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Media Release - The Strategic Infrastructure Corridors (Strategic and Recreational Use) Bill

MEDIA RELEASE

Friday, 23 September 2016

THE STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE CORRIDORS (STRATEGIC AND RECREATIONAL USE) BILL

MAYOR of Dorset Council Greg Howard has expressed his deep disappointment in the Legislative Council further delaying the passage of the Strategic Infrastructure Corridors Bill.

The Legislative Council voted on Wednesday evening to further adjourn debate on the bill for two weeks.

"This important legislation will unlock significant investment in the North East with the conversion of the disused North East Rail Line into a recreational rail trail," said Mr Howard.

"To further delay this legislation based on unsubstantiated information relating to issues which have already been addressed is unacceptable.

"This is a much-needed project for the North-East, as according to the past 12 months of Australian Bureau of Statistics information our regional economy is shrinking – we are seeing the job market contract and business investment with it.

"This is a chance to develop a disused resource that will never be used again as a railway line into an exciting tourism opportunity – the business case for which is the basis for the successful \$1.47M funding from the Stronger Regions Program.

"While this is extremely important for growing our local economy in the North East, it is also vital from a state-wide perspective – we need to make the most of these disused rail corridors. Tourism is the answer and we need to show that Tasmania is open for business," he said.

Several MLCs have expressed their opposition to the legislation, notably Apsley MLC Tania Rattray, in whose electorate the proposed rail trail would be developed.

"We are very concerned that our local MLC Tania Rattray would turn her back on tourism development and job growth in the North East," said Mr Howard.

"We need all the help we can get to see the North East continue to rise out of the deep hole we were in several years ago, and a great many people in the North East are extremely disappointed to learn that Ms Rattray has joined the opposition to the rail trail.

"In spite of Ms Rattray attending many meetings with the opponents, she has never engaged at all with the North East Rail Trail board or Dorset Council, which is very disappointing," he said.

Opponents to the bill have not been able to substantiate any of their claims in regard to biosecurity or other anti-social behaviour. With over 100 rail trails in operation around mainland Australia, there have been no recorded instances of biosecurity breaches or anti-social issues.

"We are on a strict deadline for our funding agreement, and if we aren't able to advise the Commonwealth that we will have started construction by year's end then the \$1.47M is in real risk," said Mr Howard.

"The fact that there is another two week delay is worrying for the future of this project and the planned investment that will leverage off it.

"We hope that once the Legislative Council resumes debate that we see this bill passed in a form that allows us to get on with creating economic activity and much-needed jobs in the North East."

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