

SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON RED TAPE

Environmental Assessment and Approvals

OPENING COMMENTS

MODELLING BY THE MINERALS COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA SHOWS THAT REDUCING THE TIMEFRAME FOR ENVIRONMENTAL APPROVALS BY ONE YEAR WOULD DELIVER THE TASMANIAN ECONOMY 1 242 JOBS BY 2025 AND PROVIDE CUMULATIVE REAL GAINS TO THE VALUE OF GSP OF \$2.88 BILLION.

BACKGROUND

- On 13 December 2013, Tasmania and the other states and territories signed memorandum of understandings with the Australian Government to deliver a 'one stop shop' for environmental assessment and approvals under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999*.
- On 22 October 2014, the Minister for Environment, Parks and Heritage; Hon Matthew Groom signed the assessment agreement for the State of Tasmania and that now has effect.
- The approvals agreement cannot commence until the Australian Government first secures the passage of an *Environmental Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 Amendment Bill* through Parliament.

ENVIRONMENTAL REFORM AGENDA

- Tasmania has undertaken significant red tape reform across a range of significant areas from creating a single planning scheme for the State to overhauling the *Building Act* to remove permits for low-risk developments.
- Streamlining the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) process to untie much of the environmental red tape is very much on the Tasmanian Government reform agenda.
- Inefficient regulatory processes do nothing to help the environment, but can add significant costs to projects, which ultimately has a negative economic impact on the state.
- A comprehensive risk based approach to environmental regulatory functions is the way forward.
- The Memorandum of Understanding between the Tasmanian Government and the Commonwealth to establish a one stop shop was a major milestone and we are committed to finalising the bilateral agreements which provides for a single environmental assessment and approval process conducted by the state.

- Under a bilateral agreement for approvals the State would assess the likely impacts of a project on the environment and make a decision on approval, accounting for both State matters and matters of national environmental significance.
- Only one decision is made and this includes conditions of approval if appropriate.
- It is our understanding that assessment bilateral agreements have been reached with Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and the ACT.
- Tasmania is also committed to finalising the draft bilateral agreements which provides for accreditation of Tasmanian processes for approval.

TASMANIAN EPA REFORMS MOVING FORWARD

- We are working with all relevant government agencies to achieve better outcomes for development projects, the environment and the Tasmanian community.
- That is why an efficient environmental process to compliment the planning and building reforms that have been completed is so critical.
- One of the biggest criticisms of the environmental approval process is the lack of upfront certainty surrounding the provision of environmental reports and the environmental standards required to be achieved.
- A recent case in point is an industrial precinct passed the planning approval process in Tasmania.
- Several applications have now been received from interested parties in developing large-scale projects on the site and developers have expressed disappointment in the lack of clarity and upfront guidance on the environmental assessment and approval process.
- It was envisaged by prospective developers that, given the industrial precinct received planning approval, the environmental benchmarks for the site would have been agreed and provided they adhered to those standards, environmental approvals would be a relatively straight forward process.
- The government accepts the current environmental approval processes are cumbersome and do not provide upfront clarity on the expectations of the local EPA.
- Agreement has been reached between the Chair of the EPA Board and the Office of the Coordinator-General to use the industrial park as a case study for an independent review of the assessment processes.

Concluding Comments

- Tasmania acknowledges the importance of signing the MOU with the Australian Government to establish 'one stop shops' for environmental assessment and approvals.
- However we also acknowledge that there is work that must be done at state level to streamline the environmental assessment and approval process in order to create clarity and transparency for responsible development.
- The Tasmanian Government has a strong commitment to remove unnecessary or inefficient regulation.
- Through industry consultation and direct engagement with businesses we have introduced nearly 100 red tape reforms which can be found at http://cg.tas.gov.au/home/red_tape_reduction.
- Tasmania is well placed to undertake significant reform of the environmental approval and assessment processes to achieve a streamlined and responsible risk-based approach.
- As a State we look forward to working through the bilateral agreements for environmental assessment and approval with the Australian Government.

