

6th December 2013

Submission to the Productivity Commission's Bass Strait enquiry

The National Public Lobby seeks to balance the influence of commercial lobbyists with a lobby that provides strong benefits to the public whilst introducing policies that balance the public interest with the general interests of commerce. It aims at maintaining faith in our democratic process and institutions by limiting the growth over time of agendas that may favour some and not others.

The NPL is the creature of Peter Brohier, the founder and sometime chairman of the various committees and groups that have lobbied since 1992 for transport equality across Bass Strait by sea. These include the PIK committee, the Committee for Bass Strait Transport Committee, the National Sea Highway Committee NSH, and the National Sea Highway Group.

The NPL views are summarised in the following material.

Any move by the PC, or government, now or in the past, to depart from democratic mandates for a National Sea Highway intended to offer highway equivalent travel across Bass Strait is and would be, in the opinion of the NPL, highly unproductive. It will substantially erode the public perception of Australian democratic governance and act against the stated intention of our federation to integrate the colonies into a national economy through the movement of people and freight.

The NPL believes that the Commonwealth should ensure that a "ferry" based corridor connects the existing National Highway network on both sides of Bass Strait. This should perform and be somewhat akin to the functions of a punt crossing say the Murray River. Canberra should thereby fairly close the only interstate gap in its otherwise integrated national transport network. It should provide and maintain equalised transport by sea for all people, vehicles and freight that would travel on say the Hume Highway at costs that allow a decision maker to choose equally between travel along an interstate highway or to cross Bass Strait.

The Australian Government should meet this obligation at the lowest possible cost. The NPL believes that the Rundle method is perhaps the simplest, most effective and cheapest method of promptly starting to deliver this outcome. Over time a tender process may be used or lessons learnt from operations of other links across the world.

Given many existing unused infrastructure resources, national sea highway policy and uncapped equalisation funding, a short term and long term solution is possible and necessary.

The NPL will also consider making a substantial claim for a quantum meruit payment from Government and its associates who that have been advantaged by the work of the NPL largely at the expense of delivering highway equivalence, from possibly a far back as 1996. This advantage, while giving the ongoing impression of trying to move toward highway equivalence, has necessitated the continuance of the NPL's attention to Bass Strait for over a decade.

The NPL has no doubt been the catalyst for much of this enquiry.

Such a claim would never have been entertained had the processes of government taken real steps to meet public expectations and mandates using a substantial equalisation scheme introduced largely through the efforts of the NPL.

The NPL acknowledges the role of many in the Coalition and some in government in establishing this enquiry with what appears to be a real intention to deliver long standing economically dry Coalition policy of transport equity and efficiency across the Victorian - Tasmanian border.

The NPL would like to acknowledge the role of Prime Minister's John Howard, Paul Keating and Tony Abbott in doing or offering all that they were asked to facilitate NPL objectives.

The NPL is happy to present before the PC at public hearings. Additional material can also be made available at or before that time.

"This issue is more than tourism. It is a basic transport and access issue about the entire Tasmanian community and its relationship and access to other states" Martin Ferguson - Media Release, dated 16th February 2000

"The transport disadvantage posed by Bass Strait is the single most serious impediment to growth in jobs, investment and population for Tasmania" John Howard's Coalition 1996