

Dear Chair

With the benefit of hindsight the City of Launceston is inappropriately located on and adjacent to the floodplains associated with the Tamar, South Esk and North Esk Rivers. Now that the river system sedimentation dynamics are better appreciated it is understandable that the draft Vision reflects a focus on the restoration of natural systems in order to improve navigability and river edge amenity.

A natural systems approach however will only deliver useful utility if it improves the bathymetric functionality of the upper estuary to a level deemed acceptable by commercial and recreational users, and the general public who utilise the foreshore areas. A lesser level of change will probably be seen to be “fiddling at the edges” and lack community support.

A more controversial approach would involve large scale human intervention through the construction of a total exclusion barrage at Point Rapid, some 60kms downstream, thus converting the Tamar River estuary into a freshwater lake upstream of the barrage. It is acknowledged that a regional scale project like this comes with regional scale opportunities and risks .. as normally measured by their aggregated economic, social and environmental benefits and costs. Such a project should only be contemplated if the benefits strongly outweigh the costs and there is a strong social license to proceed. Such a project needs to clearly demonstrate that it efficiently solves a regional problem .. rather than offering a solution to a regional problem which has not been shown to exist.

Tamar Lake Inc (of which I am not a member) has championed a freshwater lake approach for over a decade .. based on the local benefits associated with improved upper estuary bathymetry and the significant regional net benefits. A large amount of work has been completed for TLI to substantiate the concept ... by consulting groups with nationally recognised expertise in the field. My understanding is that the studies establish the concept as feasible, subject to the normal methodology used to further evaluate these type of projects to the level at which financial decisions to fund the project are made.

As I understand it the work to date does not yet consider the additional functions such a barrage / freshwater lake could provide in defending Launceston against climate change driven sea level rise, nor the opportunity to utilise the fresh water resource for industrial process applications (such as a hydrogen hub) at Bell Bay. These could be very significant, as infrastructure to defend the City against sea level rise, and to supply water to Bell Bay are likely to be required in any event.

Whilst further work on the Tamar Lake Project could well identify it as being uneconomic or unacceptable to the community, I suggest it behoves the TEMT to take over the work undertaken by TLI to date and extend it to the point where the “barrage debate” is settled once and for all.

Such an approach would fully unify the Tamar community around their river system, and ensure that transformational opportunities were maximised for the region.

A summary of the background which lead me to make this submission is attached for your further information.

I am happy that both this letter and the attached background summary be published with other submissions on the TEMT website, and trust that the information therein makes a positive contribution to the debate.

Regards
John Pitt