

Facing future with confidence

July 26, 2012 12.01am



Development on Mt Wellington has been a contentious issue for decades.

Action is needed to stop our state from stagnating, says Guy Barnett.

IT IS time to replace despondency and despair with hope and opportunity.

Tasmania has record lows in investor and consumer confidence, a struggling economy and the highest unemployment in the country.

Small business insolvency is up 40 per cent, while "start-ups" are down 95 per cent.

Red and green tape is strangling our productive industries. To stagnate is the best that seems possible.

Tasmania desperately needs some "can do" leadership with an unequivocal growth development and jobs agenda.

Enough is enough. This state needs a circuit breaker. We need an election.

The Green-Labor State Government is focused on one thing -- its political survival. It has no mandate for its actions and sits on a mountain of broken promises.

Tasmania has an absurdly dysfunctional and incompetent government with a split personality.

Its two parts openly oppose each other on issues such as the future of Forestry Tasmania, the pulp mill, the export of value-added timber products, world-class eco-tourism projects, aquaculture development and more.

In a shocking abuse of process Green Cabinet ministers exempt themselves from one in every four Cabinet meetings.

A house divided cannot stand. They should be sacked.

The profligate unwarranted spending by government over many years, particularly under former premier David Bartlett, has led to a Budget blow out and more debt, and is now causing pain and hardship.

Frontline services are daily compromised, especially in health, education and police.

Our unstable political environment is also thanks to our antiquated Hare-Clark electoral system, designed more than 100 years ago. Replacing this with a system that can deliver certainty and stability is the way to go.

As we review the size of Parliament we should also review its structure and shape. Business benefits and enterprise stimulated to invest from sure plans. Sovereign risk is not an issue.

Every Tasmanian politician should become an active lobbyist for this state. We need a strategic and team-based approach to Canberra.

For example, Tasmania receives almost zippo from the \$26 billion Defence Budget and we can access some of this. Out of our 78,000 defence force personnel 318 reside in Tasmania.

We host three times as many reservists than ADF personnel whereas nationally we have three times the number of ADF personnel than reservists. We punch above our weight but the defence footprint in Tasmania is negligible.

Why do we source most of the food for our troops from New Zealand when the Scottsdale defence manufacturing facility could be massively expanded to supply food to all our troops and for foreign aid and other purposes?

Alongside this food production facility we should push for the establishment at the University of Tasmania of a national centre of excellence in food innovation, with both initiatives leveraging off one of our great strengths -- agriculture.

Agriculture already employs 8000 Tasmanians on 3400 farms, and turns over \$1.6 billion a year. Investments in water infrastructure can more than double this output in a decade.

We have 1 per cent of Australia's land mass but 14 per cent of its water. Water is liquid gold. If there is an economic case to sell our water on the mainland, let's do it.

We face peak paddock in 2015, when there will be no new farmland allowed thanks to too much red and green tape. Our island is surrounded by water. Our seafood industry and an expansion of fish farms should be supported rather than opposed.

As the renewable energy state we have a comparative advantage in a carbon-constrained world. We can sell our hydro and wind power into mainland markets.

This can be done with another cable across Bass Strait, all or part-funded by Infrastructure Australia, which doles out billions of dollars around the country for major road, rail, port, and other infrastructure developments. Accessing these funds will boost our future development.

The remediation of the Hobart port and a new pier is good news but a more substantial redevelopment of one of the deepest sea water ports in the southern hemisphere would open up opportunities for tourism, business growth and Hobart as the gateway to the Antarctic.

Our success is limited only by our vision.

Mt Wellington is one of Hobart's greatest assets. Tourists and visitors desperately need appropriate food and beverage services at the Springs and a cable car development should be encouraged by our decision-makers. The anti-development messages must end.

The Hydro should build on its existing joint ventures in wind, with many more while ensuring profits are returned to Tasmanians to keep power prices down and to pay off debt.

In addition, public-private partnerships are the way to go when delivering other major infrastructure developments. The cost of these should not be covered by today's taxpayers alone.

Thirty-six planning schemes in a state of half a million people is ridiculous and anti-development. One is enough.

Reform of our 29 local councils is also in order. Reducing the cost of living, and doing business is imperative, so abolishing the world's biggest carbon tax is the way to go.

Our quality of life is the best in the world and aiming to provide the friendliest service in the most caring state, on the back of a quality tourism product (our natural and built heritage is world renowned), and the highest rates of volunteerism in Australia can only add value.

Finally with the highest rates of diabetes and other chronic diseases in Australia, it is time for change. With an outstanding natural environment and amenable climate, ambitions to be the healthiest state by 2050 are the way to go.

Guy Barnett is an ambassador for Diabetes Australia and former Liberal senator.