

LEAMAN GEOPHYSICS

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Executive Commissioner
 Resource Planning and Development Commission
 3rd floor, 144 Macquarie Street
 HOBART Tas 7000

SUBMISSION

**PROPOSED LAUDERDALE QUAY WATERFRONT
 HOUSING AND MARINA DEVELOPMENT AT
 RALPHS BAY, SOUTHERN TASMANIA**

**COMMENT ON INTEGRATED IMPACT
 STATEMENT**

Dear Commissioner,

Although there are a couple of poorly-explained concepts and details (below) it is clear that this marina development COULD be built – given appropriate approvals and funding.

Whether it SHOULD be built rather depends on a matter of principle, a matter of ecological reality and four matters of experience with such developments. If the Commission is unable, or unwilling, to consider the matter of high principle involved in this particular application then ‘heaven help us’.

1. THE MATTER OF PRINCIPLE: THE PROPOSAL, BY RIGHT

I searched high and low in the massive pile of documents in an attempt to find the origin of the proposal and the reason for the selection of this particular site. The information is not there.

The proposal is simply presented as a declaration of intent and then claimed to be the best thing since sliced bread, as something Tasmania needs, as a source of land etc.

(I suspect that Walker Corporation needs it more, to support a profit line). Thus we have to have it. Besides, it will be 'unique' in Tasmania!?

Note that Walker Corporation does not own the land (bay shore) in the way other developers would own or acquire land – by purchase – but PRESUME to be given it. There is therefore little cost to them for the site (equals more profit). They assume, or have been told by someone in high office, that this watery land could be granted to them. Since the coastal area involved already has a land status, a protected status defined for particular reasons, the proponents and the Commission are required to seek review and excision of some protected land so that the proposal can proceed.

This foreshore was not protected for a marina development, but as a bird sanctuary. A change from that status must, therefore, be fully justified and RPDC must ensure that this is so. There is a great principle in this. Walker Corporation nowhere comments on this.

One of the most blatant of Tasmanian land reclassifications occurred in respect of Lake Pedder but at least it could be argued that there was general public interest in that and the land remained in public hands for public use. This is not the case at Ralphs Bay, where the land is to be given away for private profit and no proof, whatever, of public benefit. Indeed, there is environmental loss: the defined purpose of the reserved land. If land status can be changed at whim, or to suit profiteers and politicians, then we must ask is any land status secure?

I ask the Commissioners to consider this.

Suppose someone comes along and looks at your house and land.

They then note that they could build an office block on it, noting that the suburb needs office accommodation, especially accommodation with good views.

They seek government favour to take the land, without proper compensation, and merely offer you an alternative block they have some distance away but which lacks the pleasant character that you opted for when selecting the land you now occupy.

What would you do? How would you feel? You do not want that other place!

This is what Walker Corporation is seeking to do to public land and, in particular, land with a select purpose. I will discuss the feeling of the present owners and users below. Where is the real compensation?

Another example would be:

You have a booked seat at the theatre and you are sitting in it when the management approaches with the local tycoon. "Here is \$50, go sit somewhere else!" "All we have is that seat down there in the front corner of the stalls". Again, how would you feel? This is simply not on.

I contend that the government has not the right nor justification to rescind this conservation area for someone's greedy proposal.

A related question which must be asked of Walker Corporation is: did they consider any tidal flats where there was no prior reservation? If they did, I have never heard of it and there is nothing in the IIS to indicate it. This smacks of political favour and a nod.

On these grounds, this application should never have passed beyond the “it seemed like a good idea at the time” stage. And, it should stop now.

RPDC can acknowledge this by noting that the proposal has no right to proceed in principle.

If the law of this poor island cannot recognise this, then all property is at risk.

2. THE ATTITUDE OF THE PRESENT OWNERS AND USERS OF THE LAND

I wish to consider some ecological reality as defined by the present users of the foreshore under claim for this proposal: the wading birds.

I am not a bird specialist but I have observed the behaviour of various animals when their regular habitat is disturbed or destroyed. They vanish. They either die or they go to an equivalent site far away.

Attempts by Walker Corporation to suggest, or place signs offering “come over here” or “the crabs are just as juicy over here” will simply not work – however many pages they devote to the topic in the IIS.

The fact of the matter is that the birds are where they are now because that is where the food and home is. It is also the wind and wave perspective which is agreeable to those things. If this were not so then they would already occupy the “other habitats” down the bay which they are now being offered.

There is no difference in this to the examples given in the matter of principle above. Birds or humans will respond the same way. The proposal is quite unrealistic to suggest otherwise. I have noted that there is no comment in the IIS to suggest that anyone actually asked the birds what they thought.

Since the site has been designated on bird conservation grounds, and the birds like it, that should be the end of the matter.

Why is Walker Corporation not making its proposal for the area into which they would like to move the birds? I would suggest that it is the same reason that the birds are where they are, and why the area was protected in the first place. No one wants that other foreshore area (Walker Corp and birds).

The proposal should be denied on this basis and the proponents be advised to make application elsewhere.

The choice is really whether this is the only piece of tidal flat in existence and suitable for such a proposal, and do we need it anyway?

3. MATTERS OF EXPERIENCE

Construction details

The proposal is predicated on the presumption that it can be built in the geological conditions (I agree, at a cost) in the manner described (I agree, with a few tweaks) and that it will be beautiful and desirable (in the eye of the proponent or beholder).

I do not accept that the present design of the revetments and armour will prove adequate or stable.

Unrealistic assumptions have been made about underlying stability and the depth of armour in my opinion: these are things which can be altered in any final proposal. The IIS does note (App G, p. 13) that the site has still to be checked for stability and there is no data on coefficients of friction, compaction or loadings. The concrete wall designs depend on fill load for stability on these clays (p.12).

From my experience of material vibration characteristics I have to state that I would never consider buying or building on a block of fill such as proposed here. First, it is sand, and we all know the adage about this, and foundations should be piled to the firmer natural clayey sand base which is far from ideal either (true of much of Lauderdale) and, second, can we be convinced about the compaction level achieved? I would play safe and this is a case of buyer beware. As an engineering geologist I will be recommending against purchase of island blocks and certainly against construction without very specific construction requirements. Although usage is a side issue it does relate to one of the stated aims and benefits of the proposal: new land for building – which we are said to need. Well, I do not think we need artificial land of ‘C’ grade.

Disposal of the fines

In order to avoid any external quarry or transportation issues the proponent seeks to use the material from over-deepened canals to provide, after separation, the necessary volume of sand for the ‘islands’. Then, in a clever twist, the aim is to dispose of the fines not used in this way back into the canals.

This is a recipe for smelly, foetid conditions and a murky bottom, especially as the system ages. Just who wants a clay bottom? This is not even a firm clay base, it is a flocculant. Can the proponent provide examples of how this looks, works or persists as a pleasant environment?

Other canal developments

Other jurisdictions have had considerable experience with canal developments and most now ban them. Why is this? What have we not been told? Why is there no comment in the IIS about the success or failure, or lessons learnt, at other sites? RPDC must query this and seek the answers. If the developments are not considered good by those who have experienced them, why should we accept such a proposal?

Gratuitous suggestions

The proposal makes much of the benefits to the Lauderdale community. There are silly claims.

One involves the risk of higher sea levels. Just how does this proposal protect Lauderdale? The low profile on Ralphs Bay diminishes wave break anyway. The real risk will come from the east and, in any event, the entire region will go under should the rise eventuate. This is a sound good and helpful claim, nothing more.

The proponents note (App G, p. 11) that Aurora intends to replace its submarine cable across the bay and that the development can dovetail with this. Does Aurora really have to replace its cable or is this need simply a part of the proposal implicitly approved from on high? If the need is related to the development then who pays? The taxpayer should not have to foot a bill which benefits only Walker Corporation.

SUMMARY

The proposal should be denied.

There is no proof that there is a land shortage and who cares if it will be “unique in Tasmania”? Whether the claims are true or false, if the overall idea is poor, unjustified or unprincipled, then RPDC must deny it.

I find much about this entire proposal, the inferences and nods behind it, as well as the potential smell from the canals – on the nose.

Walker Corporation has other choices. Buy and develop some real land, or buy a bay which is free of existing claims or encumbrances.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "D. E. Leaman". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Dr. D. E. Leaman