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## **Our Northern Border!**

Access across the Tasmania and Victoria border should be just as easy as it is between other States of Australia.

Let me give you an example:

I want you to imagine a young couple in Melbourne, in five years time. They are junior executives and only have the weekend available to them to relax. They have always said that they should visit Tasmania but just haven't yet got around to it.

One Friday evening they jump in their car and drive one and a half hours to the Coast of Victoria and catch a fast ferry to the North of Tasmania. They didn't book as there are ferries leaving every four hours.

The fare for transport including GST was just \$75. This included both of them and the car. If they wish they could dine in either the restaurant for an additional sum or buy some fast food. The 4-hour crossing was just enough time to have their meal and see a movie which was also extra.

By 11pm they are in their B & B accommodation and looking forward to two full days in Tasmania.

It occurred to them that the whole exercise was equivalent to driving to Sydney as they did last autumn, both in time and expense.

The issue of Bass Strait has long been high on the Tasmanian agenda but often as an issue of tourism, not just transport. For the last few decades the State Government looked upon its role as providing an overnight tourism experience to cross Bass Strait, one to enjoy a meal, a movie, play the pokies, accommodation and then breakfast, all as part of the holiday.

Well, people like to move faster now! Holidays are shorter and more frequent, we can't afford to be away from work for long periods of time any more.

The Federal Government has spent enormous amounts of money on building roads between other States, in today's terms around \$2 million per kilometre. Other than the purchase of the Able Tasman, the State Government has covered all capital expenditure. A burden never worn by other States.

Because of the push toward Globalisation and higher efficiencies within nations and companies, centralisation of head offices and manufacturing operations have occurred at the expense of regional Australia. Tasmania is losing its population to Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. With a shrinking population there are fewer jobs available and even more people decide to leave. The snowball must be stopped.

Proper funding of the transport portion of travel across the strait would be the first step to encouraging more people coming to the State. We can thank the Liberal Federal Government and Senator Jocelyn Newman for the current Bass Strait Passenger Vehicle Equalisation Scheme but it only covers the car and part of the transport portion of the drivers' fare.

It does not apply to passengers who are hit with accommodation and food costs whether they want to eat and sleep or not. This pushes the fare up to a level equivalent with the airlines.

The young couple I spoke of earlier would decide to visit another part of our country. They don't seem to mind long drives as 60% of all interstate travel on the mainland is on the surface. Buses, trains and by car.

As Executive Director of the Retail Traders' Association I am concerned for the Independent Retailers in Tasmania who need to have more people walking in their doors. The only way this will happen is by increasing our population.

Heavy industry, the great employer, needs cheap power and Basslink and Gas are both hopefully on the way, but just as importantly access to the Island State should be equal to that which is available to every other State on the mainland.

Let's support the National Sea Highway Committee in its endeavours to gain this equality for ourselves and our generations to come.

**Tony Steven**