



Tasmanian
Labor

Monday, 6 July 2026

Tasmanian Labor Northern Economic Forum

WHAT WE HEARD



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DATE Monday, 6 July 2026

LOCATION The Workshop, University of Tasmania, Inveresk

CONVENED BY Tasmanian Labor

**Northern Tasmania does not lack opportunity.
It has been held back by a lack of coordination, confidence and delivery.**

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A MESSAGE FROM THE HON JOSH WILLIE MP, JANIE FINLAY MP AND JESS GREENE MP

Northern Tasmania is a region of enormous strength.

It has world-class agriculture, food and fibre, advanced manufacturing, major industry, tourism, education, health, energy, natural assets and a highly skilled workforce.

However, businesses are facing rising costs and slower approvals. Families are struggling with housing, childcare and the cost of living. Major employers are under pressure, facing uncertain futures or leaving the region. Skills shortages are holding back growth. Essential health, education and community services are stretched. Too many decisions affecting the North are still being made without the North.

As representatives of State Labor, Bass and Northern Tasmania, our responsibility is to listen, represent our communities and work for them.

We convened the Tasmanian Labor Northern Economic Forum because we wanted to listen carefully, understand the local experience, test ideas, build relationships and develop practical policy.

We brought together leaders from business, industry, local government, education, employees, regional development and community organisations to identify what is holding the region back, where the opportunities are and what needs to change.

We thank everyone who attended and contributed openly and constructively. Your experience, ideas and willingness to engage gave us a clearer understanding of the challenges facing the region and the practical action needed to address them.



The message was clear. Northern Tasmania has the people, assets and ideas to succeed. What it needs is leadership, coordination and a government capable of following through with a long-term vision and regional activation.

Labor will use what we heard to strengthen our work on the issues that matter most: secure jobs, cost-of-living relief, strong health and education services, responsible use of public money and practical economic development.

We will continue to represent the North and look to develop policies that provide greater security for workers, families, businesses and communities.

We said this was just the first conversation and the beginning of an ongoing dialogue. We look forward to working with you to build the future of Northern Tasmania.

Hon. Josh Willie MP

Leader of the Tasmanian
Labor Party

Janie Finlay MP

Deputy Leader of the
Tasmanian Labor Party
Member for Bass

Jess Greene MP

Member for Bass

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report summarises the strongest themes, ideas, areas of agreement and practical opportunities raised during the Tasmanian Labor Northern Economic Forum.

It is not a transcript and does not attribute individual comments unless they were made during the formal group report-back.

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 considered five questions:

- What is holding Northern Tasmania back?
- What are Northern Tasmania's biggest challenges and roadblocks?
- Where are Northern Tasmania's biggest opportunities?
- What practical reforms would make the biggest difference?
- What should success look like for Northern Tasmania in five years?





WHO WAS IN THE ROOM

The forum included representatives from major industry, small and medium-sized businesses, family businesses, agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, hospitality, infrastructure, local government, education, unions, media, regional development and community services.

The following organisations were represented at the forum. Listing does not imply organisational endorsement of this report, Tasmanian Labor or any political position.

- Dixon Hotel Group
- Tasmanian Leaders
- Eaglecrest
- Tamar Valley Wine Route
- The Examiner
- United Workers Union
- Fruit Growers Tasmania
- University of Tasmania
- Hawthorn Football Club
- Waverley Mills
- Housing Industry Association
- West Tamar Council
- Hudson Civil
- Westella Vineyard and Tamar Valley Wine Route
- JMC Group of Companies
- Western Junction Sawmill
- Junction Farm
- Wine Tasmania
- Launceston Airport
- ACEN Australia
- Launceston Central
- Bell Bay Advanced Manufacturing Zone
- Launceston Chamber of Commerce
- The Benevolent Society
- Mudbar Restaurant, Blue Social Eatery, Hello Georgie and Mudbar Farms
- Boag's workforce
- NRM North
- CBM Sustainability
- Pivot Maritime International
- City Mission
- Regional Development Australia Tasmania
- City of Launceston
- Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association
- Cripps
- Tasmanian Berries

SUMMARY OF THEMES

Northern Tasmania has a strong economic base

- The region has major strengths in advanced manufacturing, agriculture, food and fibre, tourism, health, education, energy, natural assets, practical skills and liveability.

The issues are connected

- Jobs, housing, childcare, skills, services, planning, infrastructure, tourism and major industry cannot be addressed separately.

Confidence has been damaged

- Recent closures, uncertainty around major employers, rising costs, planning delays and inconsistent government decisions are affecting investment and consumer confidence.

Delivery matters

- Participants were sceptical of more process, more announcements and more consultation without outcomes.
- They wanted decisions, funding, accountability and visible follow-through.

Government must enable investment

- Participants were not asking government to control the economy. They wanted government to remove barriers, coordinate decisions, support infrastructure and create the conditions for private investment and business certainty.

The region needs a shared direction

- Northern Tasmania needs a clear, locally informed economic plan supported by all three levels of government and backed by funding, timeframes and accountability.

Services are part of the economy

- Health, education, housing, childcare and community services are not separate from economic policy. They determine whether people can live, work and raise families in the region.

WHAT WE HEARD



1. A shared regional vision

- Northern Tasmania needs support to form a clear and coordinated economic direction.
- Participants called for a long-term plan that identifies priority industries, investment opportunities, infrastructure needs, population settings and future workforce needs.

The North needs decision-makers to know what it wants to be, what it wants to attract and what it is prepared to back.

2. Business and consumer confidence

- Low disposable income, rising costs, uncertainty around major employers and inconsistent government decisions are affecting investment.
- Confidence was linked to certainty, competent leadership, local input and delivery.

Confidence will not return through announcements alone. It requires certainty and visible follow-through.

3. Decisions made with the region

- Participants said decisions affecting Northern Tasmania are too often made in Hobart, interstate or overseas without enough understanding of local circumstances.
- Local communities should be involved earlier in decisions affecting jobs, investment, infrastructure, services and major employers.

Northern Tasmania wants decisions made with the region, not imposed on it.

4. Planning, approvals and red tape

- Planning delays, regulatory complexity, state taxes and duplicated processes were consistently identified as barriers to investment.
- Participants wanted faster approvals, clearer pathways and stronger government facilitation.

The government should make it easier to invest, build, grow, create and maintain jobs.

5. Major industry and manufacturing

- Bell Bay, advanced manufacturing, renewable energy, freight, ports and major industry were seen as strategic assets.
- Their potential depends on coordinated infrastructure, reliable energy, utilities, government agencies and government businesses working towards the same priorities.

Major industries can be economic engines, but only when the government provides certainty and coordination.

6. Skills, training and future jobs

- Education and training pathways are not sufficiently aligned with a future workforce.
- Participants highlighted the need for better links between schools, TasTAFE, university and employers.

Training should prepare people for the jobs Northern Tasmania wants to create.

7. Housing, childcare and workforce participation

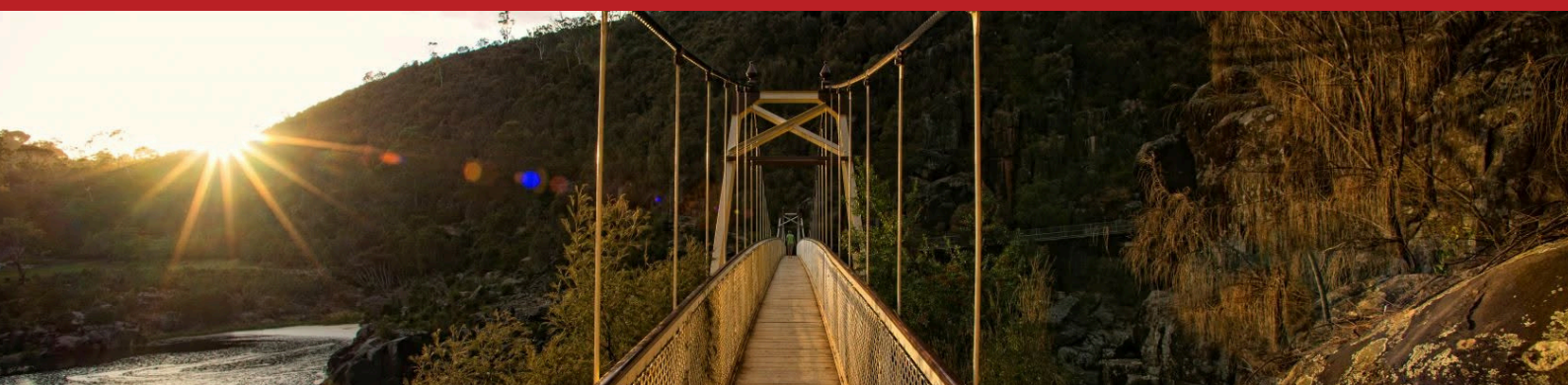
- Housing, childcare, education, health and regional services were viewed as core economic infrastructure.
- Businesses cannot attract workers if people cannot find a home, access childcare or receive the services their family needs.

Housing, childcare, education, health and services are part of the productivity equation.

8. Tourism, events and regional identity

- Northern Tasmania has strong food, wine, heritage, nature, culture and event assets.
- Participants wanted clearer regional positioning, stronger coordination and a more connected visitor economy.

Northern Tasmania needs a stronger identity and a coordinated plan that encourages visitors to stay longer, spend locally and support secure jobs.



9. Value-adding and market access

- Participants wanted more processing, manufacturing, branding and value-adding to occur locally.
- Northern Tasmania should retain more value from its agriculture, food, fibre, timber, minerals, energy, aquaculture, wine and manufacturing sectors.

The North should not only produce. It should process, manufacture, brand and retain more economic value locally.

10. Leadership, integrity and delivery

- Participants repeatedly raised the importance of clear leadership, honest communication, consistency and accountability.
- Confidence is weakened when governments make promises they do not deliver, shift priorities or become distracted by internal instability and integrity controversies.

The region wants leadership that listens, acts and can be trusted to deliver.



THE FUTURE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

The forum made clear that economic underperformance is not an abstract problem. It affects household budgets, jobs, services and regional confidence.

Jobs

- Poor planning, uncertainty and delayed approvals put existing jobs at risk and make it harder to attract new industries.

Participants called for a stronger focus on:

- Secure jobs
- Manufacturing
- Major industry
- Apprenticeships
- Agriculture
- Tourism
- Health and care work
- Future skills
- Value-adding
- Keeping young people in the region

Waste and failed delivery

- Participants were not calling for endless new spending.
- They wanted public money used effectively, priorities clearly identified and governments held accountable for outcomes.
- Tasmania cannot afford more cost blowouts, failed projects, fragmented decision-making and announcements without delivery.

Cost of living

- When regional economies weaken, families pay the price.
- Housing shortages, limited childcare, transport costs, insecure employment and stretched services all increase cost-of-living pressure.
- A stronger economy must translate into better outcomes for households, not only higher headline investment.

Services

- Health, education, TasTAFE, planning, community services and regional service delivery are essential to economic confidence.
- The government cannot claim to support regional growth while cutting or weakening the services that workers, families and businesses rely on.

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

The forum identified practical opportunities to protect Northern Tasmania's existing strengths, unlock future growth and bring the region's economic assets together.

Protect existing strengths

- Northern Tasmania's agriculture, manufacturing, major industry, tourism, health, education and liveability are genuine advantages.
- They require active stewardship and cannot be taken for granted.

Back future growth

- Priority opportunities identified during the forum included:
 - advanced manufacturing
 - Bell Bay and major industry
 - renewable energy
 - health workforce development
 - tourism and events
 - food and wine exports
 - agritourism
 - regional value-adding
 - housing and childcare
 - apprenticeships and future skills

Government should act as an enabler

- Many barriers arise from systems that already exist but are slow, fragmented or poorly coordinated.
- Planning, training, investment attraction, land use, tourism promotion, market access and government communication must become more responsive.
- Government agencies, councils and government businesses should work towards the same regional priorities.
- This is particularly important for energy, ports, freight, water, land use and major industrial investment.
- The government needs to provide strong services that help attract and retain people in the region.

One economic proposition

- Northern Tasmania's economic story is currently fragmented.
- Bell Bay, manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, food and wine, health, education, housing, events and liveability should be brought together as one coherent regional proposition.
- Like any business, Northern Tasmania needs a coordinated strategic plan and vision.

WHAT SUCCESS SHOULD LOOK LIKE

Participants identified seven broad outcomes for Northern Tasmania.



Clear direction

A shared strategic plan, regional identity and clearly defined priorities.



A confident place to invest

Better business conditions, faster approvals, stronger manufacturing and support for priority industries.



Secure jobs and future skills

More apprenticeships, stronger training pathways and skills aligned with future industries.



Strong services

Accessible health, education, housing, childcare and community services that support families and workforce participation.



Coordinated major industry

Aligned infrastructure, energy, utilities, government businesses and investment pathways.



Stronger leadership and accountability

Clear responsibility, honest communication, measurable progress and sustained engagement.



A stronger visitor economy

Better coordination and promotion of tourism, events, food, wine, heritage, nature and regional communities.

Tasmanian Labor will use these findings to inform its policy development, parliamentary work and continued engagement across Northern Tasmania.



CONCLUSION

Northern Tasmania is not short on ambition, expertise or opportunity. What it has lacked is a clear economic development plan, sustained focus, disciplined delivery, strong leadership and the capacity to bring the region's strengths together.

Tasmanian Labor is listening and committed to building policy with the people affected by it.

Northern Tasmania deserves leadership that creates secure jobs, eases cost-of-living pressure, protects services and delivers value for public money.

Northern Tasmania does not lack opportunity. It needs leadership, coordination, confidence and delivery.

Tasmanian Labor looks forward to being in a position to deliver all four.

Tasmanian **Labor**



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