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Shop Trading Hours

Tasmania along with many other parts of regional Australia have started to reject the notions of Economic Rationalism. In other words, increased efficiencies for Governments and larger companies leading to centralisation towards the bigger cities. They reject these policies because they don't take into account the people whom supposedly these policies are for.

For example, to cut costs and increase profits, state based company operations and administration offices are combined to reduce the duplication. Melbourne and Sydney are therefore booming. This then distorts the overall economic figures for the Country, making Australia look prosperous when outlying regions are really suffering.

People are leaving the smaller economies for the opportunities in the larger ones, moving to the mainland.

Governments are following these policies because Australia needs to become more efficient to be able to compete with the rest of the world and reduce economic and environmental wastage.

However, the Victorian election last year saw the beginning of a political backlash. Country Victoria, also suffering like us, gave more seats to the ALP opposition than ever before. A warning for Governments and prospective Governments everywhere.

The effect of these policies on Tasmania has been very detrimental. In the retail grocery sector for example, the market share of the major supermarket chains is an incredible 78% in Tasmania. The implementation of these policies seems to result in the shallow philosophy of "big is beautiful".

This is clearly against the public interest. The lessening of competition is effecting the consumer and the closure of small businesses has effected employment in the area. Just count the empty shops.

The economic playing field is very much weighted in favour of larger firms due to the benefits of economies of scale. Extension of shop trading hours would effectively hand the majors the entire grocery market.

The major supermarket chains are now also applying pressure on newsagents, pharmacies, liquor stores, florists, electrical and hardware stores and photo labs. Small shopping strips are feeling the pinch when supermarkets leave to reopen in major centres usually against public opinion.

It's obvious, large business is competing for even more market share at the expense of small business and the consumer. Any extension of shop trading hours will increase the market share of the majors. Further jobs will be lost in Tasmania.

All it means is the spread of the same level of spending to more days in the week. There would be a loss of more independent supermarkets meaning less competition and therefore higher prices for the Tasmanian community.

It is no good having the shops open seven days a week if there aren't enough people with jobs and the money to spend in them.

As a Nation we need to halt the unhealthy and anti-competitive domination of retail markets and introduce strong new trade practice laws to ensure fair competition.

Efficiency gains are only gains when they do not adversely impact the people involved.

The Retail Traders' Association is fighting the current campaign by various big business organisations in relation to the easing of Sunday trading restrictions. As their Executive Director, I am very involved in that fight.

The State Government and the Opposition have guaranteed a moratorium on the issue until the end of this parliamentary term being 2002. A moratorium means "no change".

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