



Tasmanian
Labor

WHAT WE HEARD

COMMUNITY FORUM REPORT

BELL BAY & GEORGE TOWN FORUM

Monday 28 September 2026

Bell Bay Advanced Manufacturing Zone, Bell Bay

A MESSAGE

from Josh Willie, Janie Finlay and Jess Greene

For generations, this precinct has produced aluminium, manganese alloys, engineering services and some of the most highly skilled tradespeople in the state. Families have built their lives here, with grandparents, parents and children training and working on the same sites.

When we met on 28 September, uncertainty was weighing heavily on the whole precinct. Liberty Bell Bay had closed. The future of Bell Bay Aluminium hung on a power deal that had not yet been settled. Businesses, workers and families did not know what was going to come next.



"The value of a power deal is not measured in price alone"

Since the forum, a five year power deal and support package for Bell Bay Aluminium has been secured. That is welcome news and a relief for the workers, families and businesses who depend on the smelter. But it does not undo the damage of the past year, and it does not answer every concern raised in the room.

We convened this forum to listen, to understand the local experience and to take what we heard into Labor's policy development. We thank everyone who attended and spoke so openly about a very hard period.

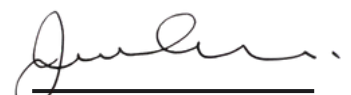
What we heard was clear. The value of a power deal should not be measured by price alone. It is measured in the local skilled jobs, apprenticeships, local businesses, schools, sporting clubs and the wellbeing of a whole community. Securing the deal was necessary, but it is the start of the work, not the end of it.



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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report summarises the strongest themes, concerns and opportunities raised at the Tasmanian Labor - Bell Bay & George Town Forum. It is not a transcript and does not attribute individual comments.

Participation in the forum, or inclusion in this report, should not be taken as endorsement of every view recorded, endorsement of Tasmanian Labor or another political party, or support for any future policy position.

The report reflects the themes heard across the room and the priorities Tasmanian Labor will take forward in its policy development and accountability work.



THE DISCUSSION

Participants worked in table groups on two discussion questions. The first was what challenges and roadblocks do Bell Bay and George Town face right now? The second was where the biggest opportunities lie for Bell Bay, George Town and Northern Tasmania more broadly? Each table then reported back to the full room about their individual discussions.



WHO WAS IN THE ROOM

- ABx Group / ALCORE Technology Centre
- Apex Contracting Tas
- Bell Bay Advanced Manufacturing Zone
- City of Launceston
- CPT Engineering
- Cromarty Automation
- Dorset Council
- East Arm Resources
- Firmus
- George Town Chamber of Commerce
- George Town Council
- Launceston Chamber of Commerce
- Master Builders Tasmania
- Northern Tasmania Development Corporation
- Pfeiffer Cranes
- Solstice Energy and Tas Gas Networks
- Temtrol
- West Tamar Council

The forum brought together representatives from major industry, advanced manufacturing, engineering and contracting businesses, family-owned businesses, energy, resources, data infrastructure, local government and business chambers.

Listing does not imply organisational endorsement of this report, Tasmanian Labor or any political position.

Summary of themes

Uncertainty has a cost

Delay over the power deal left businesses unable to plan, invest or hire with confidence.

Local businesses carried the losses

The Liberty Bell Bay closure left family-owned and private businesses with unpaid invoices, unfulfilled contracts, debts and gaps in their workforce.

There was no Plan B

Participants saw no evidence of a plan B, state government contingency plan had the power deal failed, and no clear economic vision for the North.

Government is not pulling in one direction

Agencies and government businesses are moving at different speeds, sometimes against each other.



Summary of themes

The system makes it hard to do business

Outdated planning rules, slow approvals and layers of administration are holding back investment.

Skills are at risk

Skilled workers are leaving, and the capacity to restart or grow industry is leaving with them.

The impacts are connected

Every business in the precinct is linked through supply chains, so uncertainty in one place is felt everywhere.

The power deal is a start, not a finish

Participants want planning for the precinct's future, and for the end of the deal, to start now. Renewable energy, the port, defence manufacturing and education are real opportunities, but realising them takes ambition (and a place people want to live).



WHAT WE HEARD

Uncertainty over the power deal

Delay and uncertainty over Bell Bay Aluminium's power deal created an unstable environment for every business in the precinct. Businesses said they could not decide whether, or how, to invest without certainty.

Some investments depended entirely on the smelter's future. One local business was planning an international investment, including its own wharf and export model on Bell Bay Aluminium land, that could not proceed if the smelter closed.

The region has always ridden peaks and troughs tied to global markets. But most participants expected a solution to be found well before it came to this.

The Liberty Bell Bay closure and its local cost

Family-owned and privately owned businesses have lost a great deal of money. Some businesses with dedicated Liberty contracts lost around half their revenue. Many were left with significant debts, outstanding invoices, unfulfilled contracts and gaps in their workforce.

Some family businesses had invested in property, contracts and equipment over many years. Some recovered their equipment before liquidation began, while others faced the real prospect of losing their own assets. Many now hope to recoup part of their losses through the work to scale down and clean up the site.

Participants said the site had been run down over a long period. Above all, local businesses felt forgotten.



“Above all, local businesses felt forgotten.”



Communication and accountability

Communication was poor, both on the Liberty closure and on the power deal. Many businesses learned what was happening through hearsay.

Participants saw no evidence of a state government Plan B had the power deal failed, and described that as unacceptable. They were frustrated by a lack of accountability across government and the public service. They pointed to public servants who do not seem to understand the risk private businesses carry, and to the power the bureaucracy holds over elected members. **They asked a simple question about the northern economic plan: who is accountable for it, and who is delivering it?**

Participants also want government to get better at preparing communities for change. That means a clear story about the future, backed by a real strategy. It also means explaining new industries such as AI and data infrastructure clearly.

Government, GBEs and economic vision

Participants see no clear economic vision for Tasmania or the North. Government businesses are not moving at the same pace or in the same direction. In some cases they are competing with each other and with the government itself. GBE directors need to work for Tasmania, taking a view of the whole state economy and its global context rather than a narrow focus on their own business.

Bell Bay should be treated first and foremost as an industrial hub, with the government and its businesses aligned behind it. Government needs to be an enabler, not a blocker.

Participants pointed to South Australia, which unashamedly goes after major opportunities, commits to them and makes them happen. Tasmania needs the same ambition and the ability to put the pieces together.

Energy supply and major projects

Tasmania has some of the best wind resources in the world, yet has become one of the hardest places to build a wind farm. Despite being nearly ten years in development, the Robbins Island wind farm has experienced protracted delays and has yet to commence construction. Participants described it as the first domino. If it gets going, it would set off a chain reaction of positive outcomes across the North.

Without new generation, there is not enough power to meet Tasmania's needs. Delays to major projects flow through to everything downstream.

“Government needs to be an enabler, not a blocker.”



Planning, approvals and red tape

Participants called for significant planning reform. Land classifications are out of date, the state planning scheme needs an overhaul. Some applications take years to process.

Strategic planning is done in Hobart without enough local say. Councils often want to approve developments their community supports, but the planning scheme forces them to refuse. As one participant put it, "the computer says no."

Infrastructure is being announced without councils on board. Participants raised the idea of a charter for local government setting out how the state and councils work together.

The Office of the Coordinator-General was described as a major roadblock that focuses on the largest projects rather than the businesses that make up most of the region. Land banking is holding projects back, with developers waiting for favourable conditions, and land use changes need to be governed better.

Layers of state and federal administration add cost and complexity. Some participants said the system feels like a penalty for growing and doing well.



Supply chains and the domino effect

Large employers carry a significant economic multiplier for the region and the state. At one table, 30 per cent of one business's workforce was tied directly to Bell Bay Aluminium. Losing that work would change the business's structure, skills mix and liabilities, not just its headcount.

Uncertainty for major employers flows through to suppliers, some of whom may leave the community or the state. Participants described the Liberty closure as the first of the dominoes. They pointed to changes at Boag's, Nyrstar and Liberty as signs of wider change in the region. Because businesses are linked through supply chains, the uncertainty is statewide.

“Bell Bay’s skilled workers are Tasmania’s future. We need to keep them here.”

Community and the social fabric

Many families have worked across Bell Bay Aluminium and Liberty for generations, including husbands and wives across both sites. Bell Bay industry has also raised standards through the supply chain in safety, workplace practice, equal opportunity and diversity, including for women in industry.

Population loss would hit health and education services, sporting clubs, property values and learning pathways in George Town, West Tamar, Dorset and neighbouring communities. Young people want to stay in Tasmania, close to their families, and Bell Bay has long been where they aim to train and work.

Workforce, skills and apprenticeships

Job losses across the region are creating deep uncertainty for workers, families and businesses. Skilled workers are leaving. Once they go, businesses that want to restart or grow will struggle to find the skills they need. These are exactly the people Tasmania needs to keep: skilled, working-age people raising families.

Participants asked whether the region faces a skills shortage or a people shortage. Either way, the answer includes population growth. Businesses also find it hard to compete with industrial zones in regional Western Australia and Queensland on wages and conditions.

For generations, Bell Bay has been a critical training base for apprentices, tradespeople, engineers and other highly skilled workers across Tasmania. Demand remains strong, with one business receiving around 150 applications for a single apprenticeship.

Since the forum: The power deal, and then what?

Since the forum, a five year power deal and support package for Bell Bay Aluminium has been secured, and Tasmanian Labor welcomes it. It gives the smelter's workers, its suppliers and the George Town community a measure of certainty they have waited a long time for. It also means investments that depended on the smelter can now move forward.

But what we heard goes well beyond one deal: Businesses hit by the Liberty closure are still carrying those debts. The future of the Liberty site, and of the workers and contractors who depended on it, remains unresolved. Some skilled workers have already left and will not come back. The planning, approvals and coordination problems raised in the room have not changed.

Participants were clear that the next steps should start now: Any partnership with Bell Bay Aluminium should be about the future of the whole site, not just the term of the deal. Planning for what comes after cannot wait until year four. The precinct needs a strategic plan for what comes next.



The future role of government

The forum made clear that what happens at Bell Bay is not an abstract industry issue. It decides whether families can stay, whether businesses survive and whether young people have a future in the region.

Certainty

Major industry needs long-term certainty on energy, delivered early enough for businesses to plan and invest. Contingency plans should be ready before a crisis, not after it.

Communication

Businesses, workers and councils should hear directly from government about decisions that affect them. Government should help businesses talk directly to the agencies and GBEs they deal with.

Coordination

Agencies, councils and government businesses should work towards the same priorities for the precinct, with government acting as an enabler rather than a blocker.

Delivery

Major energy and industry projects need to move from announcement to construction. Planning and approvals should give local communities a real say and let councils back good projects.

Accountability

Someone must own the northern economic plan and be accountable for delivering it. The public service should be accountable for outcomes and responsive to elected members and the communities they represent.

Ambition

Tasmania should go after major opportunities with the same ambition as other states and commit to making them happen. That includes preparing communities for change with a clear vision of the future and a strategy to get there.

Strategic opportunities

The second half of the forum turned to opportunities. Participants were clear that the power deal should be the start of a bigger plan for the precinct, not the end of one.

A renewable energy port and maintenance hub.

Participants saw renewable port expansion as a major opportunity, supported by a masterplan for the port's future requirements. A maintenance hub for offshore wind and other renewable projects was identified as where the money and the long-term activity lie. Getting major generation projects moving would unlock a chain of further investment.

Defence and advanced manufacturing.

The Australian Maritime College could anchor a centre of excellence for the region. Defence manufacturing tied to AUKUS was raised as a significant opportunity for the precinct.

Education aligned to industry.

The University of Tasmania and the Australian Maritime College can help bring people to the region and keep them here, with education and training aligned to where industry is growing. Bell Bay's long record as a training base is an asset to build on. Strong demand for apprenticeships shows young people still want to train and work here.



A region people want to live in.

If Tasmania commits to building a hub for trade, advanced manufacturing and engineering students and workers, every piece needs to be in place.

That starts with adequate housing and access to health and other services. It also takes the things that make a place somewhere people want to live: sporting clubs with a strong culture and deep community ties, and pubs, bars and restaurants.

Sporting clubs and community organisations should be part of this, not just businesses. A steady pipeline of young people moving from the mainland gives them every reason to get involved.

The goal is people who choose to settle in George Town and the Tamar, not people who fly in and fly out. Attracting migration and growing the population are part of the same picture.

Ambition and a plan.

Participants want Bell Bay actively promoted as Tasmania's industrial heart, and the ideal place for new generation and for industry to grow and innovate. Projects that depended on the smelter's future, including new export and port infrastructure, now have a pathway forward.

New energy users show the precinct can attract new industries, and community partnerships. The region should define what it wants to become and how to attract it, supported by strategic analysis and planning.

The Bell Bay Advanced Manufacturing Zone was set up to diversify the precinct and protect it from shocks, and that role should be backed and strengthened.

“We want people to settle here, not fly in and fly out.”

What success should look like

1 CERTAINTY FOR MAJOR INDUSTRY

long-term energy arrangements, planning that starts now for when the current deal ends, and a contingency plan if a major employer comes under pressure.

2 A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE PRECINCT

A clear plan for Bell Bay, with someone accountable for delivering it.

3 HONEST COMMUNICATION

Businesses, workers and councils informed directly and early, and communities prepared for change.

4 COORDINATED GOVERNMENT

Agencies and GBEs aligned behind Bell Bay as an industrial hub.

5 NEW ENERGY DELIVERED

Major generation projects built, and the port positioned as a renewable energy and maintenance hub.

6 A PLANNING SYSTEM THAT SAYS YES

Planning reform, up-to-date land classifications, faster approvals and a real say for councils.

7 A SKILLED WORKFORCE THAT STAYS

Apprenticeships, education aligned to industry, and jobs that keep skilled families in the region.

8 A PLACE PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE

Housing, services, sporting clubs, hospitality and a strong community that attract people to settle, not fly in and fly out.

Tasmanian Labor will use these findings to inform its policy development, parliamentary work and continued engagement with Bell Bay, George Town and Northern Tasmania.



Conclusion

What we heard at Bell Bay closely matches what we heard at the Tasmanian Labor Northern Economic Forum in Launceston on 6 July 2026. Two forums with different participants and different industries reached the same conclusion. Northern Tasmania does not lack opportunity. It has been held back by a lack of coordination, confidence and delivery.

Both forums called for a clear plan for the North, with someone accountable for delivering it. Both found government agencies and government businesses pulling in different directions, and planning and approvals holding back investment. Both treated Bell Bay and major industry as strategic assets and raised the same concerns about skills and keeping young people in the region. Both saw housing and services as essential to making the North a place people want to live.

Bell Bay and George Town are not short on skills, industry or ambition. What the region has lacked over the past year is certainty, honest communication and a government with a plan.

The five-year power deal for Bell Bay Aluminium is a welcome step. But workers, businesses and families in this precinct have carried a heavy load, and many are still carrying it.

This report is part of Tasmanian Labor's ongoing work across the North. We will keep listening, hold the Government to account on what we heard and build these lessons into our policy for the region. The full report from the Northern Economic Forum is available at: <https://taslabor.org.au/our-plan/vision-for-the-north/>

BELL BAY IS THE INDUSTRIAL HEART OF TASMANIA.

It needs certainty, coordination and a government that delivers.