



Community and Public Sector Union

CPSU (State Public Services Federation Tasmania) Inc. - CPSU (SPSF Group, Tasmanian Branch)

Chairperson
Premier's Economic & Social Recovery Advisory Council

Email: secretariat.PESRAC@treasury.tas.gov.au

Dear Council members,

I write on behalf of the Members of the Community & Public Sector Union (CPSU). The CPSU represents workers in Tasmania's public sector along with employees in a range of government business enterprises and the University of Tasmania.

Everyday our members serve the Tasmanian community, caring for us when we are sick, helping us to learn and develop, protecting our unique environment, keeping us safe and planning for our future. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a new set of challenges to those working in our public sector, challenges they have responded to with courage, dedication, commitment and innovation.

Given the central role the public sector has taken in Tasmania's pandemic response we are very keen to ensure our members have an opportunity to contribute to the work being undertaken by the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC). We understand the Premier has asked PESRAC to provide some initial advice by the end of June so the purpose of this correspondence is to put a few initial thoughts to you on the issues we believe PESRAC should consider.

1. Busting Traffic Congestion

Traffic congestion in our major cities has been a growing problem and one that has proven difficult to resolve. Replicating road and bridge infrastructure and building city bypasses is massively expensive and requires long term planning. The recent isolation, whereby many people worked from home, showed that there are alternatives to expensive infrastructure solutions.

As businesses reopen and workers return to offices the congestion issues will return. One solution is to change the way we work. There is no reason why start and finish times for many businesses can't be staged over a few hours or that some staff can't continue to perform their duties from home on a full time or part time basis with their agreement. Many businesses will need to consider options such as these to comply with physical distancing requirements anyway.

We believe it would be useful for PESRAC to provide some advice to the Premier as early as possible to consider ways the government can support employees and employers to change work practices in ways that reduce traffic congestion.

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2. Creating jobs Tasmanians can count on

The negative impacts of job insecurity have been exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Far too many workers were left without access to paid leave entitlements or an ability to access Jobkeeper payments because their employment arrangements were insecure.

As we plan to reconstruct the economy and get Tasmanians working again we should seek to create jobs that people can count on. Secure, permanent jobs. Jobs that entitle workers to paid recreation and personal leave. Jobs that are safe and pay decent wages. Jobs that provide access to training and career paths.

We believe that one of the first recommendations PESRAC should make to the Premier is to clearly define the types of jobs we want to create in the reconstruction and for any government funding for jobs growth to be contingent on jobs of this type being created.

3. Clarity around measures of social health

PESRAC has been established to advise the government on both a recovery to our economic health and our social health. The indicators of economic health are well understood and regularly reported in budgets. The indicators of our social health are less well understood.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic Tasmania was said to be in a golden age, leading the country on many economic indicators. Despite this we had high levels of housing stress, high levels of homelessness, low educational attainment, poor physical health, a hospital system in crisis, rising job insecurity, low wages, low wage growth and rising inequality. To plan a recovery in our social health we first need to agree on what the measures of social health are and establish targets against those measures.

We believe an early recommendation from PESRAC to the government should be to establish a clear set of positive social health indicators for our community and to set goals to meet these through the reconstruction.

4. Encouraging domestic demand

Until international markets, global trade and travel return to something resembling pre-COVID conditions the Australian and Tasmania economies will be reliant on domestic demand. We will need those in jobs to be sufficiently confident about their own circumstances and their future to spend, borrow and invest. Confidence in the domestic economy can be quickly dampened.

There are many things outside the control of the Tasmanian government that could dampen confidence – an early removal of JobKeeper or reduction in JobSeeker payments, changes to industrial relations laws that further undermine job security or a significant downturn in the markets.

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There are however things within the Tasmanian government's control that will boost confidence – a clear reconstruction plan and using its influence as a State's largest employer to put upward pressure on wages and ruling out wage freezes or job cuts.

We believe PESRAC should be providing clear and early advice to the Tasmanian government that it should take measures to boost domestic demand by providing its employees with wage and job guarantees, instructing government businesses to do the same and encouraging business to act similarly.

Thank you for the opportunity to put these early thought to PESRAC. We are keen to contribute to future stages and to help to develop the most effective reconstruction plan possible for Tasmania.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Lynch
General Secretary
CPSU (SPSFT) Inc.

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