

THE FUTURE OF TASMAN PENINSULA

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Tasman Peninsula is, and could continue to be, a valuable multiple-use resource, but careful and co-ordinated planning will be required, if past errors are to be overcome and its potential realised.

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From SMITH, S.J. (Ed.), 1989: *IS HISTORY ENOUGH? PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE USE OF THE RESOURCES OF TASMAN PENINSULA*. Royal Society of Tasmania, Hobart: 149–151.

INTRODUCTION

If there is any place that needs people to start thinking about the future and about where it is going, it is Tasman Peninsula.

This paper deals with the future by looking back at the past; this is not really advocating that we go ahead by looking backwards, but rather, if we understand where we have come from and what we are doing, we are likely to know better where we are going. Some general observations about the past, present and future of Tasman Peninsula will be made.

There are four points to be stressed. Firstly, history is, and will only be, a part of the total make-up of Tasman Peninsula. Secondly, there is a strong relationship between the present land use pattern and past activities; in particular, the landscape provides a vivid record of social and economic conditions of the past. Thirdly, economic, social and environmental change has always been a feature of the peninsula lifestyle and always will be. Lastly, rarely has the peninsula ever been planned, developed or managed with full recognition of its total range of use values.

I would like to give you my impression about Tasman Peninsula because this does bias my values and thinking about the area. About eight years ago I was asked to do a planning study and planning scheme for the whole municipality and found it a very enjoyable and challenging experience. I was able to learn more about the peninsula; to mix with the local people and understand their way of life; to consider the impact of other people's actions in a place as significant as Tasman Peninsula; and to appreciate the conflicts that occur between a society, a local community and an outside community. More importantly, I learned that planning tools were very

limiting and very indirect as a way of achieving what you want for the future of a place like Tasman Peninsula.

I have strong feelings about Tasman Peninsula — it is a great place to be and a great place to live, but, more importantly, it is the landscape which, to me, brings it all together, that is, not just the scenery but in a total sense — the heritage can be seen as part of the environment as well as the people. Therefore talking about and appreciating Port Arthur means appreciating the water, the forest, the backdrop — all those types of things come together to give it an image of the past. A gentleman by the name of Alan Gusso summed it up pretty well, when he said,

“We're not separate from our landscapes, the landscape which surrounds us is a record of our behaviour — an expression of our values — it is not simply visual resources which we manage, it is rather something in ourselves which we attempt to manage. The evolving landscape is a visual statement of who we are as a nation. When we endanger the landscape it is part of ourselves which we threaten.”

In other words, it is more than just beauty, there is a whole lot of cultural meaning in the landscape.

The peninsula has meaning because of its inherent quality and diversity in terms of the visitor experience provided, but there is a real danger that the peninsula could lose its quality, its special character and meaning, and slip into mediocrity through the zealous pursuit of the quick dollar. I use the term quality in a broad sense, as referring not only to the outstanding elements of the natural and built environments but also to the lifestyle and

experiences of those living on or visiting the peninsula.

A PLACE OF CHANGE

It is worth considering just some of the changes that have occurred on the peninsula. They include

- the disruption of the original land managers of the area — the Oyster Bay tribe, which occupied the peninsula for thousands of years prior to European colonisation;
- the indelible impression on the landscape resulting from convict labour during 1830–77, which provided the impetus for much of the basic infrastructure — roads, jetties, farmland, etc.;
- the growth of the tourism industry from a trickle to a “big stream”, accompanied by a tourism infrastructure to capture the lucrative dollar;
- the ever-changing shifts in the rural economy with its boom and bust years — once steamer links allowed produce to reach Hobart Town within a day; the advent of the motor car changed this — orcharding boomed during the early to mid-part of this century; as with many rural areas, the influence of outside market forces and restructuring of the primary industry led to rural migration and loss of services;
- the fluctuating features of the timber milling industry, which helped to put settlements like Nubeena, Taranna and Carnavon on the map at its heyday in the 1920s when the orcharding industry was booming and required wooden crates — forestry activity is due to become a more significant aspect of the peninsula’s resource base in the near future;
- a decline and general ageing in the population which has occurred in line with the downturn in the rural economy; however, growing numbers of people retiring into holiday home areas and an influx of young “alternative lifestyle” groups in recent years has arrested this general trend;
- the changes, with time, in the size of land holdings — original development was stimulated by favourable land alienation legislation, and the intensive orcharding operations allowed for smaller units of land; as the rural economy suffered and the onus changed towards grazing, land holdings tended to increase — the recessionary period from the 1970s onwards has been coupled with landowners selling smaller blocks of land to “keep their heads above water”;
- the shift in the economic and employment bases from dependence on primary industry to leisure (e.g. tourism) and community services industries.

Many other examples of change could be cited which highlight the “dynamics” of the economy and

the adjustments made to the peninsula way of life. A few observations can be made:

- change has always been part of the peninsula — people have had to adapt their way of life to the vulnerability of outside influences and the local environment has had to accept all the changes imposed on it;
- the impact on the landscape has increased with time — we are making more changes in less time;
- the impact resulting from many small decisions has added up to creating a regional impact (e.g. degradation of the Arthur Highway);
- this change has been created without understanding what the impact might be — without, for example, any provision for archaeological investigations on aboriginal sites around the coastline.

SIGNS OF DEGRADATION

From a planning viewpoint, the peninsula is a resource very much under threat, and the signs of degradation are there for everyone to see:

- sporadic holiday home developments around the coastline;
- intensive land clearing on private lands;
- ribbon development along most scenic routes;
- *ad hoc* tourism and commercial developments;
- loss of forested skylines and dominant visual elements;
- poorly designed and sited buildings;
- over-use of visitor sites;
- localised environmental hazards caused by overdevelopment;
- historic sites suffering from neglect.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

A number of previous speakers have already alluded to the relative prospects for new development and growth on the peninsula. They include:

- tourism as a result of the established visitation pattern for the peninsula (part of the almighty circle route of Tasmania) — increased day-based touring; changes in the market towards more “experienced” type of travel; growth in special interest markets; increased numbers of international visitors and so on;
- the opportunity for innovative entrepreneurs to change a negative into a positive, present examples being quail farming and the Port Arthur Apple Cider Company;
- the potential growth of the aquaculture industry

and continued reliance on the high-value fish species of crayfish and abalone in the general fishing industry; — continued growth of Tasman Peninsula as a holiday home and recreation destination; — the expected increase in forestry operations on both private and Crown land.

There are a number of critical issues involved with the above resource uses and other future uses of the peninsula, including

- (1) Who should make the decisions about what is appropriate use of the peninsula's resources?
- (2) Who should pay the costs involved?
- (3) Who will co-ordinate the actions of all those involved in affecting the resource base?
- (4) How will the impacts be assessed?

SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE

It is appropriate to consider some scenarios for the future of the peninsula; two will be discussed here.

The first is "business as usual", which requires that the peninsula should accommodate all the consequences of on-going piecemeal policies of the public and private sectors. The end result will be a resource base without a unique identity, continuing land use conflict and ultimately a major loss of resource values. We can expect more local problems with increased public expenditure to rectify them. The danger is that we will replace quality with mediocrity and begin segmenting the experience of Tasman Peninsula, so that high-quality settings like Port Arthur will be mixed with degraded settings like the Arthur Highway trip.

The second scenario involves taking stock of the situation and what is to be achieved — a "change for the better" scenario. This is a redirection in resource terms from "can we afford it?" in the short term to "can we afford in the long term to lose it?" This scenario is very much interwoven with the whole future of Tasmania and what sort of place should be created for the future. The International Hotel is a classic example of the dilemma that we face, whereby we do not really know where we are going and what we are trying to achieve, and end up with a pretty poor result. This is probably best summed up by Lewis Carroll in *Alice in Wonderland*, where Alice is walking along a track which breaks into numerous different paths. She asks the Cheshire Cat, "Which path should I take?" The cat replies, "Where do you want to go?" and Alice says, "I do not care much." The Cheshire

Cat then says, "Well, it does not matter which path you take." That sums up the problem that we face in Tasmania. Being even more blunt, maybe it is like shuffling the deck chairs on the Titanic to get a good view, without really caring where you are going. In other words, we run the risk of taking actions in isolation from any desired future for the people or the environment.

The second option involves longer-term systematic planning and management of the peninsula's inherent resources and its potential to realise more sustainable returns with reduced conflict. Conservation plans must not be made in isolation from the total resources of the peninsula; forest management plans must co-ordinate efforts for both private and public land; tourist development should be along guidelines which try to bring out the uniqueness and flavour of Tasman Peninsula rather than degrade it.

FACING UP TO THE CHALLENGE

For successful achievement there are various things to be considered, one being creative thinking. We need to rethink through the issues, pursue our opportunities, challenge our limitations and make a commitment for a more desirable future. We have to overcome resource constraints, which will require a rethinking of priorities. We have to change our attitudes, from "she'll be right, someone else will look after that" or "take what you can while the going is good and let tomorrow look after itself". The peninsula has to be recognised as an asset for the future and not just a resource for today. We have to improve co-ordination efforts and upgrade our data base.

If issues about the future of the peninsula remain unresolved, then future resource options will remain vague and unrelated. With time, the available options will become more difficult to achieve. The long-term implications will undoubtedly impair the quality of the peninsula as a valuable multiple-use resource. Tasman Peninsula is far too significant to be allowed to slide into mediocrity when we have the ability to rethink and reshape its future — obviously not repair all that has happened but certainly retain its inherent qualities for all to enjoy. This responsibility cannot be put on a few shoulders but on many, and requires a commitment from those living here and outside who want a better future for Tasman Peninsula and for Tasmania generally.