



John Tucker MP

INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR LYONS



12 January 2024

Premier
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Dear Premier

As you are aware, on Friday, 5 January 2024, I raised publicly a serious issue with your Government's compliance with decisions of the Parliament. I am surprised that, given the survival of your Government depends on my vote in the House, I have not received even a phone call from you to discuss these matters. As a result, I am writing today to seek clarification of your position.

These are matters of fundamental principle in a parliamentary democracy. Our electoral system is built on bedrock principles: every citizen has a vote, every vote has equal value, counting is overseen by the independent and impartial Tasmanian Electoral Commission, government is formed in the House of Assembly, and the Government is answerable to the Parliament.

After Lara Alexander and I resigned from the Liberal Party in May last year, you reached an agreement with us that, in return for our continuing support, you would ensure that your AFL stadium project was subject to independent scrutiny by the Tasmanian Planning Commission as a Project of State Significance, and that both the initial order and any final approval recommended by the Commission would require subsequent approval by each House of Parliament before taking effect. You personally introduced the State Policies and Projects (Amendment) Bill 2023 to remove any doubt about Parliament's right to have the final say. That Bill was approved by both Houses and received Royal Assent on 31 August 2023.

On 16 October 2023 the Governor issued an order declaring the Macquarie Point multi-purpose stadium a Project of State Significance, and on the same day you issued a Ministerial Direction to the Tasmanian Planning Commission to undertake an integrated assessment of the stadium project. That process is under way and the stadium cannot now proceed unless it can both pass the Commission's integrated planning assessment and win majority support in both Houses of Parliament.

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That is vital, because as you know the AFL has drawn its own line in the sand: no Macquarie Point stadium, no Tasmanian franchise.

Consequently, I was stunned at your announcement on 22 December 2023 that you planned to proceed immediately with a “world class” (your words) \$70 million high performance centre at Rosny for the proposed Tasmanian franchise. That decision rides roughshod over Parliament's decision on the stadium and risks the waste of \$60 million of taxpayers' money in the event the stadium is not approved. There would be no case for a training centre if there is no Tasmanian franchise. It would alienate long-standing Eastern Shore parklands and stand as an enduring monument to Government waste and lack of direction.

I note that following my raising of this matter on 5 January 2024, a Government spokesperson effectively called me a hypocrite because I had voted for the Budget, which included funding for the training centre. In other words, your Government is claiming that endorsement of the Budget constitutes approval for the training centre to proceed.

You know very well that that is not the case. On 31 May 2023, during the Second Reading debate on the Budget, the Leader of the Greens proposed an amendment that: “The House condemns the use of public moneys proposed in the bill to fund a new stadium at Macquarie Point”. Both you and the Treasurer came to my office to speak to Mrs Alexander and myself and begged us not to pull the Budget apart line by line. You assured us that the provision of funding in the Budget would have no effect until or unless the stadium project cleared the POSS assessment and received Parliamentary approval. On precisely the same basis put forward by the Treasurer and yourself in our discussions on 31 May 2023, the provision of funding in the Budget for the training centre does not imply approval to proceed.

I seek your written assurance that construction of the proposed training centre will not proceed until Parliament has concluded its consideration of any Macquarie Point stadium approval recommended by the Planning Commission following its integrated assessment. That is, I seek your written undertaking that the Government will not enter any binding contracts and will not spend any money on any aspect of site works, services or construction of the training centre and its facilities pending Parliament's decision on the Macquarie Point stadium.

That brings me to the second matter I raised on 5 January 2024: the Government's evident total disregard for the motion approved unanimously by the House on 12 December 2023 requiring specific immediate actions to address the appalling lack of Government supervision of animal welfare standards in Tasmanian abattoirs and the consequent exposure of shocking animal cruelty.

You are well aware that this is a long-standing issue. You were the Minister responsible when similar regulatory failings were exposed in 2016-17. It appears little has changed and, despite the reprieve granted to Tasmanian Quality Meats' sheep meat export license, the threat to farmers and our livestock industries is real, substantial, and enduring.

That is why the House unanimously approved my motion on 12 December which condemned the animal cruelty exposed in slaughterhouses, called for immediate action to address the regulatory failures, and called on the Minister to report to the House in the first sitting week of 2024 on:

- an urgent audit of animal welfare standards in all licensed slaughterhouses together with a clear strategy for ongoing regular auditing, including unannounced monitoring audits together with industry education.
- evidence of the installation by the 2024 resumption of Parliament of 24-hour video surveillance of stun and slaughter rooms in all licensed abattoir premises and a commitment to any required legislative changes as early as possible in 2024 to make this compulsory.
- any other action which the Minister considers necessary to ensure Tasmania's animal welfare standards meet or exceed the highest standards applying across Australia.

The motion also called on the Government to report to the House when Parliament resumes (5 March 2024) on adequate funding and resourcing of these initiatives.

I note that all sides of the House, including the Government, voted for the motion and that the Leader of the House in his contribution thanked me twice for bringing it forward.

Given that history, it was both surprising and disrespectful of the parliament, for the Minister for Primary Industries to announce a Taskforce to consider a response to these animal welfare failures, with a reporting deadline of 31 March 2024 - more than three weeks after the House resumes. In addition, and contrary to the expressed direction of the House, the Minister advised the media that the installation of mandatory 24-hour video surveillance would depend on what her Taskforce recommends.

That in my opinion amounts to contempt of the House and I am not prepared to stand by while this behaviour persists.

I seek your written confirmation that your Government will implement to the letter the motion passed by the House on 12 December.

I further seek your written confirmation that by the resumption of Parliament on 5 March 2024, mandatory 24-hour video surveillance will be a compulsory requirement for stun and slaughter rooms in all licensed abattoirs; that the Minister will provide evidence that this surveillance equipment has been installed or commissioned for all licenced abattoirs; that the Government has appointed an individual or a team from within its 35,000 strong public service to access and monitor the abattoir video surveillance feed; that random audits have been introduced and will be policed; and that these measures have been resourced to ensure year-round coverage.

While these are matters involving fundamental democratic principles, I believe they can be resolved between us by the measures I have outlined, which do no more than reflect decisions taken by the Parliament with Government support.

If we are unable to come to a resolution, I must advise you that I fully intend to follow through on my public undertaking to withdraw my commitment to confidence and supply. Under our constitutional system Parliament is paramount. We cannot have minority government overruling majority votes of the House, nor can we condone the subordination of Parliament to decisions of an unelected Ministerial Taskforce for which I have been unable to find either terms of reference or selection criteria.

I look forward to your written response, but should you wish to discuss this further, my door is always open.

Yours sincerely



John Tucker MP

Independent Member for Lyons

Cc: Lara Alexander MP