

Opinion OURS & YOURS

Analysis lacking in government's land use plan

Is the urban growth boundary extension, a serious housing measure or political tactic? Asks **Peter McGlone**

The Minister for Planning and Housing Felix Ellis has released for public comment a document titled 'Southern Tasmanian Regional Land Use Strategy Urban Growth Boundary Update: Consultation Paper'. Submissions are due on March 14, 2025.

The government's proposed urban growth boundary 'update' is in fact an extension. It is proposed to expand the boundary by a total of 615.8ha including 15 parcels of land across the greater Hobart region to facilitate residential development.

Is this a timely response to the need for more land for residential development? Or is it a political tactic designed to make the Minister look like he is doing something to increase the supply of land for housing?

I believe it is primarily a political tactic. The reason is that the minister has pre-empted the review of the Southern Tasmanian Regional Land Use Strategy (STRLUS), which is currently occurring. The first stage of consultation was during September to December 2024, a draft strategy will be released in the coming months and a final strategy is due in the second half of the year.

One of the key outcomes of the strategy review is to provide the evidence-base for supplying land for housing and whether the urban growth boundary needs to be expanded and, if so, where and by how much.

Given the submissions could not have been assessed before Mr Ellis decided on February 2 to go down this path, what was the evidence that he

used to identify areas for expanding the urban growth boundary? It seems like the Minister is snubbing his nose at the strategic planning process and is saying 'I know better'.

When you visit some of the areas, as I have done, it becomes clear the government has done a very unprofessional job that may fail to deliver much new residential land and will cause conflict in the community.

The government proposes one parcel of land at Risdon Vale that will result in the loss of part of the Two Rivulets Park and it will be replaced by residential housing.

One parcel at Pass Rd, near Clarendon Vale, includes a large vineyard. Will it be bulldozed to make way for housing?

One parcel at Lauderdale includes one of the most important areas of native forest left in this part of Clarence and identified in the planning scheme as highly important native vegetation. Part of this area is only a few metres above sea level and the land is adjacent to the now disused Lauderdale landfill. This land

will be very hard to sell.

One parcel at Sorell seems ideal for housing as it is cleared land and adjacent to serviced areas. But, if this very large area were developed (the government claims it has potential for 3000 new dwellings) this would exacerbate the severe traffic congestion between Sorell and Hobart. The high cost of transport would also diminish the affordability of this area for housing. This is a perfect example of why the Minister should have waited for the outcome of the

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Minister for Housing, Felix Ellis discussing the new planning legislation to be tabled in parliament. Picture: Linda Higginson

STRLUS review.

Most of the land identified for housing is a long way from Hobart, in Brighton, Sorell and Clarence. None is identified in Hobart and Glenorchy and one small parcel in the far south of Kingborough. Is this urban sprawl what Hobart needs?

It will be interesting to see what the draft STRLUS recommends about increasing land for housing: increased medium density infill, expanding the urban growth boundary or a mix of both.

When critics pointed out the need for medium-density housing to be

considered Minister Ellis was quick to say he supported that as well as expanding the urban growth boundary. The only problem is that the Minister is doing nothing to address medium density. More than five years ago, in November 2019, the then minister for planning Roger Jaensch started a process to amend the Statewide Planning Scheme to provide what he called gentle infill medium-density housing for Hobart. Gentle infill referred to avoiding problems such as over-shadowing existing housing.

That was the year 2019 and still no

Proposed move to city campus would create host of

In arguing that UTAS should be allowed to dispose of the Sandy Bay site to fund its developments in the city, Dean Winter was evidently impressed by continuing work on the old Forestry Building, in Melville St, and artist's impressions of its future use.

Setting aside the popular vote, a massive cost overrun, and the lack of a credible plan, Winter assured members in the House of Assembly (Proceedings, August 7, 2024) that he would have enjoyed being a student in the new building, with the

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experience there promising to be superior to his own at Sandy Bay. He overlooked the point that the new facilities could have been achieved at lower cost and in timelier fashion on the main campus.

Many people in Tasmania and beyond are baffled by UTAS's

decision to give up its greatest assets. Apart from the site's magnificence, the availability of space to grow, adapt and respond to new opportunities give it considerable advantages in the highly competitive world of higher education.

For some disciplines, there are

advantages in a city location, but a basic problem in moving the bulk of the university to the CBD is that it locks in modes of teaching and learning that may prove transient. The teaching spaces in the new building are for 20-40 students. The lack of lecture theatres (and cafeterias) rule out the possibility of all students in a class coming together for a live lecture. Live lectures are now a selling point in prestigious mainland universities.

The Sandy Bay campus has always been a drawcard for staff and students

on the mainland and overseas. Professors and lecturers were able to assume offices with windows and postgraduates dedicated work-space, all of which are unfeasible in Melville St.

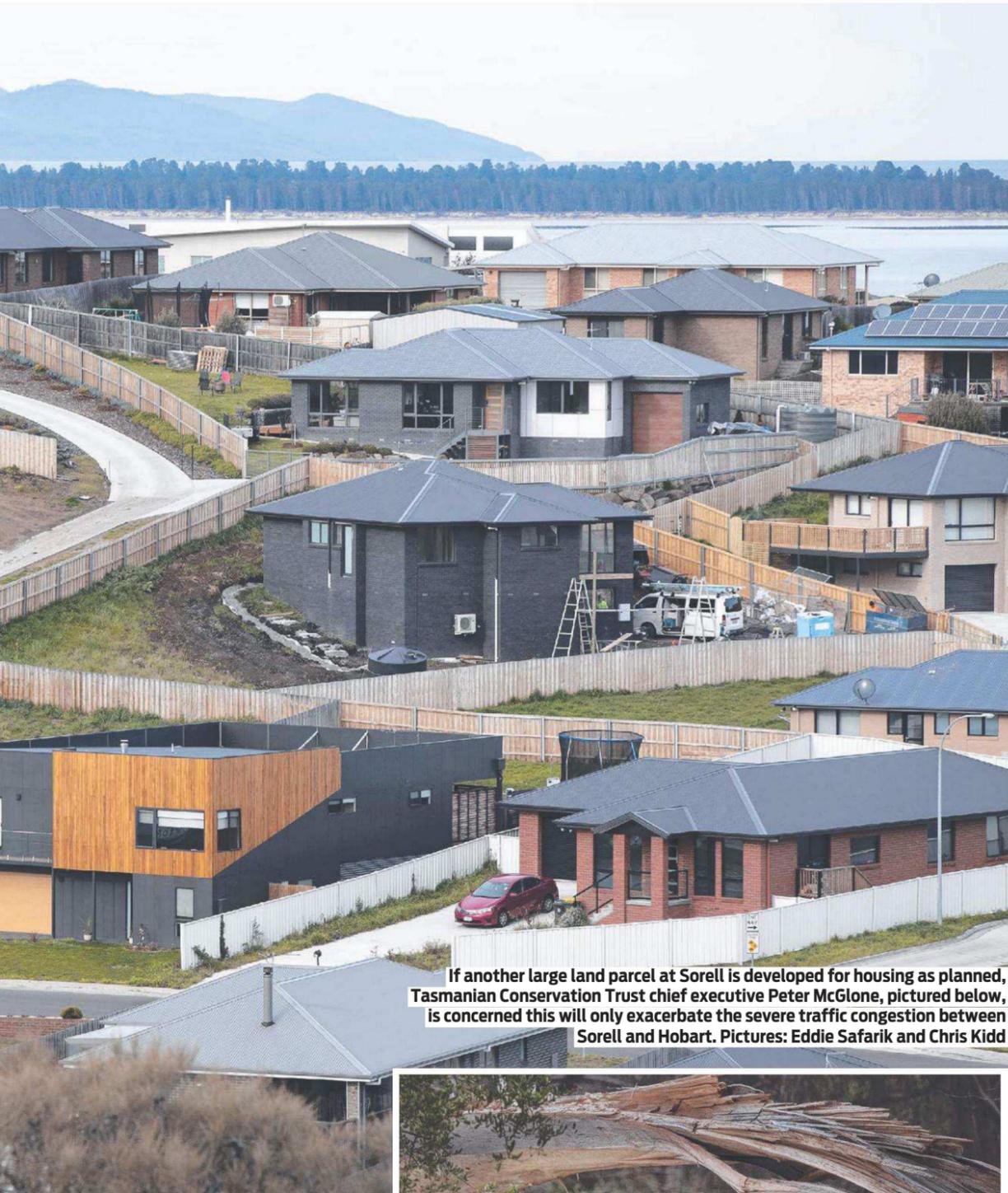
Above all, there is the natural beauty of the Sandy Bay campus.

I wonder if anyone told Mr Winter that in 2020 it was ranked as one of the 10 most photogenic campuses in the world.

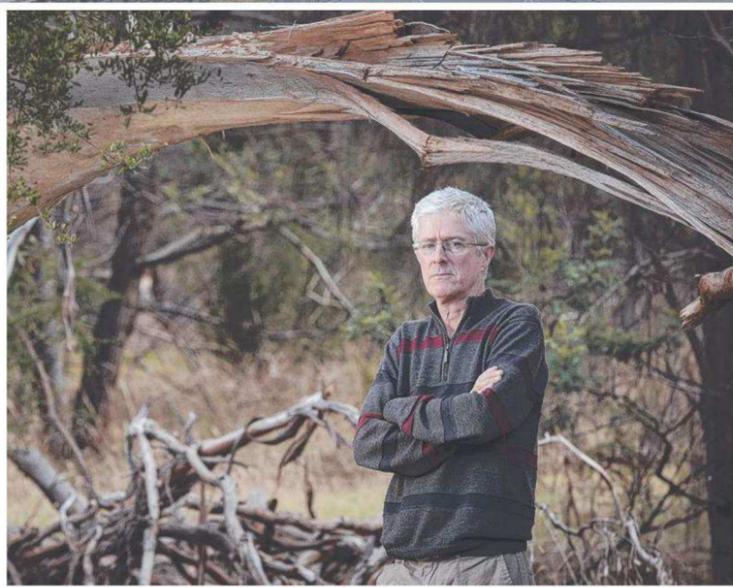
UTAS was aware of this recognition. Someone in administration had the bright idea of

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If another large land parcel at Sorell is developed for housing as planned, Tasmanian Conservation Trust chief executive Peter McGlone, pictured below, is concerned this will only exacerbate the severe traffic congestion between Sorell and Hobart. Pictures: Eddie Safarik and Chris Kidd



action to make more land available for medium density.

It begs the question, why Minister Ellis focused on expanding the urban growth boundary and opted to recommend certain areas for residential development ahead of other areas? Given that the Minister pre-empted the review of the STRLUS and did not provide any additional analysis to support his chosen areas.

Peter McGlone is the chief executive of the Tasmanian Conservation Trust

Safety fears around salmon feed additive

Minster must follow world's best practice on ethoxyquin, writes **Sheenagh Neill**

The federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Julie Collins recently called on the Tasmanian state government to ensure regulatory protections "keep pace with the world's best practice and science" with respect to the salmon industry. Commendably, this sets the height of the bar for the industry in Tasmania and nationally.

However, Minister Collins also has responsibility for regulatory protections through her ministerial leadership of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority. The APVMA regulates drugs and stockfeed additives used in animals, including farmed salmon.

The Tasmanian community has developed a sharp focus on the salmon industry moving towards the looming federal election, so will Minister Collins follow her own advice and implement world's best practice with regards to drug use and additives that are permitted in salmon feed?

For example, the feed additive ethoxyquin should be carefully scrutinised. Originally registered as a pesticide for use on apples and pears, its use as a feed additive came about because it prevents fish meal from spontaneously catching fire. Shipping regulations mandated the addition of antioxidant(s) to fish meal, and ethoxyquin was chosen for its effectiveness and low cost.

In Australia ethoxyquin was never registered as a feed additive because it was exempted from registration in 2001, based on data presented in a report commissioned on behalf of the salmon industry. Ethoxyquin residues in salmon have never been officially tested in Australia. This compares with more than 22,000 tests carried out on fish in Europe, with the results published in scientific journals and readily available to the public.

It has been shown that ethoxyquin is converted in salmon to more than 40 different transformation products, some of which have serious toxicity potential, and that ethoxyquin and

its transformation products accumulate in salmon flesh. In the past 25 years numerous research results on the toxicity of ethoxyquin and its transformation products have been published. These give serious grounds for concern about the use of ethoxyquin in food production.

Following an extensive expert scientific review of animal, human and environmental toxicity data the European Food Safety Authority concluded that, "it has not been established that the additive (ethoxyquin) does not have an adverse effect on animal health, human health or the environment". Because of these concerns, EFSA announced a ban on ethoxyquin use in salmon feed in 2017, with the ban coming into full effect in 2020. Salmon sold in Europe cannot contain measurable levels of ethoxyquin or its major transformation product. Would Tasmanian farmed salmon make the grade?

Feed manufacturers in Europe now use proven safer antioxidants, such as rosemary extract. The precautionary principle adopted by EFSA is world's best practice, with the safety of consumers and the environment paramount. In Tasmania the precautionary principle has been ignored despite repeated calls by many independent scientists. In Australia there is anecdotal evidence that the salmon industry may have responded to the EFSA ban on ethoxyquin but there are no published results of ethoxyquin residue concentrations. The APVMA has done nothing in response to the EFSA ban. It is time that Minister Collins took notice of world's best practice and moved to ban the use of ethoxyquin in animal feed and instigated residue monitoring of ethoxyquin and its transformation products that we, the unknowing public, consume in total ignorance of the levels of these toxic substances.

Sheenagh Neill is a bioinorganic chemist, Marine Protection Tasmania spokesperson and Tasmanian Alliance for Marine Protection member

problems for students, staff and everyone in CBD

putting up plaques to celebrate it. For walkers around the campus during lockdown, the plaques held the promise of better days. Then, in a matter of weeks, someone in authority had them taken down.

According to UTAS (The Mercury, October 27, 2024), the Forestry Building in Melville St will be completed early in 2026 and welcoming some 300 staff and 3000 students. Given staff cuts and declining enrolments, the numbers do not seem credible. It is certainly hard to imagine 3300 people being

accommodated in a city block not much bigger than the site, on which the mothballed Student Union stands, in Sandy Bay.

Given the internal lay-out of the building, divided into small classrooms, pods and work-stations, UTAS appears to be banking on only a small fraction of staff and students using the building at any one time. The assumption is that on-line teaching, rather than being a useful option and add-on, will be the norm. Yet there are signs of a countervailing trend. A concern for the wellbeing of

young people and an awareness of the implications of AI would suggest that social interaction and face-to-face learning will become more, rather than less important.

The prospect of even a thousand staff and students coming in and out of the Forest Building for an hour or so each day should worry everyone in the CBD. It will significantly increase congestion and render the Melville St carpark unusable as a public utility.

If all goes according to the management's plan, students in Arts and other faculties based in Sandy

Bay, who are commencing or resuming their studies, will be the last cohort of Tasmanians to have the option of studying at a green field, multi-disciplinary campus in their home state – a campus that offers space and facilities for study, the chance to meet their classmates and teachers in person, the opportunity to join clubs and societies, reinvigorate the university union, hang out in cafeterias, walk in the bushland, and chill out on the lawns.

I do hope that this cohort of students will make the most of a

genuine campus experience. In a year's time, if the UTAS plan proceeds, they will be lining up in Melville St to check into the new facilities, searching in vain for familiar faces among the milling crowd, perhaps lingering to contemplate the dome-lit wonderland, and then probably returning home to their laptops and possibly reconsidering their options. **Michael Bennett is a former long-serving Professor of History and now an Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Tasmania.**