

## **Transcript of part of an interview by Leon Compton of Rufus Black on ABC radio on 4 June 2024**

### **Rufus Black**

Yes, very much. As you can see, the forestry building is progressing well. And now we've got this really interesting opportunity with the state government leaning into how do we fund this STEM facility? You might recall back in 2017, the state recognised just how important it was that we address STEM education in Tasmania, built new facilities. Commonwealth recognised it was a priority project. And, you know, we've seen just how important that whole agenda is for Tasmania. And now our government is looking to see how can they contribute to making that happen. You saw the announcements from Minister Ogilvie about committing to that, given... And that's really important for Tasmania's education future.

### **Leon Compton**

And so when we talk about STEM, we should make it clear we're talking about science, technology, engineering and maths.

### **Rufus Black**

Yeah, really important. I mean, when you think about how just a one per cent lift in the per cent of people who had a one of those qualifications over a 20 year period, it added a billion dollars to the state's economy. This is the kind of thing that shapes the state's future. And it's where many of the new jobs are coming from.

### **Leon Compton**

VC, if I recall that press release correctly from Madeleine Ogilvie, what she was supporting was the new STEM building being constructed at Sandy Bay.

### **Rufus Black**

Yeah, well, she's certainly keen on that as a location. And we're consulting with our STEM, with the staff who teach all of that to say what's the right spot for it. They're the ones who are the experts in how to think about how do we deliver the best possible STEM education for our students, for the teachers who need to teach STEM in the state and also for making STEM more broadly engaged with everybody. You think in, you know, in Victoria and other states which are really committed to STEM, they have much more public access to STEM facilities. So we need to get the best possible view about what's the... What kind of facility would really enable that to happen? But it is pricey. And that's where the government, you know, recognising this is a \$500 million challenge and kind of stepping into that. It's a very welcome thing.

**Leon Compton**

But you've bought a huge site in Hobart CBD where you want to build it. And now the Tasmanian government is saying, oh, we could be interested. But if it's at Sandy Bay and then you've got the federal government, who you told us last time in an interview here, were enormously critical in providing funding if it was going to happen at all. So where's it at?

**Rufus Black**

Well, it's at the point where, you know, we're looking to put that, talk to our staff. They have a process to go through to kind of put that proposal together. And then, you know, given that the state government's got itself interested and that's great, we really value that because in the north of the state, remember that it was the state, Commonwealth and local government all lining up behind providing facilities there that made that happen. And, you know, that's proving enormously important for the north. So we need a proposal that all three levels of government can look at. And decide how, you know, what levels of commitment they're putting, they're putting to it. But, you know, as you know, if we're not able to kind of realise value from Sandy Bay, that's why we appreciate government stepping in and saying, yep, we're prepared to look at funding this. But if it's at Sandy Bay? Well, that's where they're at. And if that's where it lands, that's we'll work with that.

**Leon Compton**

What does it say about the management of the university that now we're at a situation wherein you've been holding that site in the CBD of Hobart for what, five years, seven years? I'm not sure exactly. Correct me. But you've been holding that for a number of years. It's cost you tens of millions of dollars on the balance sheet. And now it might even not be the site of a STEM campus at all.

**Rufus Black**

It's a very it's a for any university that's got a major part of its life based in the city. It's right in the core of all of the things that we've got. It's a really great asset. Doesn't lose any value. It's providing all the facility, car parking facilities for staff that are currently working and teaching in the city. So it's a good asset to have. We haven't lost any money on it at all. So, yeah, no loss to the university from having that terrific, that terrific, well-located site.