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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

# The Provision of a Public Primary School in the Port Sorell Area

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*Bought up by Ms White and ordered by the House of Assembly to be printed.*

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## MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Legislative Council

Mr Harriss (Chairman)  
Mr Hall

House of Assembly

Mr Booth  
Mr Brooks  
Ms White

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Committee has the honour to report to the House of Assembly in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1914* on the -

### **The provision of a public primary school in the Port Sorell area**

and now has the honour to present the Report to Your Excellency in accordance with the *Public Works Committee Act 1914*.

## 2. INQUIRY PROCESS

On 29 April 2009 the House of Assembly ordered the former Joint Standing Committee on Community Development (CDC) to inquire into and report upon the provision of public primary school education for the residents of Port Sorell, Shearwater, Wesley Vale, Sassafras and Moriarty.

The CDC accordingly conducted an inquiry and reported to each House<sup>1</sup>. The CDC found, *inter alia*, that “a strong case was made by the local community for a new contemporary school to be opened at Port Sorell” and recommended that “a new contemporary public primary school be planned, constructed and opened in Port Sorell”<sup>2</sup>.

The reference to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works sought approval for the construction of a primary school catering for students from Kindergarten to Grade Six. The submission of the Education Department indicated the intention that the school would “service the educational needs of the Port Sorell and surrounding areas and the chosen site is located within the Port Sorell township which is part of the Latrobe Council local government area”<sup>3</sup>.

Considerable public interest was expressed in responses to the invitation of the Committee to make submissions. The list of submissions received appears hereunder. Every person who forwarded a written submission was invited to appear before the Committee and to address their submission.

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<sup>1</sup> Community Development, Joint Standing Committee on: Report on the Provision of Public Primary School Education for the Residents of Port Sorell, Shearwater, Wesley Vale, Sassafras and Moriarty. (Paper No. 32 of 2009)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Submission – Department of Education – Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works – The Development of a New Primary School at Port Sorell, 25 August 2011, p. 3.

The full submission of the Department of Education in support of the reference appears as Annexure 1 to this report. Such submission contains a copy of the report of the CDC abovementioned.

### 3. PROJECT FUNDING & COSTS

#### **Cost Estimates**

Description	Amount (\$)
Building Works, Site works and Services (see next table)	9,500,000
Contingencies	500,000
Cost Escalation	150,000
Project Design / Management / Authority Fees and Permits	900,000
Furniture and Equipment	1,000,000
Special Provisions:	520,000
Demolition and pre-contract works \$175,000; Infrastructure charges; permits, surveys, headworks \$250,000; and Provisional Sums: uniforms, promotion, establishment \$95,000.	
Artworks (Art in Public Buildings Scheme)	80,000
Post occupancy commissioning works	350,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$13,000,000</b>

#### **Indicative Cost Elements of Building Works, Site Work and Services**

The following table outlines indicative costs of major components applicable to the works.

Description	Amount (\$)
New Buildings - Learning Pods	4,341,000
New Buildings - Student services	3,132,000
Site Works / Landscaping	1,631,000
Site Services	396,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$9,500,000</b>

### 4. EVIDENCE

The Committee commenced its inquiry on Thursday, 25 August last with an inspection of the site of the proposed works. The Committee then proceeded to the Wesley Vale and Moriarty Primary Schools and accompanied by officers of the Department of Education were conducted on inspections of such schools. The Committee then reconvened in the Board Room, Shearwater Resort where the following witnesses appeared, made the Statutory Declaration and were examined by the Committee in public:-

- Andrew Finch, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services, Department of Education
- Bruce Cameron, General Manager Learning Services North, Department of Education
- Michael Rataj, Representing the Port Sorell Community School Committee
- Heath Clayton, Artas Architects
- Eric Mobbs
- Emma Fitzsimmons
- Heidi Radcliff
- Colin & Liz Chaplin
- Jillian Tonelli
- Rene Hidding MP
- Liza Petherick
- Nathan Richardson
- Mathew Ryan
- Naomi Lancaster
- Michael Radcliff
- Tracey Bell
- Wendy Roberts
- Dayna Dennison Port Sorell Community School Committee
- Joanne Coates, Port Sorell Community School Committee
- Graeme Hay, Port Sorell Community School Committee

## **Overview**

Mr Finch provided the following overview of the works:-

*This project will see the return of public education to Port Sorell. A school was established in Port Sorell in 1937 with the relocation of a school building from East Sassafras. In 1956 the teacher, Mrs Hammersley, retired due to ill health and the school closed. There is a long history of representation seeking a school and as far back as 1865 the Board of Education considered whether to establish either a Catholic or Protestant school in the area.*

*The current proposal has its genesis in considerable community support for the provision of education within the local areas of Port Sorell, Shearwater and Hawley Beach. Community leaders were keen to have an education facility that was more easily accessible for families, particularly those with younger children. Acknowledged as a growth area in terms of population, the extent of community support and need is reflected in the recommendations of the 2009 Joint Standing Committee on Community Development and the subsequent budgetary commitment by the State Government that was made in 2010-11 Budget with provision for the new school.*

*The Joint Standing Committee on Community Development recommended a five-kilometre radius for the catchment area and that no school would be closed immediately as a result of the new school being established. It also recommended that steps be taken to assign an independent task force to work with neighbouring schools to develop an appropriate educational model for students in the operation of the schools in a cluster or campus modelling into the future. With this in mind a future directions group has been established with representation from the Wesley*

Vale and Moriarty school communities and has commenced looking at the longer term implications of a new school in Port Sorell. That committee continues to meet.

The Latrobe Council has been heavily involved with this proposal and has identified a site, the Camp Boomerang site, and has agreed to transfer the land for the new school to be built if approved by the committee.

Currently most school aged children within the Port Sorell, Shearwater, Hawley Beach, Northdown, Squeaking Point and Thirlstone township areas attend Wesley Vale Primary School, and Moriarty Primary School to a lesser extent, and the majority of these children are transported by bus. The enrolment, based on the first term 2011 census for Wesley Vale Primary School, is 311 on a head-count basis, and at Moriarty it is 73 on a head-count basis. Based on that first-term census there are 322 students who reside in Port Sorell and those neighbouring township areas. Of those 322 students, 250 attend Wesley Vale and 40 attend Moriarty, whilst the remaining 32 students go to numerous other schools. The official home area for the new school is yet to be finalised, however the school will draw students from these townships. Initially the targeted population and capacity for the school is 350 children.

In terms of consultation, we've had a number of groups established to provide for extensive consultation. We've had a steering committee that has been overseeing the development of the new school, a project working group to develop the project brief and support the building project, and the future directions group that I mentioned earlier. Each group has community and education representation, while the steering committee also includes members from the Latrobe Council and the Department of Sport and Recreation, given that we are looking for community-based outcomes.

A comprehensive website has also been established to inform the community about the project and we've updated that site on numerous occasions as things have been updated, like the plans and so on, for the school. We've held two well-supported community forums at the Port Sorell Community Hall. One of those was in February and we gained input from the community about their expectations, hopes and understandings about the development. The meeting was well supported with a broad range of discussions about aspects such as the impact of the development of neighbouring properties, the loss of the Camp Boomerang site, ways in which the schools would complement and add value to existing services, the amenities that the school development would bring to the local community, school and community interaction, and architectural design. Feedback was analysed by the project working group and uploaded onto the website for public information. A further community meeting was held recently in July. Members of the community were able to see a range of the site plans and building designs, as well as talk with Heath Clayton, the architect for the project.

There is considerable excitement about the development of the new school at Port Sorell but a number of issues have been acknowledged and form the basis of much of the work of the future directions group. The development of a new school at Port Sorell will potentially have an impact on the level of enrolments at Wesley Vale and potentially to a lesser extent at Moriarty. The transitioning of students from the existing schools to the Port Sorell primary school is also an issue that we'll need to work through. Establishing the home area for the Port Sorell school is also something that we need to address. As the development at Port Sorell is not the result of an amalgamation of existing schools, as has been the case in all other developments of new schools in recent times in Tasmania, there will be the need for the appointment of a new principal to commence work on developing the school culture, learning and teaching and community links, prior to the school's scheduled opening in 2013.

The establishment of an interim consultative group to support and advise the principal during 2012, prior to establishing a school association in 2013, will also be undertaken. The association is unable to be formed until early 2013 given that staff will not have been allocated to the school until late in the 2012 school year.

### **Future of schools within the 'catchment area'**

The Committee questioned the Education Department witnesses about the likely effect upon existing schools within the 'catchment area' of the construction of a school at Port Sorell. Mr Finch responded:-

*This is a case of responding to changing demographics. When the existing schools were established many years ago there has obviously been a different pattern of demographics around this local community. I guess the investment of a new school does respond to the change in demographics. There are, as we have said, in excess of 300 students who live in this immediate area and the new school is being established to cater for those students.*

*In terms of the other schools in the area, we do have that future education group, future directions group, that is working through what the impact of the new school will be on those schools. Our goal is to continue to work with that group, around what they see for the future operations and educational delivery for their schools.*

*... we will continue to work with those schools through that directions group. Obviously the biggest impact will be at Wesley Vale, given that most of the students currently attend Wesley Vale Primary, but again we need to continue to work with the school communities through that group about what we do at each of these schools into the future in the context of new schools.*

The Committee pursued the issue. The following exchange occurred:-

**Mr BOOTH** - Are you able to tell us the effect on those schools?

**Mr FINCH** - Not directly in the sense that we do not want to pre-empt the work that we are doing with those school communities.

**Mr BOOTH** - Was it contemplated in the design of the new school, or the concept of putting in a new school, that those schools would then close?

**Mr FINCH** - No.

**Mr BOOTH** - So the effect it might have on other schools wasn't considered?

**Mr FINCH** - No.

**Mr BOOTH** - It was simply a desire to put in a new school, without reference to what might happen to current facilities?

**Mr FINCH** - Obviously there will be an impact on these schools in the immediate area but, again, we need to work through that with the school communities. We need to establish, firstly, which students will attend Port Sorell and that's a process that we will be working through and then work with those school communities as to how many students they will have and how we will best cater for those students. That's why we have established a specific consultative group to work through those issues.

**Mr BOOTH** - That's been established in the last few weeks but this decision was made some time before that. What work did you do when you originally decided that it would be a good idea to build the school here? What information do you have available for the committee about the effect it would have on the remaining schools that would potentially lose their critical mass?

**Mr FINCH** - The future directions group has been going for a number of months. It first met in term 3 last year, so it's been going for nearly 12 months. It was formed soon after the announcement of the new school.

**Mr BOOTH** - I'm sorry, you're talking about the future directions for this area not the general whole-of-State?

**Mr FINCH** - No, we have a specific future directions group that involves the Moriarty and Wesley Vale school communities. That has been established for nearly 12 months.

**Mr BROOKS** - But there was no modelling done on the impact?

**Mr FINCH** - The Joint Standing Committee on Community Development looked at the demographics of the surrounding areas and came to the recommendation that a new school be established in Port Sorell.

**Mr BROOKS** - But since that announcement, since it has become government policy and we're sitting today, has the Education department modelled the impact on the other schools?

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, we have. We have presented information in the submission about the current enrolments in schools in this area. We need to work more closely with parents about what their choices will be, about the schools their children will be attending, so that we can then determine the specific impact.

**Mr BOOTH** - It's fair to say they might not have a choice. If, for example, the school opened tomorrow and Wesley Vale lost its critical mass, you're not going to keep it open with 30 kids, are you?

**Mr FINCH** - We will work with the local community about that.

**Mr BOOTH** - So what you're saying is that you might keep it open with 30 kids?

**Mr FINCH** - Again, we have undertaken to work with the community about it through that future directions group.

... (for families moving into the area) We'll have a determined home area and if you're in that home area, there would be an expectation that you would attend the Port Sorell school because you'd be within that chosen home area.

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to whether a staged development, for example, an initial development catering for kindergarten to grade 3, was considered. Mr Finch responded:-

Yes, there was consideration given to that in the very early stages of planning for the new school. Feedback from the community representatives was that their preference would be for the school to open with a K-6 presence, given that a partial opening would impact on sibling arrangements. They may have one child attending a different school in grade 4, for example, and one in grade 1 attending the new school. The



preference was for the school to open in a full format and we did have discussions about that.

That was with the community consultation that we were doing with the Port Sorell project. From the people who were going to be directly affected, that was the feedback that we got.

Mr Cameron added:-

A lot of the options that you discussed are the options that are being laid out on the table with the future directions group. Quite a deal of the work that the group has done so far has been put on hold at the moment because of the Ministerial Reference Group on school viability. We have discussed and looked at a lot of models around home areas because the initial recommendation was the 5 kilometre radius from where the school would be built. That cuts through some of the townships, we call them townships - Northdown, Thirlstane and so forth.

We have looked at a range of different models that would logically fit a home area for the Port Sorell school and trying to fit in with the department's policies and guidelines around enrolments so that what seemed to be fair here is what would seem to be fair in other parts of the State. That is around areas of entitlement; if you live in the home area to attend school, out-of-area enrolments.

It is interesting that you raised the issue about whether we could consider a K-2 or K-4 start-off. Very clearly coming through is the need to maintain friendship groups and that is impacting on some of the suggestions that are being put forward to the future directions group about transitioning because from the table here, a significant percentage of children who currently attend the Wesley Vale school reside in Port Sorell, Shearwater and Hawley Beach. Input into the future directions group has been around what transition processes could be in place, particularly for those students who are in grades 5 and 6 at the existing schools and a survey is being sent out to families this week, which the future directions group has put together, to get some initial data from families about what their intentions might be. We will be looking for firmer intentions when it gets to around this time next year because obviously needing to know numbers will impact on staffing and the level of resourcing for the school, and what class configurations could look like and what the range of curriculum opportunities could be available as well.

### **'Future Directions Group'**

The Committee questioned the witnesses regarding the composition and operation of the 'Future Directions Group'. The Committee put to the witnesses that the community perception of the Group was that it was not representative, was ineffective as a consultative body and was dominated by employees of the Department of Education. Mr Cameron responded:-

(The Group is comprised of) eight to 10 people, eight of those would be regular people. Those people were originally drawn from the school associations of the Wesley Vale School and the Moriarty School, so by virtue of their presence of that group they are representing the schools associations of Moriarty and Wesley Vale. They bring to the table comments, concerns, suggestions from their school associations and also from the communities that they live in. Another group that they also represent are those families who do not even have children at school yet, or people who live in the community but no longer have children at the school. Those

people either opted to be on the committee or were asked to be on the committee because they were representative of a range of community groups. So they are seen to be representatives and they are feeding information back out through the school newsletter, through the Latrobe Council newsletter, so it is two-way information.

The future directions committee meets regularly. It has been meeting almost every fortnight or every three weeks, so there has been a constant level of input from those eight or 10 very dedicated people. I do not think that they would see their ongoing participation as being a charade because we are dealing with very sensitive issues, as you certainly are bringing forward here, and considerable and considered thought has to go into any decisions that get put out for testing.

... I would say that the majority of the people on the group are Education department employees, but they are representatives of the school associations. They did not come onto the committee by virtue of the fact that they are department employees but are there as representatives of the school associations or the committees of those schools.

... Membership of their group was dominated by respective school associations, in my understanding, right from the outset so there are people on there who may well be department employees but they also represent different groups within different parts of the community. The timing and the schedule of those meetings were set up last year. Generally at each meeting checking is done with members about their availability. Those meetings have not always been held in the afternoon, but are generally around child-care requirements because a number of the people on the committee do have younger children, but I take your point on board.

Mr Rataj added:-

As a member of the project working group, Adam, I have made it my business to attend the meetings. It is an important process and I have made it my business. I have taken days off work; I have taken a day off work today. If people are committed to an outcome then they ought to make themselves available.

### **Demographic support for the project**

The Committee questioned the witnesses regarding the growth rates for the population first, within a 5 kilometre radius of the proposed school and second, beyond such radius. Mr Rataj responded:-

I would suggest that those areas - Sassafra, Moriarty, the Wesley Vale township itself - are basically rural areas with limited or negligible prospect of growth. That would be my observation. They are rural farming areas. They just do not have any growth potential as far as housing growth is concerned.

Mr Finch added:-

There was a demographic study commissioned by the council as part of the planning work for Port Sorell, as part of their master planning arrangements. It was commissioned through Dr Natalie Jackson and it showed that in recent years the annual growth rate had been 3.4 per cent, which compared to an annual rate of growth of 1.6 per cent for Latrobe and 0.7 per cent for the total of Tasmania.

*... that was based on people and the projections indicate that the possibility of the region's population increasing over the next decade was well within the bounds of expectation, getting up towards that 6 000.*

*... The department undertakes 'enrolment projections' - once a student enrolls in a school we project them out through the year cohorts. If they are in kindergarten, for example, we roll them through grades 1, 2, 3 and so on. We have some projections for the immediate schools. At Sassafras the enrolments projection would be stable -*

*(The estimate is based on the enrolment and projections of where those children will travel) plus an estimate of new students who would be from birth data, within ABS collectors districts, and making an estimate of where they will attend school and projecting that out to kindergartens as well.*

*... We see some growth, and I think it was evidenced in our visit to Wesley Vale, where the school has been expanding in recent years. The estimate is that given the population, it would continue to expand with more students, not obviously taking into account the establishment of the Port Sorell community.*

The Committee cited the evidence that were the 250 Port Sorell students currently enrolled at Wesley Vale Primary School to be enrolled at the new school, it would leave a school capable of accommodating 350 with a student population of approximately sixty. The Committee questioned the witnesses as to the viability of maintaining Wesley Vale in such circumstances. Mr Finch responded:-

*... the department will continue to work with the local community about the future directions for education in this area. We have an established process and that is what we will commit to continue to work through with the local communities. During the last 12 months we have also been working with the community about how the BER expenditure took place, and we saw that today. Obviously with the BER project, as we know the Commonwealth Government allocated money to every school. That was the decision by the Commonwealth Government to make money available for every school in Australia, the 9 672 schools throughout the nation. Wesley Vale had \$2 million available to it and had a project running to spend that money. As soon as the new school was announced in the budget in June 2010 we put a hold on the BER project and sat down with the local community to review the project as it was. Some changes were made to that project to ensure that the expenditure did not add to the permanent footprint of that school. So even over the last 12 to 18 months we have been working with the community to get the best outcome for the money that was available for the school and the future needs of the school. So the process has started and that is an example of how we can work with a local community to ensure that we get agreed outcomes moving forward.*

The Committee questioned Mr Finch as to how the consultation took place, he responded:-

*Basically myself and the general manager of services north-west, Malcolm Wells at the time, met with the local community. We had a fairly large meeting one evening here at Wesley Vale School and then from that we formed a sub-group. We asked for nominations for a sub-group which had community representation. We worked through the issues with that sub-group. Given that we needed to work with architectural plans and work out the project, we obviously needed to work with a smaller group about that. That is how we undertook that process. Then we had an agreed project moving forward, so we re-started the project. What you saw today*

was the final outcome of the project. I guess the important point there, and the challenge we are dealing with, is that the demographics were such that for 2012 they need extra space before the new school would become available. To cater for that we have actually put in that impressive portable double classroom that you saw there today. It can actually be moved to another school in the future, so that was a very wise investment.

### **Building Education Revolution (BER) funding**

The Committee questioned the witnesses about the advisability of expending BER funds on the Wesley Vale and Moriarty Primary Schools rather than redirect such funds to the new school project. Mr Finch responded:-

*We approached that. That would have required specific approval from the Australian Government given that the funds were allocated to each school. We did, in respect of Wesley Vale, discuss that with the local community but the local community's view obviously at the time was that the funds should be expended to bring Wesley Vale up to an equivalent standard of other schools. I think that is the important point. Whilst we did not add to permanent new footprint, some of the areas of the school were fairly substandard - the administration area, some of the classrooms, the hall, toilet facilities and so on - so we were able to spend money on virtually maintenance things really to bring the school up to an appropriate standard.*

*... if there is money available for a school community, the decision is to obviously look at the money available on the known set of circumstances and factors that exist at the time. When the BER money was sought in respect of Wesley Vale Primary I think that was between February and May 2009, in excess of a year before the school became a reality. So we were seeking the funding. The BER funding would not ever have been available for a new school entity. The only way it would have become available for a new school entity would have been if there was an official amalgamation of schools that had existing BER funding. We were 15 months in the planning of the BER project for Wesley Vale before the school was announced in June 2010 and as soon as we had the announcement and the school had become a reality - so it was more than a possibility - then we worked with the local community about reviewing the expenditure of that funding.*

*As Mr Brooks said, we discussed the use of the money at the new school but it was the local community's preference for the funds to be spent at their school. The Australian Government had already allocated the funding in respect of Wesley Vale so we pursued the allocation of the funds and the expenditure at the school. But what we did, I guess, was make sure that the expenditure incurred had an eye to the future and we did not establish new permanent buildings, that we focused on making sure we could cater for the enrolments that needed to be catered for up until a new school would be available at Port Sorell, and also made sure that we improved the amenity of the existing classrooms. The school has students going through every year group at the moment that deserve the benefit of good facilities otherwise they would have a period that they would miss out on the same level of facilities that students are enjoying at other schools.*

*... the money was available, it was allocated before the new school was announced and we have endeavoured to spend it in the best way possible. The investment has been made and does exist in those sites and we will continue to discuss the future of the sites with the future directions group.*

### **School area**

The Committee questioned the witnesses about what policy, if any, operated in respect of students travelling out of school area, given the '5 kilometre radius' proposed for the new school and what capacity would exist for parents to send their children to schools out of area.

Mr Finch responded:-

*I think the Community Development Committee suggested the 5-kilometre radius. That would be considered further in determining the precise home area for the school.*

Mr Cameron added:-

*In line with the department's policy on enrolment, there is information on the department's website about what constitutes a home area and there are maps of home areas for each of our State schools. Parents or families are actively encouraged to support their home school but there is certainly provision for out-of-area enrolments. Whether it be for employment or family connections or other reasons, there are processes to enable out-of-area enrolments, but we actively encourage families to support their local school.*

*... the input that the future directions committee has had is to consider family connections, friendships and loyalties that families and children have to their current schools. One of the possibilities is that once a home area is established there could be transition arrangements for those families who still want to maintain a connection with their current schools. That would be a discussion they would have with the current principal. Conversely, considering that the plans are for a new school to be established here, there would be families who potentially live outside the designated home area for the Port Sorell School and who may wish - again for family reasons, work reasons, whatever - for their children to attend the school here. So there needs to be the same sort of process for families who want their children to attend here as well as for families who want their children to be enrolled in schools outside the home area.*

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to how many families currently attending existing schools have indicated a willingness to attend the new school.

Mr Cameron responded:-

*That has not been quantified as yet. A survey from the future directions committee is being sent home. The plans are for it to go this week so that we can get some sort of indication at this stage. Also there is the opportunity there for parents to say what their concerns are or what further questions they have, what the considerations are within the family if they have a number of children at either Wesley Vale or Moriarty but they live here, and what those concerns might be. In 12 months time we will be asking for a firmer commitment. So I am unable to quantify that response for you.*

*...The Port Sorell school is being constructed with the idea of what is known but also with what can be predicted. We are making those more accurate assessments based on where families currently live and also the percentage of families with pre-school aged children who are enrolling their children into the currently available options.*

...The expectation would be, but has not been defined as yet, that once a home area is established for the school then families would support that school. This works with every other State school.

The following exchange then ensued:-

**Mr BOOTH** - What does 'expectation' mean?. Does that mean that they will be required to send their children there?

**Mr CAMERON** - Generally that is the case.

**Mr BOOTH** - They would be required to.

**Mr CAMERON** - Yes. In other State schools that I am aware of, particularly in this learning service, the percentage of children or families who apply for out-of-area enrolments for a huge number of reasons is not a significant percentage.

**Mr BOOTH** - But this is an unusual circumstance. From my superficial inspection of those schools, they seem well equipped, they seem to be in good condition, they seem to be providing a good educational outcome for the kids and there is now a proposal to construct a school that will actually take children out of those current schools and from what you are saying force them or require them to go to another school so that is quite a different situation to where there is not a new school being built and parents decide to send their children out of area for a whole lot of various reasons.

**Mr CAMERON** - When you use the term 'force' that is not in a physical sense.

**Mr BOOTH** - I think you used the term 'require'.

**Mr CAMERON** - The recommendations that will come out of the minister's reference group, which was referred to earlier, on the current enrolment procedures may well through the process of public consultation throw up a whole new set of conditions around enrolment. People like Mike, who live in the local community, would have a finger on the pulse as to what the level of support potentially is for the future of a school here.

**Mr RATAJ** - Again, probably unquantifiable but I think if parents had the choice of a brand new facility with the newness and the locality of that school to their home I think that surely would be their first choice. You may well have opposition or motions from detractors or people that are not going to do that but I think it would be human nature that you would send your child to the closest, newest and best facility available to you.

## **Energy Design**

The Committee asked the witnesses for an explanation of the energy efficiency of the proposed building. Mr Clayton responded:-

As far as a star energy rating is concerned, we are working through the Green Building Council of Australia rating which is an overall sustainability rating, I suppose, for a general term. It is not just a straight energy rating like a domestic house would be but in saying that, we are aiming to achieve a five-star Green-Star rating which is Australian best practice.

... We are in the process of putting it all together. Basically, Green Star is a complex process that we have to go through, working through various components of that - there is some information on the background of Green Star in the submission. You cannot go through it until you have completed the design work because there is a lot of modelling and a lot of information that we are working through. At this stage we look like achieving that but it is still subject to review by the Green Building Council of Australia as part of that process.

... I know that under the Green Star requirements there is a base level (for air exchange) under the Building Code. If you exceed that by, I think it is 25 per cent, you get a point; if you exceed it by 50 per cent, you get two points, and that is all about turning over stale air and things along those lines. We are working through that but we are well above Building Code requirements, so we are looking at one, maybe two, points, so that is still being modelled at the moment.

... We are utilising energy recovery units which are basically through the winter months when you generally don't open windows, which is forced ventilation. It forces and it is filtered, so it is forcing fresh air that has a pre-heat component. It is not the sole source of heating for it; it is purely about natural ventilation and bringing ventilation in. It sucks in it through the roof, treats it and puts it in, and it also sucks it out. So you are constantly turning over the air -

... In summer we obviously have opening windows, big doors, bi-fold windows to encourage natural airflows where we can. Our highlight windows are controlled electronically with sensors, so as the temperature increases they automatically open and dump the hot air out, so once again we are forcing the air out through those means.

(In respect of air-conditioning) - There are two areas. We have the general learning areas. Within that we are using the reverse cycle heat pumps as a heating-only requirement and we are locking it out. It does have the ability to turn on if need be but we are finding that in a lot of instances they have been overrun and the energy costs are getting out of hand. We have done that to meet the Green Star requirements, so we are locking out the cooling component. As I was saying earlier about the use of passive and natural ventilation through the dumping of hot air and turning over the heat, we believe that for all bar a few days the comfort levels will be adequate. In the other areas, such as the administration area where someone is sitting day in, day out and not moving, then it is fair to assume that you can provide them with a heating and cooling system because they are not getting up and moving around, opening doors and moving from other areas, which you would be in a student classroom environment.

## **Unisex toilets**

The Committee questioned the witnesses regarding the submitted design which appeared to provide for unisex toilets. Mr Finch responded:-

Firstly, we don't put unisex toilets in schools; what we put in schools are new, modern toilet facilities. Our classrooms are flexible learning areas and can be used in a number of ways and are a lot more modern in design. In a similar way, toilets have changed.

... They are toilets that can be used differently and that is up to the decision of the local school community. As we mentioned, we don't yet have a principal for the school. When we do, and closer to the time, we will work with the local community

*about how the toilets should be used. The important thing is that we are building in these schools new, flexible facilities that can be used in a number of ways to suit local communities. The decisions about how they are used are best made by the local communities.*

*Rather being written on (the submission) as 'male' or 'female' they are written as 'unisex' for the purpose of showing that there are toilets available which can be used either as male or female toilets or as unisex toilets. As I mentioned, we will work with the local school community to determine how they wish to use those toilet facilities.*

Mr Clayton added:-

*They are individual toilets with a hand basin inside. You go in and snib the door closed in a secure environment, use the toilet and then wash your hands and go out. This was a lot of the concern around the other schools you have been speaking about. It was envisaged that everybody shared a traditional open school toilet block, which wasn't the case. In many instances the feedback I have got from those schools is that, whilst there was some opposition to it, there is now a lot of positive feedback because the anti-bullying and other antisocial behaviour that can occur in a toilet block arrangement has now gone. If you talked to those schools there may be a few detractors but in general terms they are much happier with that. When all that occurred, we were in the planning process of this school and we talked about the pros and cons associated with the toilets and how we should do it and everyone on the working group was unanimous that the way we are doing it is the way we should be going.*

### **Opposition to the proposal**

In response to the public invitation for submissions, the Committee received a relatively high number of submissions from concerned members of the public for works of this nature. Of the 35 submission received and taken into evidence by the Committee, 32 opposed the proposal for a variety of reasons. The principal arguments proposed by such evidence fell into the following categories: there was not a current need for a school and the project should be deferred; the proposal was an inappropriate use of public funds in the current economic climate given that the recent use of BER funds had reinvigorated the Wesley Vale and Moriarty Primary Schools; there was minority support for the proposal; funds allocated for the works should be spent on alternatives; and the consultative process was inadequate.

Evidence on each of these areas of concern was communicated to the Committee both in written submissions and in verbal evidence to the Committee at the hearing. As similar evidence on each area was given by a number of witnesses, the extracts reproduced hereunder provide a summary of the evidence received in respect of each point.



## **Financial considerations**

The evidence received by the Committee in respect of the financial aspect of the works was dominated by the simple argument that the proposal was a 'waste of public funds'. This argument was given particular reinforcement by the evidence received in relation to the recent BER improvements to the Wesley Vale and Moriarty Primary Schools. The evidence of Mr Mobbs summarises the argument:-

*When I saw this I was most concerned because when the Commonwealth announced the BER funding for Wesley Vale school I objected at that point in time, and it is on the record in the Senate - in Hansard - raised by Senator Richard Colbeck, objecting to the money being spent when it had already been announced that there was a new school proposed for Port Sorell. To me it was absolute economic vandalism to have both running and at that point in time I suggested that \$2.5 million, I think it was at that stage - it has been cut back a little - that was to be spent on Wesley Vale should in fact be put to the new Port Sorell school. That was ignored by the Education department and although they did put a temporary halt on the building, they had by that stage already demolished a toilet block and I think a couple of other buildings. They then decided to proceed with spending the rest of the \$2.1 million.*

*My objection is not to the new school as such but is in terms of it is the wrong time to be building a new school. We have a budget that seems to be very constrained and just because I am given a \$25 000 limit on my credit card it doesn't mean that I have to spend it, and my objection is to that \$2.1 million. Yes, it was offered by the Commonwealth. It didn't have to be spent. It made no sense at all when they knew there was a new school being proposed. That is my main objection. I believe the matter should be deferred until such time as the new Wesley Vale school with its expanded capacity of 350 is fully utilised because the new school is not going to offer any larger capacity than Wesley Vale offers.*

The Committee questioned Mr Mobbs as to what time frame should be considered in the event that the works were to be deferred. Mr Mobbs responded:-

*It would be largely based on economic factors. We have a budget at the moment that is, by the Government's own admission, in a black hole and I think a two-year deferment - minimum - would not be out of the question, particularly as my understanding is that Wesley Vale and the proposed new school would be running in parallel for a minimum of two years, probably three. So we not only have a capital expenditure being spent now in a black hole, we also have two to three years' doubling up, maybe not quite doubling up, but certainly additional operation expenses taking place because we will need staff at both schools. There is no way that the staff at Port Sorell will be able to totally manage the school at Wesley Vale, and vice versa, so there will be additional expense incurred for a two- to three-year period at a time when we have dire economic problems, other schools have had their budgets cut back and some of the essential services in the Education department have been cut back and here we are spending \$13 million, which will have to be borrowed money because it's not in the kitty - it may be budgeted for but budgets have been known to be changed and I believe that's one area where it should be changed.*

The following exchange ensued:-

**Mr BOOTH** - Did you support the construction initially on educational grounds?

**Mr MOBBS** - Yes, on educational grounds. I think there is a need for a new school but it is a question of when. I am not against the building of a new school, I am against the timing of the building of that new school.

**Mr BOOTH** - Had the BER money not been spent there -

**Mr MOBBS** - Then I would have been quite happy to support the Port Sorell school, but it is a waste of \$2.1 million of taxpayers' money that I am objecting to if they go ahead right now and build the new school.

**Mr BOOTH** - Can you see any educational reason that you would proceed to build a new school here now that the schools have had the BER money spent on?

**Mr MOBBS** - No, it's only capacity. In terms of the quality of the education, which is excellent at Wesley Vale, it has a very good reputation. There is no vandalism at Wesley Vale and I will venture to suggest that there will be a lot more when it moves to Port Sorell, including things such as condoms and drug needles with people hanging around the premises. That doesn't happen at Wesley Vale; there is virtually no vandalism at all because of the area it is in. The students have an excellent facility there and I don't see why we can't continue to use it.

**Mr HALL** - You also include the BER money spent at Moriarty?

**Mr MOBBS** - I'm not aware of what the department's plans are for Moriarty.

**Mr HALL** - No, but there's been money spent?

**Mr MOBBS** - Yes, there has been money spent there as well. I think the department thinks, 'There's some money there, we'll take it', irrespective of whether it was needed or not. I think it is economic vandalism.

**Mr BROOKS** - Eric, regarding the investment and infrastructure in the area, there is some argument that now is the time they should be spending money on projects like that to help the economy. What are your thoughts on that?

**Mr MOBBS** - Not when it's borrowed government money. If the money was in the government coffers, you wouldn't hear a murmur out of me, but it's not in the government coffers, by the Government's own admission, and I don't see why we should put more on the credit card when it's not necessary.

**Mr BROOKS** - If the Government's financial management were to change and there was money in the coffers but there still wasn't a need capacity-wise at Wesley Vale, would you support a school being built here?

**Mr MOBBS** - No, I would not. If the capacity requirement is not there, and even if the money was, I would not support it. The capacity at Wesley Vale has been upgraded and it can now accommodate 350 students.

### **Minority community support**

Many witnesses who appeared before the Committee submitted that it was a vocal minority in the community that had pressed for the approval of a new school. The following evidence from Mrs Fitzsimmons exemplifies this opinion:-

Being at the school for a number of years now and speaking to the parents of the children in the school, most of the people I speak to do not want the school to go ahead. It is just a few whom I know of that want the school to go ahead and they seem to be loudest. They are the ones that seem to be driving it.

From the parents' point of view, there has been nothing said at school. We have not had, as you say, any surveys put out to the parents at school. There was a survey dropped in the letterbox but I am not quite sure how many people responded to that. I know one family has five properties and they received five surveys, so how accurate can that be. It just seems that we are not very loud...

... There are two main reasons. One, the monetary value; secondly, we have a great school. If it is not broken, why fix it? One of the main reasons everyone is worried is that if Port Sorell does open then Wesley Vale School will eventually close. It has been going for such a long time and it is a great school...

Mrs Petherick submitted:-

... Yes, to me there only seems to be a handful of people that actually want this school. I don't know why but real estate agents were brought up several times. Obviously this area is not full. Okay, we might have 4 000 people but 3 000 of those might be retirees that don't have any children here. I live down in Haven Drive in Shearwater. Every second house is up for sale, half of those are empty, so they're not occupied anyway.

If they're wanting to bring in population to this area, don't build another school, put out a Woolworths - that's been promised here for four years, that I know of - 'There's going to be a Woolworths built, a Centro centre with 12 specialty shops'. The land is still sitting there, nothing else has been heard. I just really think another primary school would be a waste of money. Build a police youth club centre. A friend of mine runs one in Hervey Bay in Queensland. He has more than 1 000 kids there throughout the school holidays, he looks after them after school, he runs sporting programs, he takes them camping on weekends - something like that.

... If there was a facility where you know they could spend three or four hours which might cost \$10, they're getting exercise, they're having fun, they're being with their friends - they're being looked after. That, to me, is more viable than another school when you have the most beautiful school in this area.

Many witnesses lauded the opportunities afforded by the existing schools. Mrs Tonelli submitted:-

I think the school at the moment offers great opportunity. I think we have a wonderful environmental area. I am very passionate about environmental things with my family and my children are passionate about it as well. I like the fact that it is safe. I feel I can put my children on the bus and not worry about them for the rest of the day. We have no vandalism, no loitering, no truancy. I feel that if the school goes ahead at Port Sorell we are going to get vandalism, loitering and truancy. It is more exciting for children to go down to the beach than go to school. These things do concern me.

...At Wesley Vale we have Andrews Creek and this is a very important area of our school. It gives children the opportunity they would not always have to experience this environmental side. My father is a very well known environmentalist around this

area and he takes many children on environmental trips down to these places. I am very proud of that and I am proud that my children get to experience that.

Mrs Petherick submitted:-

Something else that is wonderful about Wesley Vale is they go to Heidi's whey and they have Wes Farm at Wesley Vale Primary School where there are animals and they can collect eggs and feed the chooks and they look after injured animals. When they have their cross country they walk 300 metres up to Mrs Dick's farm where she lets them gather and have their cross country for the day and their sports day. It is a lovely environment and I think you're going to lose the attraction of that when it moves into town. It has a lovely country feel and is wide open spaces and beautiful views. There are probably six or seven houses at Wesley Vale which are close to the school but you never hear any complaints from them. It has such a nice feel and I think you're going to lose all that. It would be a shame to see that go because there are not many schools left like it. I have nieces and nephews who attend schools in Queensland with 1 500 students. The teachers wouldn't know who they are; because they are so busy they have to have certain classes from 7.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. and then they get a different group in from 1.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. because there are so many students. They don't know each other but they do at Wesley Vale. They are very close. The mums know the mums, everyone says hi, and it would be a shame to lose that, and I think you will.

Mr Radcliff submitted:-

I can't get over the number of people who have come out openly lately that are so pro the facility at Wesley Vale, it has blown me away. Probably five to six months ago, we were all hush, hush, and keeping it to ourselves, it was one of those things where we didn't create a division. I think probably Heidi's comment is that in society these days people tend to say, 'I want this, I want that'. They want things new, and new bricks and mortar doesn't provide better education. That is what she probably means by that, so there was probably a minority that have been pushing for that in their close vicinity, and who are not necessarily happy with what is being offered down there simply because it is too far to go.

### **Location of proposed school**

Evidence was received by the Committee that the site of the proposed school was ill-planned. Mr Richardson submitted:-

... I think the planners have completely missed the boat. They have seen the Camp Boomerang site as being available and they have made a school fit into that area, and I think it should be done the other way around. Let us replan a school, whether it is a high school or a primary school, and then find a greenfield site that is not in between a holiday camping ground and the caravan park, is not in between the tennis club and a golf course and not bordering right onto residential areas. The school is really hamstrung as soon as it is built; it can't move out, go north or south, it's stuck there. If it can be stopped, find a site where you can build to your heart's content. Wesley Vale and Moriarty schools have stood the test of time. They have been there for 70 or 80 years and are a perfect size. Whereas, the day this school opens, it's not big enough. Who is going to sign the bottom of the cheque knowing it is not big enough? It is not big enough for the students of Wesley Vale and Moriarty put together and it wouldn't be big enough for the students who currently travel to other schools in the area. If you're going to build something and the first day it opens it's not big enough,

where can you move from there? At least with Moriarty and Wesley Vale they have been there for 70 or 80 years and have been able to grow and adapt. Currently Wesley Vale is ticking along quite nicely with good numbers. It's not at capacity and has room to move. I reckon this site is a ridiculous place to put a school; it is absolutely absurd.

I've had experience with Camp Boomerang. The first thing is there will be noise complaints from holidaymakers and then there'll be something else to do with the tennis club - kids scratching and whatever else at the tennis courts, vandalism on the golf course after hours. So put a school where kids have to go and then they leave. That is the environment they need to learn in. If they've got all day to get to school, they'll forget their books and, 'I'll just have to go home and get something', miss a class, wander off at lunch time down to the beach. It sounds terrific to build a school right next to a beach but it's a bit like if you live right next to the beach, the novelty soon wears off, doesn't it? So it might be great for the first term then after that, that's it.

So if you're going to build a school, make sure it's big enough to start with, gets the support of the people, rather than doing what this plan's doing. It's turning people off the area, I think, already and I reckon it looks bad for the people designing it and the political representatives that are supporting it, both from government and, to a greater extent, the Latrobe Council.

... My final point would be to recommend to you guys to go back to the plans to find a better greenfield site that is not in the middle of recreational, holidaying and residential areas and one that is going to stand the test of time as the current three surrounding schools have.

Mrs Roberts submitted:-

If parents had been given an option, I would definitely continue sending my child to Wesley Vale. The working mothers I have spoken to want their children to remain at Wesley Vale because they drop their children at the bus stop at 8.15 in the morning and go on to work. If there is a school in Port Sorell then that throws up a different set of problems. How do you get your child to school in that time frame you have before school commences, which is only 10 minutes or so? They wouldn't be able to drop them there at 8.15 in the morning, unless they were prepared to pay, maybe.

Forget about bike paths and footpaths. My child will not be riding a bike, nor walking on, a footpath that has sand dunes on one side and bush on the other. I think that's a recipe for disaster. I walk daily and I have never seen children on bikes or walking alone in those areas - they are always accompanied by adults - never once in the 10 years I have lived here.

Vandalism is a problem in Port Sorell, and the golf club could give evidence of that. Their flags are regularly vandalised. That is probably small bickies but they move on to other things such as pulling plants out and breaking windows. I personally don't like the fact that there is a caravan park on the site. Most caravan park residents are law-abiding citizens but you have transients in caravan parks and they can attract undesirables.

An alternative site was proposed by Mr Radcliff:-

I think it's absolute short-sightedness to be building it down there ... I have made by point very clear that it needs to be put in a position where it has potential for sporting grounds, community facilities, green belts and nature reserves - all sorts of things.

Yes, I would. Up near the old-age home - not next door - ... -When we use the word T-I-P suddenly everyone shudders, but in the vicinity where the tip has been - I am not referring to the fact of building a school on the tip site, it is more having forward planning so that eventually that tip area can become a green belt and a school could be built in that vicinity where there is plenty of room. I think the whole Education department, with the site they have, must be very careful. It is not due to circumstantial circumstances of the ground they have available as to where the school has to be built; I think they have to look 80 to 100 years ahead and not regret five years down the track after it is open that, 'Oh, gee, we've made a silly, rash decision'.

### **Community consultation**

The question of the adequacy of community consultation was a theme mentioned by a number of witnesses. Some witnesses were of the view that little consultation had taken place. Mrs Tonelli submitted:-

*For me, personally, I know that there were a couple of meetings but I have a husband who is away a lot and I can't get babysitters and in the evenings I haven't been able to go. I remember speaking to the principal last year and she said to me, 'Early next year there'll be a survey out ...'. Well, it is going out today, which is rather convenient. So I think they are taking the bull by the horns - it seems a bit too coincidental, I suppose.*

Mrs Roberts submitted:-

*Who was surveyed? I certainly wasn't. Nobody I have spoken to was surveyed. We have a nursing home and a retirement village and provided you ask the right question or make the right statement when you hand out the survey you will get the required result.*

*The (Education Department witnesses) claimed this morning that they will work with the local community. I had no knowledge of the meetings. I had knowledge of one alone, and that was repeated to me by somebody by word of mouth. I don't get the newspapers for ethical reasons and they were not well publicised. There was \$1.6 million allocated to site works and landscaping. That amount couldn't be separated this morning but I would really like to know how much has been spent to date. I have read the reports and seen the work that has already gone into this school and which has led many of us to believe that we could not do a thing about it because it was a decision that had been made that nobody could do anything about. Perhaps that was a proposition that certain self-interest groups wanted us to believe. I have talked to a number of mothers. One was going to try to be here today. I spoke to her around 7.30 this morning and she said, 'We didn't put in a submission. The reason was that my husband saw the devastated site when we took our children to scouts. It really upset us and we lost heart. The decision's been made, Wendy. You can't do a thing about it. The exercise today is face-saving.'*

Counter evidence was received. Mr Richardson submitted:-

*From my point of view, our school has school representatives that have sat on the steering committees and whatnot around the area, and my wife is on the parents and friends organisation in the school. Personally, I do not feel that I have been left out of where the school sits, who supports it and where it is going to be built and submissions.*

## **Support for the proposed works**

The Committee heard evidence in support of the proposed works from the Honourable Member for Lyons, Mr Hidding and representatives of the Port Sorell Community School Committee. The Committee also took into evidence the submission made by the Latrobe Council to the inquiry of the former Joint Standing Committee on Community Development into the need for a primary school at Port Sorell and also the report of such Committee itself.

### **Mr Hidding**

The submission of Mr Hidding is summarised as follows:-

*... in the 15 years of my political life I have been aware of and working with this issue. There was a period that Port Sorell was not in Lyons but I was still interested in the issue because it was a live one when I was first elected and it is still live now.*

*In that 15-year period there has probably been three generations of parents that have moved through, so listening to parents today we need to understand that in three to four years' time as their children graduate, we have the next cohort come through so they are not arguing for something that they need in 20 years' time. We have a changing cohort there.*

*I want to first talk about democracy because after all that is what we are about as elected members. A parliamentary inquiry, a joint House standing committee inquiry which included all parties, including the Tasmanian Greens and independents, held an inquiry into this area - the Community Development Committee. There was a huge number of submissions for the school from not just the school community - from the community itself, the broader community, the business community and residents and others who lived in the area. Since then we have had an election and all three parties that were standing in that election supported the construction of the school.*

*The next iteration of democracy was that the Budget, reasonably passed by both Houses of Parliament, included funding for the Port Sorell school. It was not clear whether the capital funds would have been drawn from reserves or otherwise because in Treasury terms that is immaterial. It has a cost regardless. The process has been passed by both Houses of Parliament; the funding for it has been passed by both Houses of Parliament.*

*Just as important is the local government which has a very strong view about this and in fact developed a view to getting support from the Parliament for it and in fact did a report on this area which they saw as their key development area of their municipality and identified as one of the key drivers for development of Port Sorell, Shearwater and Hawley the establishment of a school.*

*I was about when the last decision was made about the Port Sorell school, which was in 1999. I was elected in 1996. During that period that we were in government Sue Napier who was then the Minister for Education involved myself and other members of Lyons in the decision. She did not make the decision by the time the election came around but it was made shortly after with the agreement of the then State Opposition because it was a developed agreement that marginally, on balance, we would spend the money on the Wesley Vale school instead and keep it open, but I remember as clearly as though it were yesterday that it was absolutely marginal and*

we discussed, watching very carefully, developments over the next 10 years in Port Sorell.

Here we are now some 13 years later and Port Sorell from back then has gone ahead substantially in population, probably not as much as it would have done if we had had a school at Port Sorell, and that evidence has been provided by real estate agents in the past who have demonstrated that they have had inquiries from families to move here but the lack of a school within 10 or 11 kilometres was seen as a disbenefit.

... The BER expenditure is what it is. I noticed at the time that nobody locally was prepared to say anything about it one way or the other because it was controversial. It is difficult in a small community like this when these things become controversial, and we've heard that today. It is hard for everybody, but for all that it is fair that people stand up for their own communities and they have done so strongly on this school. The BER expenditure was always going to be a problem and it's here today being held up as a reason that we would not build this school in Port Sorell. I knew precisely that that is what would happen. I think it is wrong. I thought it was wrong then and I think it is wrong now of the Government, particularly the Minister for Education at the time, who was then the Premier and has since retired, Mr Bartlett, to sign off on that money being spent there without there having been this decision that we are having now. That should have occurred back then, but because it was controversial they just banged it through and did it in any event. Firstly, that decision should not be levied upon the children of Port Sorell; the children of Port Sorell should not have to wear a poor executive government decision made back then by the Government. Secondly, I don't think that the level of expenditure of BER and the outcome of itself has set that school up as being prime to go for the next 20 years. I believe that if you were to reject this project now, you would be sitting here in three to four years and the Government would be looking at substantial expenditure at Wesley Vale because it is the only school in the area.

Professor Natalie Jackson has said that with or without a school this place will continue to rise; with a school it would be more so. She also pointed out, as many others have, that it is very wrong for those who have influence in these matters to try to develop a community without all elements of a community. One of the issues of not having a public primary school in a town of 4 000 is that you create a vacuum. At the time, in support of my strong feelings about this matter, I e-mailed many of my colleagues in State parliaments around Australia asking them if they knew in their areas any town of 4 000 people that didn't have its own public primary school, and not one of them could find one. The vacuum created starts looks attractive to other markets, such as private schools. There is interest and there has been interest in this place, evidence is on the record, in Port Sorell from a private school organisation that was looking at a step-down private school and this would be a perfect place to step in and build it. Whilst some people might be attracted to that, and I am a strong supporter of private school education, I am a stronger supporter of choice. The choice then will be to send your child to the nice private school down the road that is going to cost you a few bob or stick your child on a bus to Wesley Vale. I think that is a cruel, unnecessary and wrong choice to put before people of a community in Tasmania. I think any community of this size should have the opportunity to send their child to a public primary school.

...The key point I want to make here is the democratic processes of the State Government, an election process, an inquiry that allowed anybody to come in - it was well publicised and went on for quite some time; it was a very long session - has given most people an opportunity to have their voice heard. There will always be those who say they didn't get a chance or they would have wished a bigger chance and there will always be that whenever you build a new school. It has to be that the local community that you are affecting is going to be concerned about that. People feel



very attached to their schools, and so they should. It is one of the beauties of our public primary school sector, that people feel so attached to it, they work hard in it and they're terrific schools and communities. But for all that there is no reason why all those good things we heard about with Wesley Vale couldn't and won't happen in this area here. In fact I feel very strongly that that's precisely what will happen, that there will be schoolchildren on tracks and trails and clearly marked things so they can ride their push-bike to school on. This is a lovely flat area around here. They would become part of this community, a community that is growing with imbalance. There are far more people over the age of 40 than there are under the age of 40 or 45; that's most peculiar and most unusual, and Professor Natalie Jackson pointed that out. We did address the matter but we made the conscious decision back in 1999 to go that way, to keep the area under review. It has been under review and here we are now ready to build a new school. I would, with that, ask you to find that this school should be built.

The Committee questioned Mr Hidding as to whether, in his opinion, there was only a minority in the community who supported the proposal. Mr Hidding responded:-

No; that's so far from reality that it doesn't bear thinking about. I have been on this now for quite some time. For the last four or five years I have been dealing with a very large group of local individuals, and that's not just people in the school community. That's real estate agents and retired people who live in the area who know that this is a community that is imbalanced. There are not enough kids here and the kids who are here get bussed out every day in two shifts. We don't have enough buses to run them out all at once, so you have an early bus and a late bus, and then the reverse on the way home.

...If you were to equate numbers with passion or people who are prepared to say things right now in this awkward environment that people find themselves in, then it's always awkward. It's awkward for a member of parliament. There are plenty of members of parliament out there who will not take a position on this because they are scared. I take a position on this knowing that I have people at Wesley Vale throwing rocks at me because this is absolutely right for the Port Sorell community. This is about Port Sorell. This actually isn't about Wesley Vale.

There is a significant impact on Wesley Vale, which does not get overridden by the strong need for Port Sorell for the last 10 years to have had its own school. To say that there will be an impact there and an impact here, of course you can cook that impact up to be something that is unimaginable and really painful, but the point is, as we heard from the experts this morning, these things get managed through a process. I have already pointed out to you that generations wash through the schools. A child is in a primary school for seven-odd years and then moves through. Then you have a different cohort of people. We are talking about building a school, a facility, that will serve this community for the next 20 or 30 years. It is not for the current cohort. The decisions Public Works committees make are about 20- to 30-year-plus forward thinking. It is not only for the immediate things.

... two things - genuine educational opportunities obviously, but nobody has been saying that the Wesley Vale school lacks educational opportunities. That is not true. What we are talking about is educational opportunities within an area reasonably close to the house.

There are two things - one, the fact that this town deserves its own primary school for the same reasons that every other town deserves one; and there is also a regional development push by the council, which is very fair and it is a good thing for that

council to do, to make sure that the community grows up balanced. This is an imbalanced community; there is a void. As I say, there was evidence given that the school was on the ground looking for somewhere to build one of these private schools. That will skew this town to a position that no other town in Tasmania has, which I think is a very unjust and wrong choice to put before the residents of a Tasmanian town.

## **Port Sorell Community School Committee**

The submission of the Port Sorell Community School Committee is summarised as follows. Ms Dennison submitted:-

*...Let's clear up a few percentages before we go on. Community consultation: the acting general manager for the Latrobe Council, Mrs Jan Febey, today stated that 73.1 per cent of our community is in favour of a public primary school and that's because the survey that went out in April 2009 indicated that 73.1 per cent of our community is in favour of a Port Sorell primary school; 26.9 per cent did not support the building of a public primary school in Port Sorell.*

*The school newsletter publicised many of the meetings from Wesley Vale so the word was out that the opportunity for raising concerns was open for anybody. That public consultation, as far as we're concerned, has been thorough. Also, as to the concerns about the caravan park bordering onto a school, the staff car park, as you would note in the plans, is the part that borders directly onto the caravan park and, as far as we are concerned, they are irrelevant comments.*

*I am really glad that we have had the opportunity to sit and listen to most of the representations that have been made today. The \$13 million is in the Budget, ready to access. Although the BER funding has been injected into Wesley Vale and Moriarty primary schools, these funds have by no means future-proofed these schools to enable them to meet the capacity that will be required for them in the long term - 20, 50, 80 years. Also, we are surveying the students today; I have just received a note that notices have gone home from Wesley Vale Primary School to all parents. I would like to remind the committee that this is a survey that is going to the current students. This school is going to be available for these current students' children and grandchildren. We need to remember that this is not just for the here and now; it is a long-term investment into the infrastructure of our community.*

*...I would like to make the point that now is the time for the school to be built. In the year 2000 there was mention of \$2 million to \$3 million that was deemed necessary for a school at Port Sorell. Eleven years later and it is now \$13 million and this argument has in fact been going on for over 20 years about the possibility of building a school here in Port Sorell. If we defer this project, apart from adding more financial expenditure to the project we will be prolonging the stress and the anxiety of the Wesley Vale and Moriarty residents who are emotionally protective and passionate about their particular schools...*

*...Wide community consultation and hardworking representative groups have engaged in long hours of research and deliberation that has lead to these plans. This state-of-the-art public primary school for Port Sorell is about far more than just students on seats in classrooms learning... This school is about building a hub for this local community. It is about developing a sense of pride and belonging within its students, a sense of community spirit. It is about providing multipurpose spaces for the wider community access and fantastic sporting fields to complement those that are current available in walking distance such as the Port Sorell oval and the Camp*

Banksia stadium, also acknowledging that hopefully the project of the school will also have a flow-on effect that we will see some upgrades of these facilities when the school opened; that would be fantastic. It is about utilising the layout of the land to best maximise the natural features and the assets of our environment here in Port Sorell.

... a multipurpose indoor-outdoor amphitheatre ... will provide the entire community with a place to come together and experience cultural and community-based experiences. ... children will have a ready access to a wide variety of community groups that can build partnerships with the school and its children. Children will learn about foreshore erosion and estuary management, and take the short walk to the aged care and retirement precincts to build quality relationships with the aged.

Mr Hay added:-

...I am here today basically representing the local business community in stating and reinforcing reasons that it is paramount for the school to eventuate. Commenting as a local real estate agent, approximately 30 per cent of all our residential real estate inquiries come from young couples and/or families who ideally would like to live here. This area has the classic sea-change lifestyle and it attracts inquiries in the first instance, including about the environment with its clean air, temperate climate, beaches, waterways, natural bushland, the location of course, which is only 15 minutes from major facilities including the airport, Spirit of Tasmania, Mersey Community Hospital et cetera, and the lifestyle with the beaches, walking tracks, a playground for all water-based pursuits and activities, fishing, boating, cycling and more. It also offers security and a safe and healthy environment in which to raise children. The first questions raised are always the same: what facilities are here? Two of the highest-priority questions are, 'Is there a doctor's surgery? Is there a school?' Sadly, not having a school here in the past has initially led to many not progressing further. On the other side of the ledger, we experience a certain number of families moving out of the area from time to time because of the distance required to travel daily not only for school but for school-based activity relating to sport and other projects outside our area which can't facilitate them. The time and cost of continued travel in many instances has become prohibitive.

Why is a school necessary now? I don't think the question needs to be asked. The fastest-growing residential hot spot pro rata in Tasmania with a base population close to 4 000 is a target for family migration for all the aforementioned reasons but has no school. We need a change of demographics in completing the major requirement, favouring young families, and the answer is a public primary school. It would also be a very effective way of providing a multipurpose venue for all ages from infant to adult education. A school would turn around social interaction between kids and the Port Sorell district business community. How? To start with, we do not know the kids. They are bussed out and in and their focal interactive point is the skate park. There is not a lot for them to do. We need to create interaction between kids and the community and in particular the business community. The business community would embrace, participate, interact, take interest in and provide monetary contribution by way of sponsorships and assisting in school fund-raising activities. We do not know the kids and they do not know us; how sad is that? It is our fault, the fault of the community, in letting this happen and the fault of the State Government as well if at this point it does not proceed.

A school offers growth, employment and skills and employment opportunities within the business community. It is paramount to the community process of moving forward and catering for all those therein in a vast growing, caring and public-spirited community which is what this community is.

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to whether a school at Port Sorell was accounted for in the Latrobe Municipality's strategic plan. Ms Dennison responded:-

*Definitely. You can refer to the Latrobe Council website where for many years that has been one of the priorities, to secure a public primary school in the area.*

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to whether, notwithstanding the arguable merits of the proposal, the commencement of the works should be postponed given the current economic circumstances. Ms Dennison responded:-

*No, I certainly do not and, as I outlined in here, by postponing a school at this point you basically put the emotions that you have seen from what I believe is more than 10 people who spoke to you today in the negative. If they represent that small group of people who are anxious and stressed and emotional about this, there is always going to be that small group that is feeling aggrieved during times of transition and change. If you put the project on hold and revisit it in another couple of years, you are prolonging all of this agony to the point where the transition process will end up blowing out to another five years, another eight years, however long it might be. The money is there, the time is right, the school needs to be built so that people can move through this transition phase and we can look to the future because this community is about to receive a school that is going to service its community for the next 70 years, 80 years, 100 years. It is not a short-term issue; it is a long-term solution to a short-term problem.*

The Committee asked the witnesses to respond to the evidence submitted by other witnesses that truancy and vandalism will necessarily accompany the proposed new school. Ms Coates responded:-

*We can only make some best guesses about vandalism. What any community group would hope is that if you engage students and people in the wider community and in the value of a community facility such as a school, they will value that as their own property, and nobody likes their own property to be destroyed. There is some evidence on the mainland where schools are considered to be community hubs and because businesses take on a much bigger role within the school community, people are much more vigilant about who is in the school after hours. When you have a community group using the school after hours, as we hope this school would encourage people to do - we would want this school to be open seven days a week; not 24 hours a day! - and available to lots and lots of different groups, having those people use that school is certainly going to discourage vandalism, but primarily if kids love their school they don't want to see it ruined. At the moment they don't have the opportunity to vandalise Wesley Vale because it is so far out of town, however I don't believe those kids would vandalise that school anyway because they love that school. Most high school kids will tell you that their best memories of school are when they were at primary school, so they don't aim to go back and destroy the things they love.*

## 5. DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE

The following documents were taken into evidence and considered by the Committee:-

- Submission – Department of Education – Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works – The Development of a New Primary School at Port Sorell, 25 August 2011
- Eric Mobbs, Submission dated 29 July 2011
- Anna Woodhouse, Submission dated 31 July 2011
- Marvin Selby, Submission dated 2 August 2011
- Janice Welling, Submission dated 2 August 2011
- Nicola Oliver-Smith, Submission dated 3 August 2011
- Emma Fitzsimmons, Submission dated 4 August 2011
- Liza Petherick, Submission dated 4 August 2011
- Heidelinde Radcliff, Submission undated
- Jill & Tony Selby, Submission dated 5 August 2011
- Bill Tarrant, Submission dated 2 August 2011
- Colin Chaplin, Submission dated 9 August 2011
- Liz Chaplin, Submission dated 9 August 2011
- Peter Hodgkinson & Sarah Hiller, Submission dated 9 August 2011
- John & Michelle Hamilton, Submission dated 5 August 2011
- Jillian Tonelli, Submission undated
- Nathan Richardson, Submission undated
- Angela McClymont, Submission dated 15 August 2011
- Suzanne Dick, Submission dated 8 August 2011
- J. Morris, Submission undated
- Naomi Lancaster, Submission undated
- Rachel Brown, Submission dated 16 August 2011
- Kaye & Jamie Radcliff, Submission dated 17 August 2011
- Eve Woodhouse, Submission dated 16 August 2011
- Port Sorell Community School Committee, Submission dated 12 August 2011
- Alan & Judy Wilson, Submission dated 17 August 2011
- Janice Welling, Submission dated 17 August 2011
- Tracey Bell, Submission dated 17 August 2011
- Jodi Redpath, Submission dated 18 August 2011
- Greg & Tamara Baldock, Submission dated 18 August 2011
- Wendy Roberts, Submission undated
- Paul Yeates, Submission dated 18 August 2011
- Steven Connelly, Submission dated 15 August 2011
- Jodi Redpath, Submission dated 18 August 2011
- Latrobe Council – Submission – “Tasmanian Government Community Development Joint Standing Committee – Inquiry into the provision of public primary school education for the residents of Port Sorell, Shearwater, Wesley Vale, Sassafras and Moriarty” – June 10<sup>th</sup> 2009

## 6. CONCLUSION

The proposal to construct a new school at Port Sorell comes at a time of economic stringency and is inevitably interrelated with the Government's current process of assessing the viability of schools throughout the State. The proposal also closely follows upon the expenditure of Commonwealth Government funds at Wesley Vale Primary School and Moriarty Primary School under the 'Building the Education Revolution' scheme. These factors have combined to make an otherwise unremarkable reference a considerably contentious project.

This inquiry elicited an unusually high response to the Committee's invitation for public submissions. As mentioned above, all but three of the submissions and documents taken into evidence opposed the works. Such ratio was replicated in the evidence given by witnesses at the public hearing conducted at Shearwater. As already mentioned, such evidence focussed upon four principal themes: financial – that the proposed works were a waste of money, particularly given the BER money recently spent on nearby schools; there was minority community support for the project; location of the school was first, inappropriate and second, inadequate for expansion; finally, the consultative process was inadequate.

The Committee received counter-evidence from the proponents, comprising the Education Department, the Latrobe Council, Port Sorell Community School Committee and the Honourable Member for Lyons, Mr Hidding. Evidence was received that the Government had provided the funds in the budget, which has received the approval of the Parliament; that the BER funds, whilst providing some short term benefit to the two existing schools, did not 'future-proof' such schools; that residents of Port Sorell and surrounding areas were surveyed in 2009 by the Mayor of the Latrobe Council, Hon Mike Gaffney MLC, and such survey recorded a 73.1% 'in favour' response to the proposition that a primary school be constructed at Port Sorell. Proponents also cited the demographic analysis conducted by Dr Natalie Jackson and provided to the inquiry of the former Joint Standing Committee on Community Development which observed an annual population growth rate of 3.4% in the subject region with the possibility of the region's population increasing from 3,500 to at least 5,000 to 6,000 over the next decade probable. The Committee also considered the findings and recommendations of the former Joint Standing Committee on Community Development after its inquiry into the need for a school in the Port Sorell area.

It is fair to say that the decision of the Committee would certainly have been a simpler one were it not for the expenditure of the BER funds on Moriarty and more particularly Wesley Vale Primary Schools. The Committee did not have the benefit of inspecting these schools prior to refurbishment, but is able to draw upon experience of other inquiries and site inspections undertaken of schools of a similar age. The Committee was particularly impressed with the new classrooms at Wesley Vale and the much needed library at Moriarty. The emotional connection to the maintenance of the *status quo* was very clearly communicated and understood by the Committee.

The Committee gave very careful consideration to the propositions given by both proponents of the works and by those who opposed it. Arguments were well made and the Committee resorted to considering its statutory obligations. The Public Works Committee Act<sup>4</sup> prescribes that when considering a proposed public work, the Committee must have regard to: the stated purpose of the works; the necessity or advisability of carrying the works out; and the present and prospective public value of the work.

### ***Stated purpose***

The Committee is satisfied that the proposed works will undoubtedly provide a school of contemporary design which will cater for an initial enrolment of 350 students. There is provision within the design for increased enrolment through adaptive use of flexible learning areas and the future construction of an additional 'Learning Pod'. The design incorporates 14 General Learning Areas; Administration areas; a General Purpose Hall; a centralised resource, ICT and teacher aide support area; staff facilities; student staff and public amenities; a canteen; and storage.

### ***Necessity etc.***

The Committee is satisfied that on the balance of evidence received, the need for the school exists. The proposed school will be located in the largest population centre in the area which is predicted to grow at an above average rate. Based on the first term census for 2011, 208.5 of the 287.5 full time equivalent (FTE) student population of Wesley Vale Primary School and 24.5 of the 69.5 FTE students who attend Moriarty Primary School currently reside in the Port Sorell, Shearwater and Hawley Beach area and are bussed to their respective schools. The proposed school will provide a facility at the location where the great majority of current primary age students are resident and where there is anticipated future population growth. Such rationale is entirely appropriate.

### ***Present and prospective public value of the work***

Wesley Vale and Moriarty schools are facilities which have not, in the opinion of the Committee, been 'future proofed' by the BER expenditures. Notwithstanding the undoubted improvements which have been afforded by this expenditure, the permanent infrastructure is quite old and will, in future, require exponentially increasing recurrent expenditure to maintain the building fabric and services at an acceptable standard.

The focus of the Committee must necessarily be upon the future and the construction of a new school will provide a state of the art facility for the Port Sorell community for decades to come. The Government has appropriated money for the construction of the new school.

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<sup>4</sup> Public Works Committee Act 1914 (No. 32 of 1914).

### **Recommendation**

The need for the school was clearly established for the reasons outlined above. The Committee recognises the disappointment that such decision will have for the opponents of the school whose preference is for the maintenance of the *status quo* as a defence against the possible exposure to closure of either or both of the nearby schools. The Committee is not statutorily competent to make any recommendation in relation to the future of those schools.

Appeals to the Committee to recommend a deferral of the works are unable to be acceded to as the Committee has no statutory authority to do so.

The Committee is firmly of the view that the expenditure of BER funds from the Commonwealth Government for Wesley Vale and Moriarty Primary Schools on items other than essential minor works was ill-considered as it provided an unfortunate false sense of security to those school communities given the active consideration that had been given to the construction of a new school at Port Sorell at local and state government level for some years.

The Committee recommends the project in accordance with the plans and specifications submitted, at an estimated cost of \$13 million.

**Parliament House  
Hobart  
21 September 2011**

**Hon. A. P. Harriss M.L.C.  
Chairman**



## **ANNEXURE 1**