



MEDIA RELEASE – 4 September 2009

'Streamlining' of the planning system: ineffective and misguided

Environment Tasmania and the Environmental Defenders Office have criticised recent changes to Tasmania's planning system for reducing the independence and transparency of development assessment.

The groups claim that the changes will undermine public participation without actually achieving the benefits promoted by the Government, such as streamlining approvals and reducing undue political influence.

"The merger of the RPDC with the government planning branch to form the Tasmanian Planning Commission clearly opens planning decisions to greater state government influence", ET's Simon Branigan said.

The groups are also critical of legislation passed yesterday creating a new assessment process for Projects of Regional Significance. The legislation gives unprecedented power to the Minister for Planning to call-in developments for assessment by a Development Assessment Panel chosen by the Tasmanian Planning Commission. The Panel's decision is not subject to merits appeal.

EDO lawyer, Jess Feehely said,

"The provisions are poorly conceived and demonstrate a lack of public consultation. There is no evidence of a need for an additional assessment process, and the new process is in fact likely to increase assessment timeframes. The removal of rights of appeal in relation to projects of regional significance is also completely unwarranted.

The best protection against inappropriate political influence in planning decisions is to enshrine public participation and rights of appeal to an independent body, such as the Resource Management and Planning Appeal Tribunal."

ET and the EDO are disappointed that the recent changes fail to address the main problems with the planning system. Simon Branigan said the groups remain concerned by the lack of State Policies to guide decision making, and the lack of enforcement options available to make sure that planning laws are complied with. He said,

"Public confidence in the planning system relies on independent decision-making, meaningful public participation and effective enforcement of the laws. The recent changes do nothing to advance these issues."

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