

Be brave, protect us and our brand

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Move from mass production to a Tasmania that looks after people and the economy for the long term, says **Ian Johnston**

TASMANIANS are enjoying one of the highest standards of living and quality of life in the world. Our economy is booming and there is a feeling of optimism and pride in our society. However there are still many of us who are not faring so well and there are inequities that have not been resolved.

It would be a pleasant change to see our political leaders making their decisions based primarily on the long-term benefit of our society. Most of our politicians seem to be shortsighted, mainly focused on hanging on to power through the next election and denigrating the opposition. Their decisions seem to be influenced by big business which uses powerful lobbyists intent on making short-term profits at the expense of compromising our quality of life, cultural identity and environment. Politicians should be working towards the benefit of ourselves, our children, grandchildren, our nation and not big business.

For example, the Liberal Party received huge financial support at the last election from Federal Hotels which undoubtedly ensured their re-election, but at the unacceptable social cost of allowing very high numbers of pokies to continue to suck the populace dry of a great deal of money that could better benefit their families.

As a state we have an ongoing history of exploiting our resources to exhaustion in a greedy headlong rush for short-term profit. For example, whaling, sealing, scalloping, orange roughy fisheries, unsustainable clear-felling of our old-growth forests, and now the rapidly escalating industrial cage farmed salmon industry.

Taking old-growth timber as a case in point, I am not opposed to some timber extraction from appropriate old-growth forests, but 20 years ago we could have made a decision to have an industry that Tasmanians are proud of, that produced locally made world-class timber products



from sustainably managed old growth forests. This smart and future-focused forestry management could have attracted people from around the world to visit and learn how we achieved world-class silvicultural practices. Instead, we find ourselves shamefully fighting over the remnants of what were some of the finest production forests and timber in the world.

Now we find the industrial cage-farmed salmon industry is focused on rapid expansion, growing a product for the mass market. Already we have had massive disease outbreaks (1.3 million fish killed in one disease outbreak at Macquarie Harbour) and devastated local environments. How long before there is a mass fish kill in the channel?

Our salmon production is only 1 per cent of the global market. Why can we not focus on growing the highest quality product with minimal harm to the environment and widespread positive social licence? Yes the salmon will be more expensive, but if you want the best you should be able to look with confidence for the "Made in Tasmania" label. Our other food products are not necessarily the cheapest, but they are the best.

For example you will only

get the best flavour and texture from highest quality feed. Why is their fat content twice that of wild-caught Atlantic salmon? It would not be necessary to artificially colour the flesh if the quality was more appropriate to yielding flesh that had the best flavour. Perhaps the breeding program could change focus from speed of growth to flavour and texture.

Greatly reducing stocking

density in the feedlots would enable the fish to gain muscle and reduce fat, enhancing the quality of the product. We can employ many Tasmanians growing world-class salmon products, but this is not the direction we are going in.

Already, we have some of the best wines, whisky, cheeses, wild seafood and many other foods, as well as cultural and art events, in the world. However, our salmon

industry is in danger of spoiling our vitally important Brand Tasmania, with increased pollution, disease and social mistrust.

Where are you Mr Premier? Please lead us towards a bright, healthy, happy, culturally rich society with a clean environment. Where is the Leader of the Opposition? Please try to create a positive, viable, sustainable alternative to our

current situation. We need political courage and leadership. When the opposition has an idea that is better than yours, embrace it. If you have made a mistake or need to change your policy because of better information, then do so; you won't be condemned by most voters. Come up with bipartisan long-term visions and pursue them.

Politicians need to make the hard decisions as well as

the popular ones, even if it means they lose the next election. You are there to serve our best interests not your power ego.

If I may venture some opinions on other issues.

Declare all political donations as they occur. Refocus some of our health budget to preventive health measures. Healthy people use hospitals much less.

Stop hiding information

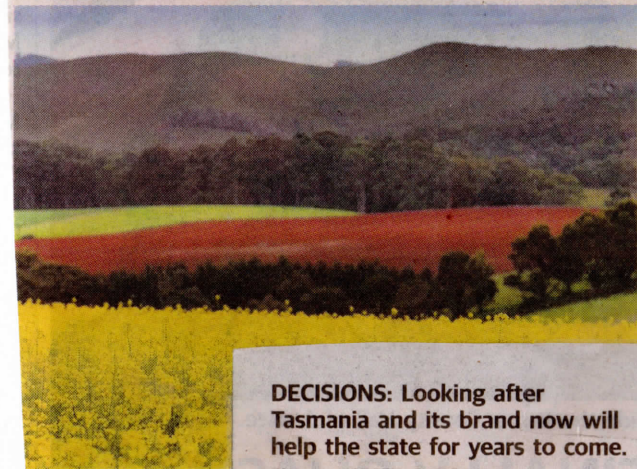
from the public, free up Right to Information restrictions.

Education is vital for our future, but please add much more music, arts and languages to the curriculum. These are the subjects that enhance the creative, innovative, adaptable and wide-thinking skills needed for a rapidly changing world. They also reduce the severity of many mental health conditions.

We should impose a tourist tax in some form. Most of the rest of the world with a large tourist population raises considerable revenue without harm. We need to take some decisions to prevent tourism changing our culture and environment, we can easily spoil what the tourists come here to experience. Give more funding to Parks and Wildlife. Take some short-term actions with public transport. Increase

the size of parliament, it is only petty politics stopping you from instituting this necessary change.

Ian Johnston is a founder of the Australian Wooden Boat Festival, ship's master of a local marine research vessel, yachtsman, boat builder, teacher and author of recently published book *The Shank*, about the coastline of the South-West of Tasmania.



DECISIONS: Looking after Tasmania and its brand now will help the state for years to come.

Pictures: ISTOCK; CHRIS KIDD