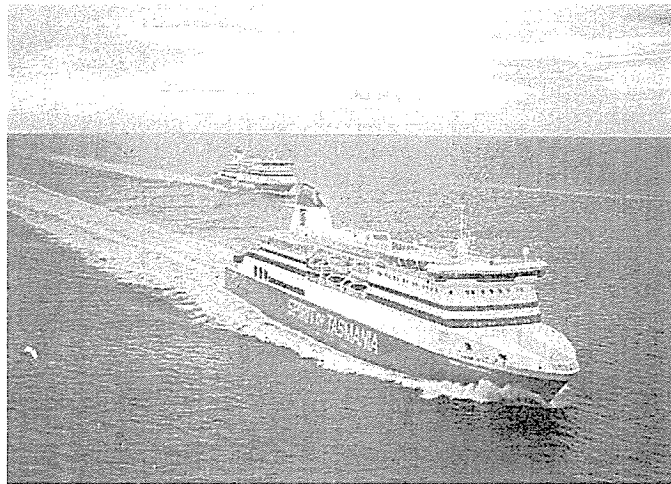
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Fairly linking Bass Strait is critical for Tasmania

Peter Brohier
09.11.11 3:21 am
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The Hon. Julia Gillard MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
Canberra

7th November 2011

Dear Prime Minister,

Fairly linking Bass Strait is critical for Tasmania - but not as compensation for Tasmania's island status

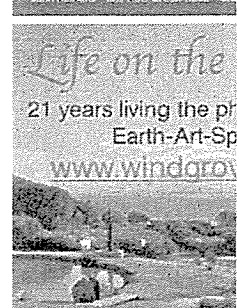
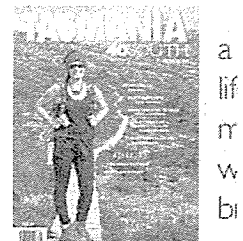
I was Chairman of the former Committee for Bass Strait Transport Equality and the National Sea Highway Committee. These public interest and commercial committees encouraged Prime Minister's Keating and Howard to try to bring equitable transport for people and vehicles across Bass Strait.

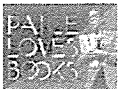
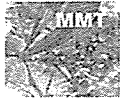
Prime Minister Keating, when rejecting the NSH committee request for the second time, said that Tasmania should use its own "natural and developed strengths" and not ask Canberra for further subsidies. He subsequently offered to fully meet our request for passenger and vehicle transport equality.

Why? Did Prime Minister Keating really discover what the Bass Strait campaign was about?

You see, Prime Minister, our recent requests for further Bass Strait funding are possibly still seen by Canberra and others as further requests for compensation.

Such is not the case. In no way should Bass Strait funding be seen as requests for further compensatory dollars paid to Tasmania. They are instead requests for equal





interstate transport links as all other states enjoy. Using ferries operated on highway principles, Tasmania, its people and businesses can build a strong Tasmania.

The Commonwealth, by failing to provide such equal links, denies Tasmania the ability to effectively use or rely on its "natural and developed strengths" while offering other states equal links over mountains and deserts.

Canberra is severely restricting a state capable of making a substantial contribution to the nation. Compensating Tasmania for its island status, through further untargeted Commonwealth payments, leaves the Tasmanian Government and others to choose how that funding is applied. The result - federal compensation for Tasmania per capita is unnecessarily substantially higher than for any other state. It also has resulted in some of the weakest economic figures in the nation.

Failure to provide equal transport links wastes money and skews access, denying a fair level playing field between industries. It fails to deliver the business certainty and access required for the fair movement of people, for fair trade and exports. It adversely impacts on the conduct of all types of commercial and social activity. The consequences leave a struggling state economy, reflected by a lack of investment, population and jobs.

It is critical that Tasmania be encouraged to use its natural and developed strengths and its location, near the largest population corridor in this nation, to advantage. Canberra can start overnight to open access to Tasmania. There is unused infrastructure and very substantial Federal Bass Strait funding available now to turn the Tasmanian economy around, in days.

The original aims and outcome of the BSPVES, when introduced, proved that equal links for passengers and vehicles work. Canada can do it for its island state and for freight, why not Australia?

You have recently said that Prime Ministers need to take the hard decisions.

In this case, will you follow the lead of two Prime Ministers and restore Bass Strait equalisation schemes to deliver "equalisation", consistent with the federal mandate for transport equality?

Prime Minister's Keating and Howard both understood the need for Tasmania to have equalised access. They each took every possible step we asked for, to achieve it. Bass Strait access significantly impacts on activities across the whole of South Eastern Australia.

Prime Minister, will you minimise the need for Federal handouts by giving our nation Bass Strait links capable of allowing Tasmania and its people to fully contribute our nation's wealth? Will you accept such equal transport links as the key to development of Australia's island state, not just more and more handouts offered under the name of "equalisation"? Will you allow Tasmanians access to, and fairly close the only gap in our national inter-capital, interstate, integrated transport network? Will you prove that our democracy can deliver its mandate for equality?

Prime Minister, will you do what Prime Minister's Keating and Howard tried so very hard to do, or will your legacy leave our nation divided?

Yours sincerely,

Peter Brohier

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