



Tasmanian Agricultural Productivity Group Ltd

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Legislative Council Select Committee Tasmanian Irrigation

Ms Natasha Excel
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Submission for Committee Consideration

Introduction

TAPG directly represents the industry processing and related agri-business service providers. It is registered with ASIC as a not for profit company and is governed by an elected Board who volunteer their service. The Articles of Association require that members of the Board represent the various sectors that comprise the overall agricultural industry. This requirement ensures that the Board consistently takes a “whole of supply chain” approach when considering the matters before it.

Accordingly, the composition of the Board requires Directors as follows:

- Vegetable Processing (2)
- Plantation Forestry
- Other Crop Processing
- Fresh Vegetables
- Dairy Processing
- Transport and Logistics
- Business Development
- Regulatory Affairs
- Agribusiness Services
- Primary Production
- Tasmanian Women in Agriculture
- Agri-Business Marketing

No other representative group in Tasmania attempts to maintain this breadth of view when considering policy and practice in the agricultural environment.

Current representation within these categories ranges from large multi- national companies through wholly Tasmanian companies to individual farming business owners. All Directors are required to represent their “sector” rather than the specific interests/policies of the company for whom they work.

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This elaboration of the governance structure for the reader is important in understanding the breadth, quality and overall neutrality of consideration that the Board have provided when discussing issues.

In recording a response for consideration by the Committee we have chosen to address the question of “Future Management of Water Rights and Associated Assets” under three sub-headings:

Current Success Indicators

- As an entity Tasmanian Irrigation has gained an enviable national reputation for the engineering excellence and creative problem solving evidenced in the schemes delivered to date.
- The tripartite funding model between Federal/State Governments and Private Landholders is an excellent model that has, in no small degree, ensured not only the initial building works but an “ongoing” commitment to ensuring the full potential of the Tasmanian landscape with respect to irrigation is realised.
- The recent droughts experienced in Tasmanian has consolidated the “worth” of reliable wide-spread irrigation schemes into the mindset of the Tasmanian Agricultural Industry.
- The cost of irrigation water while always “contentious” has, in many instances, forced a reappraisal of the role and value of “niche” crops outside the traditional ware market. It is considered that this diversification has both immediate economic value to our economy as well as potential future proofing of the industry particularly with respect to the likely impacts of Global Warming.
- The availability of reliable irrigation has enhanced the “take up” rate by the industry practitioners of precision agriculture techniques and practices. Recognition of the need for better soil management, crop selection and general farming practices has all been heightened through consideration of how to maximise productivity through sustainable and economic use of the irrigation opportunity.
- Irrigation has provided a massive boost to our agri-business support businesses across the state with drainage and pump specialists through to agronomy advisors all finding increased demand for their services.

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- The current leadership of TI is forward looking and sensitive to the challenges inherent in the growth and development of a large “user pays” organisation.

Areas for Further Development:

- The cost of irrigation water and supporting infrastructure continues to attract critical commentary.
- The changing focus for TI as a “Business Development” body compared to its “Pipes and Pumps” original mandate has not achieved a popular mandate at present.
- The relationship between TI and DPIPW with respect to water regulation is not well understood.

Comments and Recommendations:

- TAPG believes that there is recognition by TI of the need to reduce its overheads. At least some of this has been an “inherited” factor that is best understood by recognising that the original establishment of TI was based on the premise that it was essentially a “construction” company that would be dissolved once a finite set of tasks were completed. Ensuring the schemes were of high quality and delivered on time required hiring the best available work force and achieving this outcome would have been expensive if looked at over the longer time frame that has now emerged. As existing contracts end, and new staffing needs are considered we believe that this salary and overheads issue will eventually reflect a more mature and sustainable percentage of TI’s costs.
- We believe that there are two aspects of TI’s current role that will require ongoing attention from a statutory body of some description:
 - Dam safety along with maintenance and monitoring of what is steadily growing as a massive state-wide infrastructure.
 - Business development as a consequence of the irrigation provision now available needs a view of the horizon that is not usually available to the individual grower. Understanding and utilising the related R&D learnings requires a time and resource allocation that is again outside the capacity of most individuals. Tasmania already has a wealth of commercially relevant data such as Land Use Suitability Mapping that can inform long term

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investment opportunities. Someone needs to do this work and it is argued that TI has an appropriate heritage to evolve its business model into this field.

- Water Regulation is often considered a vexing problem to both regulators and user groups. Our view is that a more collaborative model needs to be negotiated in this space. There are a range of recently developed technologies and well researched trials that need to inform a shared understanding of how rivers are behaving and what actions are required to provide sustainability of both the catchment and the dependant farm businesses. TI could be an informed and useful agent in such negotiations.
- TAPG would be delighted to work collaboratively with all parties involved in developing a new paradigm of water management.

Kind regards

Jim Wilson

Chairman

Tasmanian Agricultural Productivity Group