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27<sup>th</sup> September 2017

Tamar Estuary Management Taskforce  
EMAIL: [temt@stategrowth.tas.gov.au](mailto:temt@stategrowth.tas.gov.au)

ATTENTION: Mr Stewart Sharples

Dear Sir

RE: TAMAR ESTUARY MANAGEMENT TASKFORCE

I have noted the call for submissions published in the Examiner of Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> September last.

Given the circumstances I rather think that the establishment of yet another "Taskforce" with yet another inevitable report and yet more maneuvering is all a bit ridiculous!

I **attach** an excerpt from my Annual Report for 2015 to the Tamar Yacht Club and an article which I prepared and which was subsequently published in the Examiner early last year.

Political expediency has dictated, now for about fifty years, prevarication and delay and a few token dollars chucked in the direction of what should be the dress circle of the City of Launceston.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely

W M GRIFFITHS

*Attach: Excerpt Annual Report (260917.6k)*  
*Examiner Article (280416.8k)*

*I have recently been asked about the prospects of reintroduction of sailing in the upper reaches of the river. Clearly this would serve as a marvelous advertisement for the Club and the sight of spinnakers in Home Reach and within sight of the Launceston Post Office would be, for many reasons, an advantage to the Club, an advantage in popularising the sport of sailing, and a benefit to the Launceston community at large.*

*Keel boats using the upper reaches can clearly not function conveniently with the use of the traverse slip for launching and retrieval, but before this issue is addressed and before small boats can re-enter the upper reaches of the river, there must be a major improvement in the river's health.*

*I am reminded of historical references made by sailors in the 17th and 18th Century who visited Batavia, then one of the few Southern outposts of civilisation, and now named Jakarta. They spoke of open sewers running through the town.*

*In the 21st century, Launceston has its own open sewer with foul smells emanating from the various pumping stations in the upper reaches of the river and enveloping all those, whether on sporting fields, in factories or businesses or in their homes – or on the river – at each high tide as what may as well be untreated sewage is pumped into the river.*

*A river frequently with enterococci levels which elsewhere would require the erection of warning signs and media advice to the public of potential health risks. The issue has long been a political football. The problem may be exacerbated by the reduction of flow from the South Esk to enable the HEC to provide a better return to the Government and the failure of Local Government and now Taswater to overcome problems associated with the mixing of sewage and storm water from the CBD.*

## TAMAR RIVER

It is clear from those many who have expressed their views in The Examiner in recent months that there is probably no one who lives within 50km of the upper reaches of the Tamar River who is not disgusted by its regularly putrid condition.

The construction of the Trevallyn Dam in 1955 has had an increasingly deleterious effect upon the health of the river as the population increased and as the ability of Tasmania's only open sewer to dispose of untreated sewage correspondingly decreased.

No one is content with the current state of affairs.

Alan Birchmore, Chairman of the Flood Authority, is concerned that absent the flushing by the South Esk, silt builds up in the upper reaches and the more silt there is, the higher the flood levies must be to protect the City from disaster.

From those who rely upon tourism or recreation on the river to those who would simply enjoy a clean river flowing adjacent to the CBD, all clearly detest the current state of affairs.

Those who in the past have used the upper reaches for swimming, canoeing, rowing or sailing or indeed those who have simply enjoyed taking a constitutional beside it and perhaps walking on the marvellous pathways between the City and Duck Reach cannot do so without fearing the potential effects of third world Enterococci levels.

There have been occasions in the past when NRM North has arranged to analyse samples of water taken from a variety of locations along the river.

In the developed world, Enterococci levels in excess of 250 parts per million require that the public be immediately informed through the media that a public health problem exists.

Readings obtained however by NRM North have shown levels in Home Reach exceeding 5,000 parts per million and all the public get are a few rusty warning signs along the river. Such an abomination next to our City and where the South Esk is meant to flow through the Cataract Gorge and create one of the major tourist attractions of the North can surely no longer be tolerated.

Last year the Tamar Yacht Club suggested to NRM North that an analysis of the water in the upper reaches should be undertaken not once a month, but at least once a week and preferably more regularly than that.

It was then revealed to the Club by NRM North that not only was that organisation not intending to undertake testing more frequently than once a month, but that they now intend to undertake no testing of the river, at all, for the next two years!

Mind you, a shortage of funds does not appear to have prevented NRM North wasting large amounts of money on expensive colourful brochures telling us how filthy the river is. And it is apparent that one the sponsors of NRM North is the HEC. Whether or not that is a factor which has influenced NRM North to stop analysis of the river for two years is only conjecture but such a restriction on accountability to the public is unlikely to be adverse to the interests of the HEC.

The Treasurer Mr Gutwein was recently reported in the Examiner as saying that the problem with the River is one to be addressed by the Launceston City Council. That would seem rather unfair given for

example that there appears to be no such suggestion so far as the Hobart City Council is concerned in relation to the funding of 60 million dollars to remove a sewage treatment plant at Macquarie Wharf for the financial benefit of that city. One wonders in any case how the State Government on the one hand can reap millions of dollars of benefit from the exporting of Hydro electricity but then claim that it is the Launceston Council alone who must pay the penalty for untreated sewage in a resultant stagnant and undiluted backwater.

A restoration of the flow of the South Esk down the Gorge, together with the ability to concentrate or reduce it as required, would go a long way to assisting in removal of much of the silt which otherwise endangers the City's levy banks. Such a flow, apart from restoring Launceston's major tourist attraction and providing first class white water canoeing would also largely dilute the Enterococci levels in the upper reaches.

The occasional flood has certainly scoured out silt and on occasions indeed the effectiveness of that can be seen by the stain of the silt flowing out from the mouth of the river and into Bass Strait.

Also of course there have been periods when the flow of water down the Gorge has been much reduced however, we now have a dam, and one which many of the people who live around the lake behind it would be very pleased to keep.

If the discharge through the Trevallyn power station of, say, 70 Cumecs is not used, then clearly that flow can be released from the Trevallyn Dam, and together with larger releases as available.

It is unarguable that an uninterrupted flow of water down the Gorge will benefit our local tourism industry. Presently, the release, courtesy of the HEC, is no more than a dribble of about 2.5 Cumecs

In September last year the Hydro released 25 Cumecs of water on each of three days to allow for the conducting of white water sports in what was described by exponents at the time as a world class venue. At the same time the flow facilitated raking in the upper reaches. That raking, thus assisted, removed about 19,000 cubic metres of silt during those three days of HEC benevolence.

It is clear that the ability to provide variable and significant flows down the Gorge will provide numerous benefits.

If anyone is in any doubt about the need for this might I for example commend the article by Alexandra Humphries on the front page of the Examiner on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May last.

Her revelations were startling in the extreme, although apparently not sufficiently so to merit any response from the Greens! Their concerns for the environment apparently do not extend beyond the forests and certainly it seems not to the environment in which Launceston residents live their lives and entertain their tourists. Perhaps the Greens would prefer that we all simply left!

Taswater is aware of the Enterococci levels in the upper reaches and of the urgent need to update Launceston's aging sewerage system. The cost however is apparently many hundreds of millions of dollars. Current prognostications even at that cost do no better than suggest that there will be, perhaps, a small percentage decrease in the amount of raw sewage in the upper reaches of the river. Perhaps.

That is, in 7 years time. Perhaps.

Over the last 20 years or so there have been regular promises from politicians of a few hundred thousand dollars here or half a million dollars there and other endless examples of tokenism. Just enough to

show that it is believed that fiddling around the edges of the problem is the best way to address it. Meanwhile, nothing happens to actually fix the disaster which our river has become and which, to use Mr Ambrose's terminology in the Examiner on the 26<sup>th</sup> April, "suffers from cancer, an ever increasing ugly and debilitating cancer, worsening year after year after year."

One truly wonders how candidates for election, year after year after year, have done no better than to pontificate, utter platitudes and say that they will "lobby for funding". However, Mr Nikolic in more recent times has provided some Commonwealth assistance and to be fair, who would stake their political career on claiming they will arrange to cough up a few hundred million dollars for an eventual improvement of 18%? It is a naïve hope at best and to tantalize the electors with the prospect of immediately funding such a solution is simply to mislead them.

Of course there is presently a drought; there have been droughts before and there will be droughts in the future, and certainly at the present time all the hydro electricity that we can generate is required to make ends meet.

We must simply insist, and our elected representatives must promise, that not one iota of electricity will be exported to the mainland before the turbines in the Trevallyn Power Station are turned off and put into maintenance and the Gorge restored to its owners. Further, the cost of achieving that must not be regarded as simply the responsibility of either the Tasmanian Government or the City of Launceston.

Thereafter we might be prepared to continue for a bit longer listening to our politicians telling us they are in the course of finding the funding for an improved storm water and sewerage system so as to finally rid us all of the insult of seeing faeces we know floating in the Tamar.

BILL GRIFFITHS

Commodore, Tamar Yacht Club

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11<sup>th</sup> May 2016

