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Submission to the Productivity Commission Tasmanian Shipping and Freight Inquiry

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The Chairman
Productivity Commission
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BASS STRAIT SHIPPING – PASSENGERS, VEHICLES AND FREIGHT

For over two decades, I have been actively lobbying for Bass Strait transport equity and for better application of the BSPVES and the TFES.

I was the Chairman of the National Sea Highway and the Committee for Bass Strait Transport Equality - two committees that put together the vital support for the introduction of the BSPVES.

In this context, I ask that this Commission and the Australian Government consider the following suggestions and initiatives -

That the purposes of Federation governing the movement of both people and freight between states should be fully met by properly connecting transport networks on either side of Bass Strait.

That the public history of the introduction of the BSPVES, including the offer to make Bass Strait part of the National Highway, be delivered and based on the principle of equal links between states.

That the 1995 federal resolutions of both the Liberal and National Parties in favour of a National Highway sea link be followed.

Given changes in the economy, the purposes of TFES should be now brought in line with the name of that scheme. Also, the original purpose of the then called, Bass Strait Passenger Equalisation Scheme, BSPES should also be restored.

That the principal of direct equalisation, based on the cost of highway travel and not the priorities of any one operator or industry, be applied to all people, all vehicles and all freight, save for bulk cargo travelling coastal in ships.

That such move is accepted as a fair and economically dry integration of our national surface transport network and of the whole transport corridor, Melbourne to Hobart and not an initiative based on any special case for Tasmania and or its industries.

That the Australian Government enter contractual arrangements with shipping operators to deliver this outcome as if it were dealing with the operator of a punt crossing the Victorian -

New south Wales border, or perhaps as a basic ferry operation overseas - thereby minimising administrative costs of operation and monitoring.

That the Australian Government, through this process, influence the cost of travel - also the type of ferry and route on a state neutral basis. Such influence could involve Federal capital and or operational funding, as and if necessary, on the basis that the notional cost be shared between Victoria and Tasmania.

That the Australian Government maintain the equalised cost of travel over time consistent with the cost of travel or transport on other inter-capital, interstate routes. This move will better use existing TFES and BSPVES uncapped funding and reduce administrative complexity and costs to shippers.

That a high degree of transparency be applied to all contracts.

That the Rundle method be applied by the Commonwealth to open access to Tasmania in the short term, using existing unused shipping.

That the "punt" equalisation operation be integrated, if necessary, with the existing equalisation schemes and or eventually replace them.

That modification of contracts be nationally managed to take into account advances in shipping and the need to deliver increased access for all over time, as with any land-based interstate highway.

Recognise that air transport and travel is already based on a level playing field and should be required to compete with fair surface inter-capital travel across Australia, including Bass Strait.

That it would be unfair to federally support direct sea links bringing goods from overseas to Tasmania without coverage of all southbound freight crossing Bass Strait from the mainland and also to not provide Tasmanians and all mainland suppliers with the benefit of fair competition policies.

That the economic impact of connecting this inter-capital link, particularly on Victoria and Tasmania, be fully understood and not delayed - also that the wider definition of "tourism" be applied to any Bass Strait operation. Also, that transport policies not tourism policies should govern basic access over the Strait to drive investment and population and jobs.

That if the Commonwealth deliver transport equity between all states then each state should be expected to do the same for islands within their jurisdiction.

I trust that our nation will, for the first time since the great sea lanes connected the colonies, be soon able to enjoy comprehensive Federal transport equality. This will allow both public and private activity and associated investment on both sides of Bass Strait to play a far more effective role in the common wealth of Australia.

Yours sincerely

Peter Brohier