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Planning laws

Proposed laws make it harder to protect what makes Tasmania special and unique, says **Sophie Underwood**

The proposed new skyscrapers in Hobart are emblematic of what will happen across our beautiful island home if the red carpet for property developers keeps being rolled out in Tasmania.

High-rise hotel proposals demonstrate that local, interstate and international developers are waiting to pounce on the opportunity to exploit Tasmania's unique position as having, to this point, protected itself from out-of-control property development.

The proposed buildings will dwarf adjoining development in Sullivans Cove and tower over residences in Wapping, where buildings less than 20m are the norm.

The Hodgman Liberals have changed planning laws to make development easier and the new Tasmanian Planning Scheme (TPS) is set to come into effect in early 2018.

New "major projects" legislation is expected to extract big developments from even that weakened planning scheme, a proposal met with a loud cheer from the Property Council of Tasmania.

These laws give a major leg-up to developers, at the expense of Tasmania's identity, amenity and the everyday experience of the people who live here.

A planning scheme sets out policies and requirements for the use, development and protection of land.

It impacts every single land title in Tasmania: our backyards, our real-estate values, our skylines, our

coastlines, our heritage places, our wild and inspiring landscapes, rural towns, and the places that we love to holiday. The scheme will impact all the things we love about Tasmania.

The TPS risks Tasmania's greatest economic assets. With careful management and considered planning, Tasmania could capitalise on our natural and cultural assets, increasingly rare in an urban and industrialised world, and have both a beautiful place to live and a prosperous economic future.

Michael Buxton, professor of environment and planning at RMIT, has seen the negative effects of similar planning "reform" in Victoria.

Last year, in Hobart, he addressed a standing-room-only public meeting and said, "The Government argues the new [planning] system is vital to unlock economic potential and create jobs, but the state's greatest economic strengths are the amenity and heritage of its natural and built environments. Destroy these and the state has no future."

The community is being told that building a house will get a lot easier.

However, we are not being told that we will see smaller block sizes, higher buildings, buildings closer to fences, and higher density developments in residential areas.

How will you feel when your neighbour's house takes your view, sun and privacy, and there is nothing you can do about it? Most local councils are concerned about



the new planning scheme taking away their flexibility to address local issues and protect local character.

It is tragic that the same rules governing residential development in cities will apply to our coastal and rural towns, potentially destroying their charm and appeal.

Aboriginal, built European and our natural heritage are equally treated with contempt.

Local councils have been tasked with protecting local heritage, including more than 500 properties removed from the Tasmanian Heritage Register.

Yet the TPS provides limited powers and many local councils lack the resources for proper heritage assessments. Even the well resourced Hobart City Council has expressed concern that

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CONCERNS: Hundreds turned out to discuss planning law reform.

“Hobart will become a city of facades”. There is not even a code for Aboriginal heritage in the TPS.

The Government proudly asserts that tourism developments in our parks and reserves is being made easier, while eroding community consultation and your right to challenge development in your favourite national park or local reserves.

With fewer developments requiring public comment under the TPS, the community will lose its ability to shape its own future.

The TPS and major projects legislation is a fantastic gift for property developers.

It signals that Tasmanians can expect to see more proposals for high-rise hotels, more private lodges in public reserves, and more towering

brick walls in heritage neighbourhoods.

But the TPS is not good for Tasmania.

Weakened planning laws and reduced community engagement will increase local conflict over development, pit neighbour against neighbour and lower the amenity and the general satisfaction of everyday Tasmanians.

It will come at a cost to the health and wellbeing of the whole community, the livability of cities, towns and rural areas, and the protection of natural and cultural heritage.

Biased from the outset, Premier Hodgman will allow shortsighted open slather development that will fail the community and Tasmania.

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reflecting widespread community interest.

United with a common concern over the TPS, an unprecedented number and combination of groups from across Tasmania will soon launch the Planning Matters Alliance Tasmania (PMAT).

PMAT will need all the community support it can get to stop these planning changes going through. If you care about Tasmania's future —

now is the time to act. Every little action will collectively make a big difference. Watch this space.

Sophie Underwood established the Freycinet Action Network and has 25 years experience in local planning issues on the East Coast, including advocacy, appeals and community engagement.