

Submission to Legislative Council Select Committee on AFL in Tassie

Tasmanian State Labor Parliamentary Party.

Tasmania has a strong and proud tradition in Australian Rules Football. For over a century we have produced champion players and champion teams.

Australian Rules football clubs across the state make a significant contribution to not only to the strength of their community but also provide environments that build social capital. It is often true, in many parts of our state, that the local football club is one of the key contributing factors in bringing our communities together, for fun, for better health well-being and for support, in good times and bad.

Australian Rules football is also a key part of the Tasmanian identity, how we see ourselves and how we portray ourselves to the rest of the country. Sport plays an important part in the lives of tens of thousands of Tasmanians and over the last century Australian Rules football has been at the forefront of many of our community's daily lives.

Thousands of Tasmanians are involved in football clubs, as players, volunteers and supporters across the state from community level to semi-professional.

The Tasmanian Labor Party has a strong history of supporting Australian Rules football in the state with successive Governments providing financial and political support to clubs, leagues, programs and its ongoing development.

It was the Tasmanian Labor Party that first attracted regular season AFL games to Tasmania, we backed that initiative in with significant investment in facilities to support ongoing viability and success. These games have been well supported across the state for over a decade.

It is important to understand that while this investment has supported the game's development in Tasmania, the decision to financially support the games being played through broader club based sponsorships is not purely a football development one. This investment is successful primarily in terms of economic development, as a part of a broader tourism and events strategy. In doing so it is important to acknowledge that the clubs that play in Tasmania also augment their Tasmanian connection and game day activities with junior coaching sessions and community development activities,

Tasmania uses these games to promote and attract thousands of visitors to our island, these tourists spend significant money, creating jobs and building prosperity, particularly in the traditionally slower winter months for accommodation, tourism and hospitality venues.

A number of reports that quantify the economic benefits and the numbers of tourists and money spent in communities around the weekends when the games have been played have been produced. While data is somewhat varied, evidence suggests that both the Hawthorn and North Melbourne deals bring a significant return on investment, far beyond other deals such as the GWS' deal with the ACT. The scheduling of games, the days they are played on, the times they are scheduled and the teams we are allocated all have a bearing on this return on investment and potential economic benefit.

At times, this has distorted the public debate around AFL games in Tasmania.

Whilst the investment and success of the games in Tasmania has proven we are capable of hosting and successfully running such games, games that demand elite standard facilities, they should not necessarily be seen as the pathway to getting an AFL team. More importantly the point should be made that we should be aiming for a standalone football club with both men and women's team in the premier competition in the country, the AFL.

In relation to the specific questions posed by the Committee Tasmanian Labor is pleased to provide the following response.

Reference — (1) The likely benefits to the broader Tasmanian economy and community from having a Tasmanian team in the AFL;

There is no doubt that a Tasmanian Team will bring both community and economic benefits for Tasmania. The jobs and roles required to support an AFL team are significant, with direct employment (administrative, marketing etc) or indirectly via the services they require (health and well-being). These jobs are predominantly permanent and well paid. The economic benefit of a minimum of ten games being played north and south, (potentially with finals) means that we will attract tourists from the larger Melbourne based clubs to travel to support their team and subsequent economic benefit already derived from the current games. There is potential for a greater benefit to be realised through a scheduling discussion with the AFL that ensures Tasmania receives its fair share of top tier games, rather than the standard the state is provided through the Hawthorn and North Melbourne deals.

In addition, we should not underestimate the important link to aspiration and ambition for our young men and women that access to an AFL team brings.

(2) Whether or not the Tasmanian Taxpayer, or the AFL, should subsidise Melbourne based AFL Clubs playing in Tasmania;

If we look at these subsidies through a purely Australian Rules development opportunity the investment is marginal at best.

As previously observed, Labor believes that these games are more of a tourism and economic development opportunity and on this measure they are an absolute success.

Tasmania should use future investment in these deals as leverage in negotiations with the AFL to grant an AFL license to Tasmania, and to clarify the pathway forward.

(3) The on-going support required to sustain a Tasmanian AFL team;

Labor believes a reasonable investment, consistent within our existing financial footprint, is warranted and sustainable.

(4) The possible solutions to the AFL's perception of Tasmania being geographically and politically divided;

Parochialism again reared its ugly head during the recent Federal Election. The campaign run by the Tasmanian Liberal Party was as dishonest as it was divisive. In many football leaders' eyes it set our case back for a team of our own back ten years. To win a license we must prove that we as a state have a unified position. This will take political leadership at all levels of Government and a single strategy to deliver on it.

Labor has shown that it is willing to work alongside the Government to deliver a Tasmanian AFL team. It is now incumbent on other parties to put the cynical, desperate political games to the side, and work together for the good of the community.

(5) The impact on the future participation rates in AFL in Tasmania of not having a Tasmanian team in the AFL;

All sporting codes in Tasmania are actively working to increase participation, despite recent trends that suggest organised, team sports are in decline. Participation is important for individual and community health and well-being, particularly mental health and community cohesion. A lack of a Tasmanian team will potentially impact negatively on participation rates. Once again, the Government must play a leadership role in this key measure for preventative health and well-being.

(6) If Tasmania were to establish an AFL team, when would it be the optimal time for it to commence;

We believe a period of time of approximately two to three years from a granting of an AFL licence should be given to allow a club to be established, playing list built, coaching panel and supporting roles put in place and membership recruited and sponsorships signed to allow a successful launch of a Tasmanian based club. The alignments of the Hawthorn and Nth Melbourne deals should assist with this trigger point.

First and foremost, Tasmanians expect its politicians to work together to put pressure on the AFL to finally show football lovers here the respect they deserve, after generations of taking them for granted.

David O'Byrne

State Labor Shadow Minister for Sport.