

# Only a clear vision can protect what makes Tasmania great

**T**O achieve its full potential, and protect what's special about the state, Tasmania needs to develop a set of guiding principles through which we can navigate a path towards a sustainable, equitable and prosperous society. The principles need to be based on equitable social development, cultural preservation, conservation of the environment and good governance.

Success can be measured through spiritual, physical, social and environmental health. These principles can be delivered through a suite of State Policies, setting a strategic vision for Tasmania.

When Tasmania's

## Overdue policies prevent ad hoc development, explains **Sophie Underwood**

Resource Management and Planning System was introduced in 1993, State Policies were intended to form the backbone of that system, providing statewide guidance on a wide range of planning issues. The near absence of these policies (to date, only three have been finalised) has

long been regarded as a missing piece in Tasmania's planning framework.

Premier Will Hodgman's Liberals, prior to the last state election, said, "Immediately after the election ... We will commence drafting state policies to provide the necessary guidance to councils on how to implement the single statewide planning scheme and plan for Tasmania's future land use needs." That's great, except it has simply not happened.

Instead, Mr Hodgman put the cart before the horse, reformed the way planning schemes operate in Tasmania and gutted the rules, regulations and community

engagement pertaining to new development in Tasmania.

The Tasmanian Planning Scheme (TPS) has come first, leaving the development of policies articulating Tasmania's vision and informing the rules about how we achieve it for a later date. That approach is clearly the wrong way around.

People live in and visit Tasmania because of our beautiful parks, seascapes and landscapes, the amenity of our built and urban environment, our cultural institutions like Mona, and our clean air, water and high-quality food, wine and beer.

Without a clear vision for how to protect and promote

these assets, it is too easy to kill the golden goose, not only for the people who live here, but for our visitors too.

An example is Freycinet National Park. The park is receiving unprecedented visitation, and is the fastest growing tourism region in the state, yet this growth is not been governed by any overall strategy. Success is being measured purely by visitor numbers rather than the maintenance of natural values, quality of visitor experience and liveability of the area by locals and shack owners.

The Freycinet National Park Management Plan has not been comprehensively reviewed since it was written

18 years ago, despite a statutory requirement for a 10-year review. The plan has not been updated to reflect changing tourism patterns or to assess conservation performance.

This lack of strategic thinking will be compounded by the plan under the TPS to remove appeal rights on developments in national parks, and the secretive Expressions of Interest process facilitating such developments. This creates a perfect storm for killing the golden goose.

While a Freycinet Master Plan planning process has been established to address infrastructure and other needs

arising from the influx of people loving what this spectacular peninsula has to offer, development is again outstripping a proper planning process.

For the first time in over a century as a national park, heli-tourism has started at Freycinet, threatening the beauty and tranquillity that attracts tourists and on which so many businesses trade.

Exclusive helicopter joy rides benefit the customers and operating business only. For the majority on the ground, the Freycinet experience is affected, with an intrusive clamour that will shatter the peace.

The operation has

commenced with no public consultation, there are no appeal rights and there has been no cost-benefit analysis regarding the impact on wildlife, businesses, residents, shack owners and visitors. The only controls of air traffic and noise is a voluntary code, which is both inadequate and impossible to enforce.

This is what happens when development is purely market driven and therefore ad hoc. This is what will play out across Tasmania under the TPS.

The Freycinet Action Network has launched a petition calling on Will Hodgman, as Premier and Minister for Tourism, to

maintain the peace at Freycinet. It shouldn't come to that. Leaders of vision will articulate their aspirations for the state and bring the people along, not sit by while a situation emerges that requires a collective public appeal to reverse a wrong.

A planning system is a powerful tool underpinning Tasmania's future economy and way of life. We need it to be strategic, integrated and sustainable, where decision making is based on the best available science and is inclusive of the community it is supposed to be serving. It must place communities at its core, not developers.

If left unresolved, a poor

planning framework, unguided by a suite of State Policies, will lead to outcomes worse than a community in conflict with their premier. Poor planning and a failure of public consultation will pit neighbour against neighbour, tear tranquil communities apart and, like choppers at Freycinet, will trash unique Tasmanian experiences that make us different and special.

**Sophie Underwood established the Freycinet Action Network and has 25 years' experience in local planning issues on the East Coast. She is co-ordinator of the Planning Matters Alliance Tasmania, an alliance of more than 50 community groups.**