

THE VOICE OF TASMANIA

MERCURY

Government must listen

At a time when so many Tasmanians are lamenting the lack of long-term vision from both sides of politics, the five-step plan economist Saul Eslake lays out for our state in the *Mercury* today (Talking Point, Pages 34-35) provides what would be a pretty solid starting point.

His plan goes like this: fix education, rethink the health system, sell some assets to reduce public superannuation liabilities and free up cash to spend on infrastructure, increase the size of the State Parliament to improve the quality of government, and then provide real incentives for the right kind of businesses and the right type of public servants to relocate here from the mainland.

Can you imagine if instead of the point-scoring and daily one-upmanship we saw during the recent election campaign, a political leader came out with such a succinct plan for how our state should be moving forward. And can you then imagine if, when after winning office, they just got on with the job?

Yes it's easy to appear smart when you're sitting on the sidelines rather than actually having to do the work. But at least it would provide a starting point.

Take education: the Hodgman Government deserves full credit for its moves to roll out years 11 and 12 to high schools — as is the case in every other state. It only makes sense.

On health, too, the Eslake plan appears a good one. Yes, finish the redevelopment of the Royal Hobart Hospital — and ensure it remains the number one source of emergency and serious healthcare in our state. But also to invest in preventative health, so fewer of us actually need to end up there.

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The third proposal relates to asset sales. Now, over the past few years the idea of selling public assets has become electorally unpalatable. But there is no reason why it should be. It makes a lot of sense. Selling some assets to cash up and re-invest in important and more relevant ideas that have a bigger upside to the state's future than holding on to stuff that have only traditionally been public assets, well, again, it only makes sense. And if you can then invest the cash you have from that into infrastructure, well all the better.

And so to the fourth Eslake proposal: to increase the size of the State Parliament to improve the quality of the parliamentary process — an important move that should be considered.

Fifth, Mr Eslake proposes the government provides real incentives for the right kind of businesses and the right type of public servants to relocate here from the mainland. Again, this makes perfect sense. Small businesses are important to Tasmania, but they are not what the New Tasmania will be built on. A positive future here relies on businesses that can grow and employ more and more people — full-time and permanently. At the end of the day, Mr Eslake is right when he says: "In short, we cannot rest on the laurels of our recent much-improved economic performance. We need to be willing to [be] bold and visionary."

Treasurer Peter Gutwein unveils his Budget next Thursday. He has a real opportunity to not only deliver on the election commitments made, but deliver an economic statement with real vision.

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