

Submission to: A draft vision for the future of the kanamaluka/tamar estuary

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My strongest impression with this document and the proposed vision statement is that it is a window dressing exercise to disguise the most significant issues with the health, vitality and ecological sustainability of the Tamar Estuary. In order to address this issue, I consider the Future Priorities for your vision should be re-ordered to read:

1. Priority 1: To address and implement infrastructure development for sewerage and stormwater treatment and disposal to worlds best practice so as to return the estuary to an ecologically sustainable system that addresses the needs of today and into the future
2. Priority 2: To manage sediment issues within the upper reaches of the estuary in such a way that there is no impact (particularly ecologically but also socially) on the intermediate and lower reaches of the system.
3. Create a cultural and recreational use of the upper reaches of the estuary that is ecologically sustainable with minimum infrastructure intrusion into the functioning of this ecosystem

I consider that it is essential to get the first two priorities right before any other infrastructure is developed in the Tamar Estuary and immediate floodplains. The document has my third priority as No 1 but this is like trying to attract people to recreate at the edge of a large sewerage pond. Fix the most significant issue first and don't just ignore it.

The issues trying to be addressed with this vision statement has arisen in the Tamar Estuary because, with European occupation of Tasmania, infrastructure had been placed on and around an environment best described geomorphologically as an aggrading alluvial plain that will always continue to grow and develop. These plains began to develop soon after the end of the last ice age and the accompanying rise in sea levels to about their current levels (approximately around 10,000 years ago). Some of the current alluvial deposits are often in excess of 25 meters deep. Deposition continues today but its natural levels of accumulation have been significantly exacerbated by human activities, not only around the estuary (particularly including all dredging activities) but across the entire watershed catchment. The more recent sedimentary deposits unfortunately have been mixed in with contaminations arising from sewage disposal, stormwater discharge and other human activities (e.g. agriculture, forestry, mining) where they now pose significant human health issues and impact on the ecological sustainability of the estuarine ecosystem.

Fix the sewerage treatment plants throughout the estuary so they meet worlds best practice in avoiding human health issues and environmental impacts. Statements like fixing this issue is "neither practical nor feasible" is just another way of saying that it may cost too much so we will continue onwards and to hell with it. This is particularly unhelpful and doesn't even consider likely future growth and development in Launceston.

Dredging sediment from the upper reaches may be an option. But the spoil from these activities must be disposed of so that it is unable to return to the estuary and be used in such a manner that does not impact on human health (because of its faecal coliform and other pathogens) and the wider environment. The preferred option is one where you try to work with nature by addressing the causal factors for the problem rather than trying to fix the outcome head first. Mud raking and stirring up the mud with boat propellers are useless because all they do is create a hole in the sediment (which incidentally fills back up rather quickly when stopped) and move the problem further down the estuary.