

## **Dr. Pete Hay**

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I wonder how many of you have looked at the Lauderdale Quay project’s Socio-Economic Impact Assessment? You should. It is a positive blitzkrieg of words, a welter of data and factual minutiae right down to the last word in Appendix G.

It is designed to convey the impression that the rights and wrongs of the proposal are to be found in some convoluted calculus of the positives and negatives that lodge within its avalanche of facts and figures and projections. Now, I do not believe that to be where the rights and wrongs of this matter are actually to be found. There are, rather, two overriding principles that establish why this project should not proceed. One of these consists of the absolute need to hold the line, now, on the privatisation of public space, particularly on the coast...

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...and the other has to do with the assault that this proposal constitutes on the home range attachments to the place and community of Lauderdale. I’m going to deal with each of these in turn.

We know that ninety percent of the Australian population lives on the coast. We know that each coastal type faces a huge range of problems – that these will grow as populations grow, and as the climate changes, and its attendant sea level rises begin. Wetlands in particular face an uncertain future. As a raft of studies have shown, climate change will make future efforts to restore and manage wetlands vastly more difficult, given their heightened susceptibility to hydrological changes. As the sea rises they can, given time, migrate – but they do need time.

In terms of the intractable management problems that the coast faces, this development flies in the face of just about the lot! It involves significant interference with the most vulnerable of coastal geofoms: those wetlands – in this case a wetland deemed significant enough to have been given a reserve classification. And it is to proceed in what seems to be blithe ignorance of the irreversible changes to the planet’s climate in which sea levels will rise, the scientists tell us, by a metre within this century.

And yet, only the other day, as Cassy has told us, the Premier has announced that this Frankenstein’s monster of a development – something concocted in the commercial equivalent of a mad scientist’s laboratory – that this Frankenstein’s monster of a development could help mitigate the effects of climate change on Ralphs Bay. Oh yes? Does one of the qualities of this mud-bound monster consist of its capacity to hold back sea-level rise in just this one spot? Only when the Premier can explain that to me will I stop describing his contribution to this debate as the silliest thing I’ve heard in Tasmanian politics since Rodney Cooper stepped down from the Ulverstone Council.

*applause*

But I have strayed from my theme. We have a coastal culture. We assume the beach, and the foreshore, and the offshore, to be a commons. Our civic forefathers had the good sense to set up a land-use regime in which that principle was acknowledged and implemented. We take it for granted – but we should not – it is not in evidence in North America, for example. We need to recognise that what we've been bequeathed is to our great civic good. And we need to resist any attempts to “Americanise” – which is to say, privatise – the public estate of the coast.

The proposed Walker Corporation development at Ralphs Bay constitutes precisely that shift away from the coast as public space. As a precedent it is appalling; and it must be resisted. We must insist that the coast, the onshore and the offshore, be retained as a public good, free and accessible to all, and not just to privilege and money. I would commend to you the good sense to be found in the 1996 Coastal Policy, which acknowledges, and I quote: “that the natural character of the coastal zone is of special cultural value to Tasmanians”; which recognises “the dynamic, complex and interconnected nature of biological and physical processes in the coastal zone”; and which mandates that any development in the coastal zone not constrain “public access to and along the coast, consistent with protection of natural coastal values, systems and processes.”

As population pressures increase on the narrow and fragile coastal zone, it is more than ever vital that we insist on its preservation as a democratic commons. That we will not permit a foot to be placed in the door that opens onto free-for-all privatisation. And this means that we must tell Walkers to pack up their glossy bag of spin and trickery and take themselves elsewhere.

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And so I come to my second theme.

There is, I contend, only one thing that needs to be established to make this proposal democratically legitimate or illegitimate: do the people of Lauderdale want it? If they do not – and that is clearly what the evidence suggests – it is the duty of government to acknowledge that and proceed accordingly.

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To continue to support the developer and not the people is to act contrary to the responsibility that falls upon any democratic government. I'll explain why.

The people of Lauderdale have a just cause because when you fight in defence of the integrity of your place – your home – you are fighting in defence of your very selves. A place is not some mere abstract backdrop within which random lives are lived. When you are truly at home – when an affectionate bond ties you to a home range – the very fabric of the place enters you. And you enter and inform the place. It becomes a very real and tangible extension of yourself. It is the first and prime component of your very identity. And just as

you have not only a right but a responsibility to defend your corporeal body, so do you have not only a right but a responsibility to defend the extended self that is your home.

What the people of Lauderdale are engaged in, then, is not just a fight for something they merely happen to like. What they are engaged in is an act of self defence; self defence against a violence that would be visited upon them by a disembodied abstraction called capital, and by capital that is not even Tasmanian, but that comes from afar and has no concept of the depth of the ties to place that prevail here.

I want to take this just a little further. If to act in defence of your affectionately-regarded home range is an act of self defence, it follows that an attachment to place – to come from somewhere – is a first-order human need, without which your very humanity is diminished. “A deep relationship to place”, a wise man once wrote, “is as necessary as close relationships with people. Without such relationships human existence is bereft of much of its significance”.

This is why the citizens of Lauderdale have mobilised to defend their place against an externally-imposed “making over” in the name of development. “Home” – place – is not to be trifled with. It supplies the very messages and symbols that construct personal and communal identity.

And so place becomes primarily public space – not private. It is created through the shared meanings that neighbourhood conveys. It is public space, whatever is on those abstractions known as land titles. And it is for this reason that the Lauderdale community is entitled to claim a public right, superior to the use-rights claimed by Walkers and the governments of Tasmania, to have the prime say in what happens to Ralphs Bay. Where a community can demonstrate a deep, shared, public attachment to place, then that needs to be respected. When it is not respected – when it is over-ridden by governments or remote centres of capital – an unwarranted, grief-inducing violation of an under-acknowledged, but basic human need has taken place. No government ...

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...no government, no corporation, has the right to inflict such grief on the place-grounded citizens of a democracy. This tangible public interest that a community like Lauderdale has in maintaining the valued qualities associated with a treasured place establishes a claim that is prior to the profit-seeking activities of capital; and it entitles...

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...and it entitles local communities, such as Lauderdale, to have the prime say in determining the future and the evolving character of their place.

Now this might seem abstruse and high-falutin to some of you, but what I’ve actually articulated is nothing more than well established and accepted principles. They are even to be found in the DIIS, which states that, and I quote: “any substantial change in local built character is likely to be experienced by residents and visitors as an impact on the area’s sense

of place, which is strongly derived from the existing low-density settlement pattern and natural landscape”. And it is to be found in a passionate little essay written by Nick Evers and posted up on the Tasmanian Times website. Evers concludes his wonderful evocation of Lauderdale as place with this superbly lyrical observation: “Ralphs Bay is an attractive feature of the Derwent Estuary – whatever the tide, whatever the weather, whatever the season. It doesn’t require tarring up in a way that would be incompatible with its natural assets. All it needs is to be managed with good sense and sensitivity and by people who will be alert to rapacious developers, bungling bureaucrats and ill-informed politicians who are sometimes too quick to fall for the blandishments of corporate carpet-baggers”. Now, Nick Evers was Chairman of the TT Line, he was head of the Premier’s Department and thus the state’s senior public servant, he was a prominent minister in the Liberal government of Robin Gray, and most recently he was Chairman of the Forest Industries Association of Tasmania – he is a free spirit, but he is hardly an anti-development, back-to-the-caves anarchist. When Nick Evers argues that the place values of Lauderdale and Ralphs Bay trump the developmentalist aspirations of capital and government, I think we can take the debate as having been won. And we can do what the government should have done years ago – and that is, show Walker Corporation the door!”

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