

Speech at VCOSS Industry Planning Symposium on 17 March 2017

Thank you for inviting me to speak at your Industry Planning Symposium today.

Since becoming the CEO of TasCOSS in 2015, I have been constantly energised by the collaborative working relationships in the COSS network across Australia, and particular for TasCOSS, a lovely, collegial and sharing relationship with VCOSS.

As is often the case across the country, Tasmania is at a similar and a different stage of the Industry planning journey. Today I will share with you some of the learnings and approaches we are taking in Tasmania – and equally, I know I will learn from you throughout the day to be able to apply your learnings to where we go next.

To set the scene I will briefly give you a snap shot of the Tasmanian context:

As you may know, it's very easy to joke about the Tasmanian, two head thing.

More seriously though, In Tasmania, TasCOSS talks a lot about the two Tasmanias

Let's talk about our island. Tasmania has changed dramatically over the last ten years. Some put it down to MONA, some to the growth of cultural and wilderness tourism, or to the global demand for the top quality food and wine that comes out of Tasmania. Tasmania has changed in ways that, as a born and bred Tasmanian, I can feel and in ways that I see daily. There is a growing air of confidence and pride and this is something acknowledged by many in our state. Economists report a growth in business confidence right across the state and Hobart is currently experiencing a building boom. Tourism Tasmania is predicting this current summer season to be our biggest ever. Cruise ships are now a constant at Constitution Dock, our wilderness walks and luxury resorts are booked out more than 12 months in advance and longer.

Recently Tasmania was placed above Rome as a preferred tourist destination in the London Sunday Times to a readership of more than two million people. There is undoubtedly something exciting happening in Tasmania that is bringing a greater sense of optimism than we have experienced for a number of years.

This reminds me of the two articles I read about Tasmanian in the same weekend a couple of years ago that most stood out: the first was an article about MONA in the New York Times. The second was about the complex problems of substance abuse, poverty and unemployment in Burnie on the North West Coast written for the Weekend Australian. It is difficult to reconcile these two tales of Tasmania. It is almost as if there are two Tasmanias: one that is riding the wave of a boom in cultural, food and wilderness tourism and a construction spike, and one that is still facing the same issues that have defined parts of Tasmania for decades.

In a snapshot – we talk about these two Tasmanias as:

We have huge demand for our fresh produce such as Houston Lettuces and Petuna Ocean Trout while nearly half of all Tasmanian children cannot afford or have access to fresh fruit and vegetables.

One in five children in Tasmania live in a jobless household.

We have a Booker prize winning international author in Richard Flanagan, but just on half our population are functionally illiterate and we have the lowest rates of educational outcomes in Australia.

The median household income in Tasmania sits at just on \$38,500.00

Sadly, the summary of Tasmania by economist Saul Eslake who I am going to talk about in this presentation today is:

“Tasmanians are the unhealthiest, the oldest, worst educated, most under-employed and most dependent of government benefits of any population in Australia. “

So that briefly paints a picture of the disadvantage, the inequalities that the community services sector in Tasmania is working hard to turn around.

Our sector: new slide

Like VCOSS, TasCOSS wears the dual hat of amplifying the voice of vulnerable Tasmanians who need a strong voice and advocacy, and we are also the peak body for the community services sector in Tasmania.

To give you some context, here is a snapshot of our sector:

The Tasmanian community sector is a significant industry and employer. The output of the health care and social assistance sector now represents almost 9% of Tasmania’s total gross product, making it the State’s second largest sector after agriculture, forestry and fishing.

Our sector employs approximately 10,000 people across the regions with a workforce that is projected to grow significantly in the next 5 – 10 years. In terms of future workforce, it is also critical the sector is perceived by Tasmanian as an employment option. Volatility within sector will have a range of impacts on the current and future workforce.

In 2016, TasCOSS released the State of the Sector report, prepared by the University of New South Wales. The report provides a comprehensive overview of Tasmania’s community sector.

Broadly, our sector is made up of:

- 350 organisations delivering an average of 6 or more service types
- A workforce of approximately 10,000 employees (up from 9000 in 2014/15)
- A majority of the workforce are employed part-time
- 75% are female
- Approximately 35,000 volunteers worked across our sector and 90% of our sector engage volunteers at some point.
- We deliver over \$50million dollars back into the Tasmanian economy through our work

In a snapshot – from a workforce perspective, the main challenges include:

- Rapidly changing service models and increasing complexity of client demand
- Increasing community expectations for accountability and transparency in service delivery
- Significant competition for highly qualified staff from other industries
- Diminishing number of new workforce entrants
- An ageing workforce

Our reform agenda:

Like Victoria and the other states and territories, Tasmania's community services sector is undergoing an unprecedented period of reform. The federal reforms are obviously biting hard for us all and it is shared pain. Coupled to that, we have a state liberal government in the 3rd year of their 1st term with a massive point to prove, and axe to grind! They spent nearly 14 years in opposition and came into power needing to demonstrate they are an action government.

As a result, in our space this is what our state reform looks like:

- New Department of Health and Human Services Corporate Plan
- Healthy Tasmania Strategic Plan
- One Health Service White Paper
- Rethink Mental Health Plan
- Affordable Housing Strategy
- Child Protection Redesign
- Review of Out of Home Care
- Safe homes, Safe Families – Family Violence Strategy
- Youth at Risk Strategy (including reviewing of our Youth Detention Centre)
- Joined Up Services project
- Education Act reforms
- Home and Community Care review (HACC)
- Breaking the cycle – community corrections and prison reform
- Settlement Hubs – reforms to our migrant, refugee and settlement services
- Elders Abuse strategy
- Active ageing strategy
- Legislative review into our Child and Family Centres
- Legislative review into gambling
- Etc. etc. etc.

So, when you have a look at our population demographics, when you have a look at the size and variances of our sector, and you have a look at our reform agenda – it is pretty clear – we need a plan – an industry plan and a range of areas coming off the industry plan. To put it bluntly, for us to work strategically and ultimately do the best we can do for clients, disadvantaged Tasmanians, something has to change, something has to shift.....

So how do you get traction, how do you get noticed by government, by treasury, in a way that is beyond the stereotyped perceptions of our sector –that generally, we have our hand out for more funding.

When we looked at our sector as an industry it was very clear we were in need of an Industry Plan – we needed support to transition from the old to the new.

In Tasmania however, the focus of “industry” was very much on the traditional – forestry, manufacturing etc. Tourism, agriculture and aquaculture were emerging as the new economy focus areas and seen as the future of our state. Government investment through workforce planning, industry planning, and infrastructure funds are considered the smart investment when they are channelled into these areas.

In my previous work I owned a small consulting firm – amongst other things we had a high level of success supporting commercial businesses in accessing significant dollars – I call it corporate welfare – to improve their infrastructure and processes – with the promise back to government they wouldn’t close down and they would create some new jobs. However – some new jobs – often meant between 15 & 20 staff short term and maybe 8 – 10 long term for a \$3 or \$400,000 investment by government.

When I looked at the jobs growth in the community sector – nearly a 1000 additional jobs from 2012 – 2015 with no investment by government in in the industry, the infrastructure, the sustainable of the sector it just didn’t add up.

So we needed a way to stand out and get noticed in amongst the competing demands of a shrinking state budget and a treasurer and a treasury who has seen us only as a drain on the state coffers.

And so we looked to the drivers of the attention – the business and industry peak bodies that were driving the investment and the attention of government to see what we could learn.

In Tasmania, we also see a lot of influence and positive focus through our regional development bodies – including Regional Development Australia Tasmania. Their strategic plan has uncanny similarities to the TasCOSS vision for “One Tasmania, free of poverty and inequality, where everyone has the same opportunity”

So we started to look for new partners, new voices to amplify our own.

Enter Saul Eslake. A well-known national economist, who, like many Tasmanians had left our island to find his fame and fortune on what we call “the mainland”. But like many of our great human exports to the mainland, Saul has recently returned to live, work and play and to ensure his young family grow up in the relative safety and beauty of our island. For the middle class, it is a great lifestyle choice.

What Saul could do was bring the value add, the value proposition to the argument we had been trying to prosecute to government.

Because what has been missing for us in this debate across Tasmania is the “Why”. Why would government invest in our sector outside of their grants programs for direct service delivery? What would be the advantage of expending government funds on our industry like they do on other industries? Don’t governments already invest millions of dollars into looking after vulnerable, poor, disadvantaged Tasmanians? Surely that is an investment in our sector?

The goal was to think about new ways to represent and reframe the image of our sector to government, but also to the community more broadly. To reframe the way that government (in our case a small Liberal government) saw the outcomes for all of Tasmania if we could address growing inequality.

We chose a strange bedfellow to achieve this.....our Chamber of Commerce and Industry and an economist.

TasCOSS was deeply immersed in the development of a report focusing on the Indicators of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Tasmania – internally it was known as IPSIT.

Meanwhile, the TCCI were considering developing a similarly dense and focused report on the economic indicators for Tasmania, and they were talking with Saul Eslake about preparing it.

I am a big believer in careful, strategic, long term planning. But I'm also an opportunistic person by nature. I arranged a meeting with the TCCI to introduce our thinking and in this meeting the TCCI CEO revealed the work he way planning with Saul. This was an opportunity, we could both see it and we needed to run with.

It had risks, particularly as the people in this room know, a risk that our own membership, our sector, would feel very uncomfortable about this partnership with business. But we needed to take a risk. My mantra that many in Tasmania are probably tired of hearing me saying publicly is that we have to be prepared for new ways of thinking, new ways of working, new partnerships and new opportunities. If we want to get different outcomes we have to start doing things differently. We can't keep doing things the same way and expect to get different outcomes.

The will for new ways of working is there. The will from communities, from business, from government and of course, from our sector.

The Tasmania report was born –collaboration between TCCI and TasCOSS.

The report combines the economic and social indicators for Tasmania – and it is prepared independently by Saul Eslake. TasCOSS has major input into the development of the report and we work closely with Saul to ensure his social indicator focus areas align with the messages, the narrative we are working on with our government.

It is now in it's second year of publication.

It looks at:

- Our economy
- Our Labour Market
- Our Housing market
- Our population including the demographic profile
- Our society – its strengths and weaknesses
- Education outcomes
- Tasmania's public sector
- Tasmania's regions – as communities.....not just economies.
- And – it looks forward – to where we should invest and what we need to tackle.

The first report was released in December 2015 and the second report in 2016.

Both TasCOSS and the TCCI provide a forward within the report.

Let me read to you from the forward from the 2016 Tasmania report:

That is not the TasCOSS forward. That is the forward from the chair of the board of the TCCI

Susan Parr's piece:

So we produced the report and then we hit the road in Tasmania. This is how we changed to profile of our sector – where we are able to reframe the work and the importance of our sector to many Tasmanians who we would not normally get to speak to. This is the where and the how we targeted those with influence.

On the day the report is released – always in December we hit the road.

Organised by the TCCI and fully supported by TasCOSS's members we hold:

- A breakfast in Hobart – approximately 250 people attend
- A lunch in Launceston in the North – approximate 200 people attend
- And a dinner on the North West Coast – approximately 100 people attend.

Each year in December, we visit the three major cities, do ABC radio interviews in each city, an interview and full coverage by each newspaper, tv news, regional social media, blogs, and by our own internal estimates across these varied mediums, TasCOSS reached approximately 220,000 Tasmanians.

We drive from one end of the state to the other and we help all Tasmanians – business, sector and community members, understand how we look as a state – what are the important economic and social indicators, and importantly, how can we ensure that reducing inequality and poverty is a shared goal across Tasmania.

Saul presents the data and puts a narrative to it. And then we talk about solutions, about working together, about what we have in common, and where the shared interests are.

In each region our board, our member organisations and our sector more broadly are actively involved.

And the community sector is seen as part of the solution. As a critical player in what we need to do in Tasmania to support improved lives, improved outcomes.

We stand should to shoulder with business, unions and others to say this is how we will reduce inequality and ensure a better future for all Tasmanians.

And governments can't help but listen. We are infiltrating and influencing allies that we had not previously thought would care. Our work will take time, it is a long term cultural shift in how government see our sector, but the work on the Tasmania report is helping to achieve that – to put us up there as equal partners in where, as a state, we need to go next.

Previously, our sector has not been seen, by government, or by itself as an industry. So we set to work to nudge the thinking, convincing and prosecuting the argument of why we are an industry, and why we matter an industry worth investing in. And that the outcome of low income Tasmanians and to the workforce, employment and economic outcomes we deliver for Tasmania make up part of who we are.

Where we are at now:

What next? The third Tasmania report is in planning.

In the last 18 months we have made significant progress.

We have achieved the goal of getting the attention of government and we are emerging as a significant player in shaping the future of our state. No longer is the export value or the contribution of a sector to GDP seen as the only important measure of value.

We have completed a State of the Sector report that provides us with detailed data and information about our sector. This was a critical first stage for us as we couldn't lobby for industry support funds until we had the evidence base in place. The University of NSW completed this report for us in early 2016.

We have secured \$100,000 from Skills Tasmania and have just commenced work on a Workforce Development Plan for the next ten years. Again, this interest in our sector as an industry was highlighted by the partnership work we have been undertaking.

To compliment this, we are working closely with DHHS on a Blueprint for Human services in Tasmania. This will capture the range of reforms we are grappling with, not just in the delivery of Human Services to vulnerable Tasmanians, but also in ensuring all the contractual and regulatory elements of our work are aligned.

The Blueprint will look at the range of areas that make up the efficient delivery of Human Services in Tasmania – the why, the what and the how.

Importantly, our peak bodies in Tasmania have, for the first time, put to the state budget process a shared budget priority statement. This is to enable an Industry plan. Our shared proposal across 12 community sector peak bodies puts forward the need for a long term Industry Plan.

While change and reform are constant in our sector, we are entering an unprecedented period of accelerating and multi-layered change. In particular, models of consumer directed care and individualised funding models and a drive for competition policy are impacting significantly on our sector and ultimately, the clients are sector support.

This shared submission from the Community Sector Peaks Network represents the highly collaborative approach we are taking in supporting the transition phase of these reforms. It also recognises that in order to remain a sustainable, contemporary and responsive sector we must work closely with the Tasmanian Government to undertake the necessary scoping and planning to ensure we are able to provide the community with the range of services and support it requires in the next ten years.

Tasmanian Community Sector Industry Plan

Outcome 1: A strong and sustainable community services sector to meet the diverse needs of vulnerable Tasmanians in all regions.

Key ask: The development of a Tasmanian Community Sector Industry Transition Plan that provides a framework and resources to enable the community sector and state government to transition effectively in this period of change.

What would the Tasmanian Community Sector Industry Transition Plan contain?

The Tasmanian Community Sector Industry Transition Plan - a three year industry plan that will provide:

- An analysis of the current and emerging strengths and challenges of the sector (based on the needs of small, medium and large organisations, within the context of the current reforms)
- An analysis of the sector context including the economic and social return on investment.
- The establishment of a shared process between government and the community sector to scope, assess and introduce contemporary procurement approaches.
- An assessment of the priorities for investment for sector infrastructure, data collection and I.T. to enable a contemporary and effective systems.
- The inclusion of a Workforce Development Plan (which is not part of this funding request and already funded through Skills Tasmania)

Recommendations for action

At the conclusion of the plan development and based on the findings of the scoping document, resources would be available to enable organisations to review their business models and develop alternative approaches to ensure effectiveness and sustainability.

In summary:

The Tasmanian Community Services sector is experiencing a period of substantial structural adjustment due to a range of factors including multiple state and federal government reform agendas.

All parts of the non-government sector are facing significant and rapid change. Sector leaders are dealing with changing service delivery models, increasing demand and higher expectations of services. The risk profile of service delivery has changed dramatically, forward planning is challenging and Government reform requirements overlapping and continuous.

So some key messages to leave you with today flow from that:

We have to be prepared to work differently. To get different outcomes we must be bold and take new approaches, look for new partnerships. We must be prepared to trust each other and work towards the same goals.

You also need to be prepared to let go of some of the old ways of thinking and be prepared to listen to new ways, new ideas, and new partners. The world we work in, the funding models, what is happening in the environments around us is changing, that is a fact, and we must be prepared to change to. That doesn't mean leaving behind our values, what makes our sector strong, it means being flexible, adaptable and willing to be bold in the change.

In Tasmania for the first time, our community sector peak bodies have put a shared budget priority statement to our government. We have a shared vision and funding ask.

Three of our peaks, including TasCOSS are looking at co-location.

These are examples of how important our collaboration and our partnerships are, and how they will need to stay strong as the change around us continues.