

## TASMAN PENINSULA: TOURISM AND TOURIST POTENTIAL (SOME DIFFICULT ISSUES)

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Conservation of Tasman Peninsula's heritage values is essentially an investment in the future of the peninsula. Appropriations for the purpose, rather than being treated as dispensable and unnecessary costs, should be regarded as part of the regular maintenance of an investment package of historic significance and development potential.

**Key Words:** Tasman Peninsula, tourism, heritage conservation.

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### INTRODUCTION

The theme of the symposium, "Is History Enough? Past, Present and Future Use of Tasman Peninsula", is thought provoking. It also suggests a sense of urgency which can no longer be overlooked: *Which way is Tasman Peninsula heading?*

Issues of varying complexity are intertwined with such a deceptively simple question. This paper attempts to explore some of the more difficult of these which, for one reason or another, are rarely articulated; in doing so, it places heavy reliance on the concepts of the Additionality Syndrome and Environmental Development. (For more comprehensive discussion of these two concepts, see Uy 1985.) One issue, very relevant in the wake of overriding concern for economic imperatives, is the availability of an alternative to traditional development undertakings. Another, arising from the recent controversy between the Federal and State governments over the future funding of the Port Arthur Historic Site Restoration Project, is the interesting question of private enterprise involvement in the essentially public domain of environmental management and conservation. These issues converge around the common goal of heritage values conservation at Tasman Peninsula. This paper argues that conservation of heritage values, as a common goal, serves as a unifying mechanism amongst various activities currently focussed on Tasman Peninsula. The significance and potential of such a common goal is examined within the context of dwindling and

ambivalent government commitment towards environmental objectives, on grounds of economic hardships. The tourism and tourist potential of Tasman Peninsula provides a meaningful perspective for articulating these issues, which in turn provides the relevant linkage to the overall thrust of the symposium.

### TASMAN PENINSULA: PRESSURES AND POTENTIALS

Reduced to bare essentials, the pressures and potentials associated with Tasman Peninsula can be traced to a few critical facts. Listed as part of the Register of the Australian National Estate, the peninsula is an acknowledged heritage area; the outstanding quality of its natural features and the richness of its history are well documented. Russell (1985) identified as many as 27 landscape units covering the peninsula; detailed inventory of major components contributing to heritage values in each of these landscape units provides a clear statement of the character of Tasman Peninsula. The following description of the Eaglehawk Neck landscape (Russell 1985) gives a sample of the awe-inspiring nature and quality of the heritage area:

"Its coastal cliffs and forests, at once grand and forbidding, have the power to impress upon visitors a degree of understanding of the intentions of the prison builders that would be hard to achieve by any other means. Those intentions included the

idea of locking convicts away in terrain that was terrible both for its isolation and for its reputation as a natural prison which prevented escape by the ferocity of its landscape."

It is thus not surprising that "the most significant specimen of penal archaeology in Australia" (Jack 1981, cited in Russell 1985) is located on Tasman Peninsula. The National Parks and Wildlife Service of Tasmania (TNPWS) manages two Historic Sites, eight State Reserves and one Nature Reserve on Tasman Peninsula (TNPWS 1982). Port Arthur Historic Site, which has been undergoing restoration, is the better known of Tasman Peninsula's historic settlement sites. The high-quality scenic landscape for which Port Arthur (and for that matter Tasman Peninsula) is famous, has been aptly attributed to the characteristics of the settlement area and its surroundings. This quality landscape is further enhanced by the "powerful blending of sea, open coastline, protected bay, seafront cliffs, gently graded coves, meadow and forest interfaces and marked relief" (TNPWS 1982).

The peninsula supports an equally varied mix of activities and opportunities, ranging through coastal fisheries, forestry, agriculture and pasture, as well as residential and urban developments (*Municipality of Tasman Planning Scheme* 1979). As a valuable recreational resource, Tasman Peninsula enjoys a thriving tourism industry, the importance of which transcends its local and even regional boundaries. The pressure faced by the peninsula as a consequence of these competitive interests is enormous. In spite of the peninsula's unique value as a historical and cultural landscape, features of existing developments which detract from the peninsula's general landscape character are not difficult to find. Russell (1985) documented a number of these arising from land clearing (for various purposes) — unsightly road verges, shabby visitor facilities, dune damage, unimaginative road signs, and poorly blending foreshore buildings or residential designs.

Another factor contributing to the potentials and pressures of Tasman Peninsula is the complex pattern of ownership and stewardship of its land. It is interesting to note that Russell (1985) pointed to this situation as one of the reasons for developing a Landscape-Environmental Reference System for the peninsula. This reference system is intended as a source of comprehensive information on heritage values as well as a practical guide to operating within the sensitive limits of these values. At present, half of the land at Tasman Peninsula is owned by the Crown and the remaining half is freehold property (Russell 1985). In the absence of effective institutional

arrangements and co-ordinating mechanisms, the direction of development at the peninsula is subject to the influence of largely incremental activities — of local government, State agencies, Federal authorities and private interests. A unifying element is the common goal of heritage conservation which has so far not been put to productive use. A closer look will be taken below at this unutilised mechanism, in conjunction with an examination of the Port Arthur funding controversy within the context of the concept of the Additionality Syndrome and the concept of Environmental Development.

### THE ADDITIONALITY SYNDROME AND THE PORT ARTHUR FUNDING CONTROVERSY

The controversy over the future funding of the Port Arthur restoration programme erupted in full scale with the announcement by the Federal Government on 9 May 1986 that it is not providing any further funding for Port Arthur (*The Mercury* 12 May 1986). The Minister for Arts, Heritage and Environment, Mr Barry Cohen, claimed (*The Mercury* 10 May 1986) that "the former convict settlement had been a bottomless pit for funding and no end was in sight for the restoration". Mr Cohen's announcement followed "months of protracted negotiations and bitter debate over Port Arthur's future" (*The Mercury* 10 May 1986). The Tasmanian Minister for National Parks, Mr John Bennett, immediately launched a scathing attack on the Federal Government, referring to the withdrawal of funding support as a "national disgrace and a signal for further cost-cutting exercises that will seriously affect Tasmania" (*The Mercury* 10 May 1986).

Naturally, the funding controversy had to be seen within the context of the sometimes far from cordial relationship between the two governments in the past few years. Also to be considered are the conservation record and commitment of the incumbent and past governments of Tasmania. Nonetheless, stripped of political manoeuvrings and grandstanding, the Port Arthur funding controversy represents a symptomatic obstacle confronting practically all environmental projects, namely the Additionality Syndrome (Uy 1985). In simplified terms, the Additionality Syndrome refers to the entrenched practice of treating environment-related matters as extraneous or irrelevant to our mainstream activities which, up the present time, are still firmly anchored on an economic basis. The notion that environment is an additionality, inevitably leading

to the easy dismissal of environmental projects as an unnecessary burden or an extra cost, is so entrenched that even those who are concerned for the environment accept it easily. The assumption all along is that traditional development (as in mining, manufacturing and so on) is the only legitimate societal undertaking, with ultimate claim on the way land is used and the way resource is allocated. That environment-oriented activities can similarly generate economic benefits, comparable to those normally associated only with traditional development, is generally ignored; that these environmental activities could easily complement development by providing an alternative is rarely considered.

The Port Arthur controversy serves as a ready illustration of this unproductive attitude. Both governments' reluctance to shoulder responsibility for the restoration programme over the years is indicative of their view of conservation efforts as a cost item to be written off. The tenacious association of environment activities with costs obliterates even the slightest hint of benefits (Uy 1985). The unfortunate referral to the restoration programmes as "a bottomless pit for funding" (*The Mercury* 10 May 1986) has profoundly said it all.

It is interesting to note that the uncertainty (and lack of government commitment) over the funding of restoration work at Port Arthur goes back a long way. Support has been intermittent, almost sporadic, indicating the lack of a well-thought out plan for the overall programme. Furthermore, the release of funding was almost always preceded by intense public pressure.

For instance, serious attention was first drawn to the need for restoration in 1955 (*The Mercury* 6 January 1955), with momentum gathering in 1966 (*The Examiner* Supplement 9 August and 15 September 1966, *The Advocate* 15 September 1966, *The Mercury* 26 September and 15 November 1966). This culminated in a Ministerial announcement in 1967 (*The Mercury* 20 January 1967) that the restoration of Port Arthur will go ahead; funding support took another two years, till 1969, to be pledged (*The Mercury* 17 January 1969). In the intervening years to 1975, initial projects were completed but this still left a sizeable number of important buildings in a state of unattended disrepair. Talks about a much more realistic scale of funding, and hence restoration were initiated (*The Mercury* 12, 22 February 1975). Given the positive effects of the initial restoration work (Uy 1985), tourist interest picked up (*The Mercury* 17 May 1973). Private enterprise and developers were sufficiently encouraged (Uy 1985, *The Mercury* 29 August 1978) by the long-term prospects of tourism which drew on

the history and heritage attractions of the area. Prospects for funding support took another four years (*The Examiner* 19 April 1979) of struggle to take shape. Finally, the Special Seven Year Programme (from 1979/80 to 1985/86), involving a much more realistic sum of \$9 million, was released so that urgently needed restoration work could go ahead. This Federal and State venture on a \$2 to \$1 basis became the turning point for the long-term tourism prospects on the peninsula (Uy 1985, TNPWS 1982).

The cycle of funding difficulty began once more when funds ran out for the Seven Year Programme culminating in the Federal Government announcement in May 1986 that no more funds for the project would be forthcoming. The latest funding requirement of \$7.7 million (*The Mercury* 15 November 1986) was projected for the completion of the restoration work and regular maintenance programme thereafter. Over a 30-year period (from 1955 to 1986), a continuous struggle has had to be made for the future of Port Arthur; the failure to see the role which investment in conservation plays in further stimulating local and regional economy (Uy 1985) was a major factor in this. As earlier noted, the Additionality Syndrome remains a significant obstacle, preventing the recognition/acknowledgement that a viable alternative to development (in a complementary rather than an absolute substitutive sense) does exist (Uy 1985). The investment potential of environmental projects therefore remains essentially untapped. In the mean time, environmental objectives are continually being abandoned since they are perceived as inferior to and a threat to economic imperatives (Uy 1985).

#### THE ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT AND THE PORT ARTHUR FUNDING CONTROVERSY

Another interesting issue arising from the Port Arthur funding controversy is the question of the viability and practicality of private enterprise involvement in the essentially public domain of environmental management and conservation. In the wake of the furore over the Federal Government decision to abandon the Port Arthur project, the Four Seasons Group expressed its intention to take over the running of the Port Arthur Historic Settlement, the Group's Manager, Mr Featherby, announcing that Four Seasons planned to spend \$1.8 million on renovating its Port Arthur premises over the next three years, and as the only hotel chain operating at the settlement, it was important Tasmania's most popular tourist destination was not allowed to deteriorate (*The Mercury* 10 May

1986). Reactions to such a surprise twist in the controversy were varied. Conservationists were predictably upset and the State Government rejected the idea outright, stating that the last option might be to levy charges/entrance fees (*The Mercury* 10 May 1986). The Tasmanian Government's position was observed to be "in clear contrast" to its usual private enterprise stance (*The Examiner* 12 May 1986). In just as much contrast, the Australian Heritage Commission, through its Assistant Director Michael Pearson, reacted favourably to the "injection of non-government funds", reiterating that "as long as there is strong management control, they can do very well" (*The Examiner* 12 May 1986).

Without entering into a lengthy debate (on the multitude of intricate issues involved, such as levies, entrance fees and "commercialisation"), this paper hopes to point out some important philosophical and conceptual considerations relevant to the settling of the Port Arthur problem. The crux of the matter lies with the concept of Environmental Development (Uy 1985). Environmental projects and activities, contrary to the well-established myth on "additionality", are capable of generating benefits comparable to those attributed to traditional development. This is self-evident in the Port Arthur Restoration Project. The phenomenal growth of tourist investments, with significant implications for the economies of Tasman Peninsula and also of Tasmania (Millington 1983, Uy 1985), hinges on the conservation and restoration effort at Port Arthur. The expressed intention of the Four Seasons Group to take over the running of the Historic Site to prevent its further deterioration is a clear statement of the investment potential inherent in the restoration project. As an effective counter to the Additionality Syndrome, the Environmental Development Concept endorses the active pursuit of environmental projects as an investment; this means treating the disbursement involved as an input and maintenance element of the environmental investment package, rather than an unproductive cost item to be written off. A subtle and important difference distinguishing the Environmental Development Concept from other prevailing concepts and practices is its treatment of the environment component as the "development" project itself, rather than as an accessory component to serve development ends. In such a set up, the conservation component is the prime contributor to the further viability of tourist investments and other related traditional developments. If these basic assumptions and preconditions are accepted, then the source of funds, whether governmental or non-governmental, is not a serious point of contention. The Australian Heritage

Commission's optimism, that good management can take care of difficulties that might attend private enterprise involvement in the running of the Port Arthur Historic Settlement, is therefore not unfounded from the perspective of the Environmental Development Concept. A relevant model is provided by the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Project at The Rocks (Uy 1985). Reservations about "commercialisation" can be allayed by the installation of a conservation-oriented management team to provide the necessary check and balance.

#### THE TASMAN PENINSULA TOURIST PRODUCT AND THE COMMON GOAL OF HERITAGE CONSERVATION

With the benefit of hindsight from the foregoing analysis of the Additionality Syndrome and the Environmental Development Concept, lessons from the Port Arthur funding controversy can easily be translated to the situation at Tasman Peninsula. Within the context of Tasman Peninsula, the situation can be dealt with by considering what is referred to within the tourism industry as the "tourist product" (Burkart & Medlik 1981). Taking the broadest possible definition, "tourist product" is what the tourist "buys". Within the amalgam of composite elements making up the "tourist product", destination characteristics are generally regarded as the prime determinants of tourists' choice, an observation supported by a shift from "production-oriented" to "consumer-oriented" marketing strategy in recent times (Burkart & Medlik 1981). Tasman Peninsula is richly endowed with historical and heritage values which, in combination with a generous dotting of interesting natural features, make the area unique and irreplaceable. As a tourist product, Tasman Peninsula is therefore one of a kind, even by world standards. The critical link between heritage conservation and tourism on Tasman Peninsula can therefore hardly be overemphasised; the successful promotion of Tasman Peninsula as a tourist product hinges on the continued protection and enhancement of its heritage values. Once this linkage is fully understood and appreciated, there should really be no serious conflicting interests to divide the tourism industry, the community at large and the various groups whose interests are closely identified with Tasman Peninsula. A priority more urgent than any improvement or addition to the tourist infrastructure is to convey successfully the message that heritage conservation is a common goal to work for, as dictated by enlightened self-interests. This is

the bottom-line issue that stands between a flourishing/unique and a mediocre tourism industry for Tasman Peninsula. The significant contribution of tourism to an area's economy is well-established. If one further considers the fact that tourism is regarded as one of the fastest growing economic activities in the world today — to the point that it is considered as the most important export industry and earner of foreign exchange in many countries (Mathieson & Wall 1984) — there is even less excuse to ignore the significant role of heritage conservation. Conservation of Tasman Peninsula's heritage values is essentially an investment in the future of the peninsula, therefore allocations and appropriations for conservation should be treated as part of the regular maintenance of an investment package rather than written off as dispensable and unnecessary costs. As an environmental development project, the conservation of Tasman Peninsula's heritage values feeds and supports the other traditional development activities within the heritage area.

In conclusion, this paper reiterates its position that history (herein taken to mean the bundle of heritage values and scenic resources) is more than adequate as a term of reference in arriving at consistent policy decisions regarding the present and future use of Tasman Peninsula.

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