



Environmental
Defenders Office

24 March 2023

The Hon. Michael Ferguson MP
Treasurer
Level 5, 4 Salamanca Place
HOBART TAS 7000

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Dear Treasurer,

Re: Tasmania's State of Environment Report

The Australia Institute Tasmania and the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) write to seek the allocation of at least \$1.5 million in the 2023-24 state budget to the Tasmanian Planning Commission (TPC) for the production of the State of the Environment (SoE) Report.

As you are aware, the last Tasmanian SoE Report was released in 2009, despite the *State Policies and Projects Act 1993* requiring it to be produced every five years.

On 4 October 2022, you directed the TPC to produce the next SoE Report by 30 June 2024.

In 2022, documents released to The Australia Institute Tasmania and EDO under *Right to Information* (RTI) showed that, since at least 2016, the Tasmanian Government has been aware that the TPC has not had the financial capacity to undertake SoE reporting. In Budget Evidence of June 2016, the then Executive Commissioner indicated that the TPC required additional resources to perform this function.

The RTI documents revealed subsequent advice from the Department of Justice to the Minister for Planning that "The TPC cannot produce the SoE Report because it cannot finance production of the Report."

In 2019, the Department of Justice advised the Minister for Planning that:

The total cost of producing the 2009 SoE Report was in excess of \$1 million over five years. With CPI this figure would now be in excess of \$1.25 million. This would amount to an additional \$250,000 per year for the budget...

This amount is highly likely to be insufficient. Environmental monitoring and assessment techniques have evolved substantially since 2009, so the TPC will be required to implement a new methodology. Inflation, the compressed timeframe, and the necessity to collate and analyse 15 years' worth of data, rather than five years' worth, will all only add to the cost.

As you are no doubt aware, the SoE Report involves substantial collection, analysis and presentation of data. At a minimum, the key components of SoE Reports (in accordance with the *State Policies and Projects Act 1993*) include:

- i). The condition of the environment; and
- ii). Trends and changes in the environment; and
- iii). The achievement of resource management objectives; and
- iv). Recommendations for future action to be taken in relation to the management of the environment.

These components should be further expanded to ensure that Tasmania's SoE Report is consistent with the issues addressed in the national SoE Report. The latest national report addresses the issues of climate, First Nations cultural heritage, heritage generally, and urban health.

Beyond the publication of the SoE Report itself, all environmental monitoring and reporting data that the SoE Report uses or relies upon should be made publicly available and easily accessible in real-time, or close to real-time. This data should be updated regularly and used to inform, at minimum, annual updates on the State of the Environment.

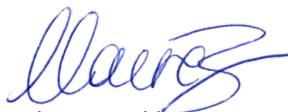
We understand that, to date, the TPC has been given \$500,000 to cover the cost of four staff, along with an audit of the Report. This amount is clearly inadequate. Given the above considerations, we estimate at least three times that amount will be necessary if the Report is to be delivered by the new deadline to an adequate standard. Ongoing funding to prepare future Reports will also be required.

It is a matter of continuing and growing public interest that the TPC complies with its SoE reporting obligations under the SPP Act. Given this, we seek your commitment to properly resourcing the TPC to undertake this statutory function in the upcoming year.

Regards,



Eloise Carr
Director
The Australia Institute Tasmania



Claire Bookless
Managing Lawyer – lutruwita/Tasmania
Environmental Defenders Office