

Dear sir or madam,

I am writing to you in relation to the construction of a new stadium in Hobart, the proposed Tasmanian AFL team bid and the stadium's proposed site at Macquarie Point.

This is a topic that is of enormous importance to myself. This is the first and probably last time I will ever submit a letter to council, and I beg of you to please consider my perspective.

Growing up in Tasmania in the 2000s-2010s was a disenfranchising feeling. I think I echo the feelings of many young Tasmanians in this period, that we harbour an almost patriotic sense of pride in our identity as Tasmanians. However, or many of us, there was never a sense of exactly *what* it means to be Tasmanian.

Perhaps from the perspective of other states, what it means to be Tasmanian is to be cold, maybe a bit bogan, inbred or have three heads? As distasteful as many of those reputations are, they are the true associations most mainlanders have towards Tasmanian people.

But why do those negative associations continue to perpetuate? For most Australians. They have never had any reason to visit and see how great our state is. After all, why would they? Tasmania is lacking in the just about all the drawcard, quality-of-life enriching events & experiences that most other Australians can take for granted. For many, to move here, would be to give up access to those experiences.

Regarding 'what exactly it means to be a Tasmanian' I recall my parent's and grandparent's generation speaking in glowing terms of the once great Tasmanian state of origin footy sides. The legendary team which beat Victoria in the 90s and how wonderful it was to have a side that united the whole state in that way. Likewise, the amazing Tasmanian cricketers such as David Boone & Ricky Ponting who wore their Tasmanian identity with pride.

By the time I was able to remember, the Tasmanian State of origin side had finished. By the time I was a teenager Ricky Pointing was finishing up his illustrious career. Likewise, the Tasmanian Devils VFL side (which I fondly remember taking great pride in) was disbanded, in favour for a complete decimation of local football and the formation of the TSL. My team, the Hobart Tigers, were abandoned in the process, and the death of Tasmanian local football was set well in motion.

Regarding music, there were never many local musicians to support. Certainly, in our youth many of our friends tried to create a music scene. But the lack of foot traffic, venues and out-of-state recognition made it next to impossible to get noticed without leaving Tasmania. It's common knowledge that larger touring artists seldom visit the state, let alone Tasmanian artists ever have much success elsewhere. Certainly, the Falls Festival was a huge thrill when I was in my late teens. However, sadly for Tasmania's current youth, that too has disappeared.

So, what sense of identity is left for a young Tasmanian to attribute themselves towards?

The Hobart Hurricanes started in the Big Bash League when I was a teenager. It filled me with pride that finally Tasmania/Hobart were represented on a national stage. Although I love Hurricanes to this day, the BBL is fundamentally marketed towards children, most supporters are not heavily invested in the league and it's far less attractive to teens. In addition, being a young person without a car it was next to impossible to get to Blundstone arena and attend. If I were to attend? Then what? Going to a pub afterwards was out of the question because to do so would require to get back into the city, by which point it's probably easier we all just call it a night.

MONA also opened. As a young person whose passion lied in the visual arts, this was an absolute godsend. Despite its largely private funding to get off the ground, and initial external opposition, once it opened, MONA represented a revolutionary cultural change in the Tasmanian identity, and finally for young people, we had a blueprint of an identity of what it could mean to be a Tasmanian. We leant into the reputation of perhaps being a 'little bit strange' and embraced the weird and wonderful. Likewise, we embraced the cold through DARK MOFO and gave thousands of tourists and locals a good reason visit Tasmania or get out in the winter.

MONA was fantastic, and finally as Tasmanians we had gained a reputation for something outside of the previous negative stereotypes, weird and wonderful art.

However, for a young person you can only go to a gallery so many times (I've been around 30). Eventually the prospect of being able to experience music, sport, festivals, nightlife, AND incredible art in another city that embraces those things, pulled myself, as it does with many, out of the state.

By the age of 24, of my closest 30 friends who grew up in Hobart & surrounds, 27 of us had moved to Melbourne. Please let that sink in.

I am certainly not alone in this, as most young people I know of appear to have moved out of state. A common misconception is that these people are leaving the state solely to study and work. Sure, that is a contributing factor. However, I know that if you dropped Monash University into the CBD of Hobart tomorrow, these people would still have left to experience all the music, sport, nightlife, food and art they can in their youth. If those things were available to them in Hobart, I guarantee they would have stayed.

I find it heartbreaking to drive through the Hobart CBD and not see any pedestrians after 8pm, because I see so much potential in the city. Apart from the two weeks surrounding Christmas and New Year (when relocated young Tasmanians tend to head home), and during DARK MOFO, the city remains quiet. It hurts me to think of the kids and teenagers, like myself, who are proud of their Tasmanian heritage, but know deep down know that they will probably need to abandon that identity and move elsewhere to experience the music, sport, nightlife and events that most Australians can take for granted.

The same goes for young Tasmanian sports people, who are feeling helpless at the lack of professional pathways and direction towards professional sports. A Dodges-Ferry based friend of mine was recently awarded best soccer player in Tasmania at the young age of 18. Despite dominating, he had not been noticed by any A-League teams, and actually had to contact teams himself in order to finally be awarded a trial. He moved interstate and found that every other trialling player had come to the club through elite mainland soccer pathways where they had been guided from a young age and mentored. He was eventually not signed in favour of the others.

Likewise, as a teen, my friends and I would look to the best teenage AFL players across the state and speculate who would be drafted. There were no academies, there were no professionals giving them guidance. There was so much talent, but without any hope or direction most decide to join their friends drinking and partying in their teenage years because they have never been given an inkling that they might have a chance to make it. Over time, the number of Tasmanian AFL draftees trends downwards, and I know it's not because of lack of talent. These young sportspeople are disheartened, ignored and see no hope of success because they were born in Tasmania. They want nothing more than to represent the state on a national stage. I fear that much of the commentary against the proposed team is sending a clear message to Tasmanian children that they don't deserve that same chances as mainland-born kids are afforded.

Currently, growing up in Tasmania makes it abundantly clear to the youth that they not valued or wanted. Tasmania is unfortunately a state designed for (generally change-adverse) elderly people who want minimal disruption.

When the initial thrill of MONA has gone, the festivals have left town, the Tasmanian sports legends have retired, no Tasmanians are drafted to the AFL and our highest levels of footy are on their knees, what sense of identity or state pride is left to tie the youth to the place they grew up?

Once again, the youth will ask themselves 'What exactly does it mean to be a Tasmanian?' and most likely they'll picture an image of the same change-adverse, conservative adult population which (amongst Tasmanians) we have now become renowned for.

In the past couple of years, it's been a joy to see the Tasmanian Jack Jumpers instantly jump up to one of the most loved and supported clubs in the NBL. Although basketball is not a traditionally large sport in Tasmania (nor Australia), it speaks volumes of the sports passion and state pride of Tasmanian people. Suddenly basketball is on the back page of the paper, first sports passage on the news with advertising all over the airport. This goes to show that Tasmanian people are begging for a team that is actually representative of us, unites us, and ties into our identity as Tasmanian people, despite basketball not traditionally being a huge drawcard.

On a smaller scale, it shows that Tasmanians would absolutely rally behind a AFL team that plays in our colours, with our mascot and is representative of us, given the chance!

Now is undoubtably Tasmania's final chance, if Tasmania does not secure an AFL team now, we will never have another opportunity. That much is clear. It would be the death of football in the state. I beg of you to please do everything in your power to allow this team to go ahead for future generations of Tasmanians.

The Question of Tasmanian AFL Support

There are currently almost 100,000 paying Tasmania based members of interstate AFL clubs, from our population of roughly 550,000. This speaks volumes of the amount of support the AFL has in Tasmania with almost 1/5 of our population paying for memberships of clubs that they must fly to see. Reports suggest that a Tasmanian team's membership would likely exceed 64,000 should it go ahead.

As I've mentioned, growing up as Tasmanian in the past 20 years is disenfranchising for many youths. Without local heroes to look up to, a united team to support, events to look forward to, or pathways to pursue their own dreams, many talented youths are abandoning their dreams and turning away from our state's traditional sport, AFL. It is added insult to injury for our youth, to then witness the negative reactions of opposing Tasmanian politicians when we are finally afforded a chance for AFL representation. Its no wonder than youths are now choosing alternative hobbies, the divided Tasmanian political discourse has disheartened many and demonised our traditional love for AFL.

Hobart Lord Mayor, Anna Reynolds, recently suggested that Tasmania should not invest into an AFL team because Australia's most practiced sports are walking and yoga. Thus, the AFL is not as supported. Quotes like these wrongfully denounce the genuine support hundreds of thousands of Tasmanians have for the AFL, and our almost 100,000 paying AFL members are proof of that. Walking and yoga are obviously both incredibly popular due to the exact fact that they don't need any facilities, are free, accessible, can be done anywhere, at any time, for any duration; meaning they are obviously more practiced daily than an organised team sport like AFL.

Blundstone Arena

Hobart's existing stadium on the eastern shore is a decent stadium, it's certainly unique and has many positives and quirks. Tasmania has invested greatly in redeveloping it, however it is fundamentally flawed for reasons that can't be ignored.

Unfortunately, Blundstone arena is located in the centre of suburbia. Surrounding it, there are very few hotels, pubs, clubs or restaurants for people to spend time at before, during or after the game. This makes it incredibly difficult for tourists to attend and prevents them from injecting money into the economy nearby. Likewise for locals, visiting Blundstone arena is often seen as a means to an end, as there is nothing else for them to do in the area.

There is very limited public transport to and from the site. I know that there are options to park at the cenotaph and catch a bus across, however, having tried this I found it inconvenient and time consuming still. For tourists staying in the city, this is also troublesome, and means most attendees need to drive, which is complicated by the fact there are very few roads in/out, all of which are not built to withstand stadium traffic.

Because such a large proportion of attendees need to drive, many cannot drink, which discourages many locals from attending with friends and discourages tourists from flying down.

In Melbourne a large proportion of AFL attendees are teenagers who attend with friends. How are young people supposed to get to Blundstone arena? They are often without cars and the public transport options are unfeasibly long. It seems the only way for them to attend would be for a parent to drive them, which goes a long way to explain the lack of teenagers at Hobart Hurricanes games.

Please consider the possibility of Collingwood flying down to play a Tasmanian AFL team in Hobart. For visiting fans, travelling to Blundstone Arena from the city would be logistically very difficult. There is also nowhere in the area to them to eat, drink or listen to music prior or afterwards in the area. Thus, leaving them to come all the way back into the city first, which probably takes upwards of an hour on a shuttlebus, hire car or a walk to a pricey ferry boat.

The AFL is right to suggest that these shortcomings are large, and that a new stadium would be preferable. The economic activity generated for Hobart would also be far greater if the stadium were in a walkable distance to the CBD and the Salamanca bar/club precinct.

The Proposed Stadium

As is often the case for large projects, another common opposition is that the community does not support the proposed AFL team's stadium. From what I have seen there are several very vocal Tasmanians who are opposed to the it, in favour of spending state government money elsewhere. Many of those opposed suggest that the money should be spent on housing or health (in particular, ambulance ramping in Hobart).

Firstly, as you are aware, much of the suggested expenditure on an AFL team and its proposed stadium are proposed to be provided by the AFL & federal government, meaning we otherwise would not have access to those funds.

Another factor to consider is that the current state funding towards health and housing eclipses the proposed funding towards the proposed stadium, such that the stadium would cost approximately 10 days of Tasmanian state health funding.

As I have previously mentioned 27 of my 30 Hobart raised friends have moved out of state. 3 of whom are doctors. In addition, I also know several other recently graduated medical professionals who have expressed their desire to move interstate in the next 1-2 years. The unfortunate reality is that the lack of enjoyable activities for young people in Tasmania is swaying them to move and work interstate. The Tasmanian state government's expenditure on music, art, sport and events has a direct and noticeable effect on our health system, with many doctors now choosing to live elsewhere given the chance in order to experience the quality of life that most other Australians are afforded.

A direct injection of immediate money would have little effect on the Tasmanian health system, if the state are not able to retain nor attract doctors and medical professionals to work here. A Tasmanian AFL team and associated stadium would assist to achieve this, by providing more access to music, sport, art and events, as well as boosting tourism and nightlife for those in the city. The same can be said for housing, with many of our tradespeople and construction industry professionals moving interstate.

As with every city there are housing problems and homeless populations. These are certainly pressing issues; however, they will always exist to some extent. Cities such as Melbourne and Sydney continue to invest in sports, arts and music despite having significantly higher homeless populations than we have here in Hobart.

I find it rather trivial to suggest that Tasmania and Hobart should not be allowed to invest in music, sports or arts until the point in which the health system is perfect and homelessness is eliminated. The reality is that these things will likely never be eliminated. We can and should invest heavily in these, however, it is completely unfair to use the already large health and housing expenditure as a weapon to deny Tasmanians of the quality-of-life improving the music, sport and art opportunities that people in other states are afforded.

Many of the opponents of the proposed stadium are clinging to the profitability of the proposed stadium as a means of denouncing a Tasmanian AFL team. Sure, this is a factor, and I implore Tasmania to fight for the best possible financial result.

However, I would ask why would the feasibility of the proposed stadium be contingent on it operating at a profit?

This opinion seems to ignore the fact that the purpose of the stadium is to pay for something which will improve the quality of life for Tasmanians now, and long into the future through sports, music, events and arts.

When the Tasmanian Museum purchases a new artwork do we question whether it will operate at a profit? When the state government builds changerooms at a local footy team's home ground do we say that it should only go ahead if it's profitable?

The truth is that none of these other art, sport and music expenditures are assessed solely on whether they operate on a profit. Tasmania spends money on them because they increase the quality of lives for Tasmanians and make the state a better place to live. A secondary effect of these expenditures is that tourists and locals can then go and experience them, thus generating economic activity and injecting money into the economy. The same can be said for the proposed AFL team and stadium.

If the proposed stadium were to operate at a slight loss, would that make the project a failure? Even if it were widely loved and enjoyed, created millions in economic activity, boosted tourism, sports

participation, gave young Tasmanians a sense of identity, gave Tasmanian children heroes to idolise and slowed Tasmanian youth from moving interstate?

I ask you to please consider these stadiums of Australia and the opposition they faced.

MCG	https://mcg.org.au/the-stadium/mcg-history/in-the-beginning
ANZ Stadium	https://www.bluemountaingazette.com.au/story/5096970/growing-public-backlash-over-sydney-stadium-spending/?cs=356
Adelaide Oval	https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/state-opposition-still-against-adelaide-oval-project/news-story/888cbd32f0b0458087cbdf3314c23f3d
Optus Stadium	https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-16/mcgowan-government-in-love-hate-relationship-with-perth-stadium/9154704
The Gabba	https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/west-end-residents-take-development-opposition-to-the-streets-20160821-gqxkap.html

The reality is that every stadium in Australia has faced significant opposition. We know Hobart is a particularly conservative city when it comes to building permissions, which is understandable given the natural beauty of the city. However, I beg of you to please consider that this opposition is not unusual, and that often the loud opposition can sound out the quiet support. Again, Tasmania's almost 100,000 paying AFL club members is a testament to this.

Once again there is a defiant community opposition from the generally conservatively minded, elderly Tasmanian population, but I implore you to please consider the opinions, aspirations and dreams of younger Tasmanians in your decision. Younger Tasmanians are generally not reported in these opinion pieces or votes, they don't know how to contribute nor are they afforded the same representation.

This is a decision that will have an enormous effect on the future lives of Tasmanian children and teens, their sense of identity and belonging, their dreams and aspirations, their job prospects, their propensity to move interstate and their quality of life in Tasmania, as well as those of their children.

This is Tasmania's final opportunity, it's now or never. If Tasmania does not act now to secure an AFL team, I have grave fears for the future of the state and its youth. It will only fall further behind in its attractiveness as a place to live, in comparison to other states. It would also set a precedent that Tasmania will continue to place the interests of its youth last in favour of resisting positive change.

Warm regards,

Evan Wilson

A concerned Tasmanian.