

Bertelsmann Stiftung (ed.)

Winning Strategies for a Sustainable Future

Reinhard Mohn Prize 2013

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Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

© 2013 Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, Gütersloh

Responsible: Armando García Schmidt

Translation/Editing: Barbara Serfozo, Berlin

Production editor: Christiane Raffel

Cover design: Elisabeth Menke

Typesetting and Printing: Hans Kock Buch- und Offsetdruck GmbH, Bielefeld

ISBN 978-3-86793-491-6

www.bertelsmann-stiftung.org/publications

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Tasmania: Sustaining an Island's Future

Morgan Williams, Ingeborg Niestroy, Céline Diebold, Andreas Esche



Introduction

Tasmania Together

Inspired by the Tasmanian government in 1999, the community action plan Tasmania Together began by targeting the promotion of long-term social, economic and environmental goals. A unique feature of Tasmania Together has been the strong involvement of a broad group of citizens in defining such goals for the island state. Indeed, Tasmania Together has represented an inspirational effort to empower communities in sustainable development by engaging them to craft a vision, set goals and develop measures of what is important in their lives, and thereby ultimately improve government accountability to citizens.

However, as of December 2012, Tasmania Together lost its original mandate. Acknowledging the plan's groundbreaking features while citing the goal of streamlining government operations, Tasmanian Premier Lara Giddings initiated a bill presented to parliament in October 2012 to dissolve Tasmania Together's autonomous Progress Board and incorporate Tasmania Together into the state government's Department of Premier and Cabinet (Giddings 2012). At the time of this writing, it is unclear how this decision will impact the future of Tasmania Together and its activities.

Tasmania: an island state

The Australian island state of Tasmania is, in fact, an archipelago of more than 300 islands located just 240 kilometers south of mainland Australia. The main island is host to most of the state's population, 40 percent of which resides in or near the state capital of Hobart. Tasmania's total area is 68,401 square kilometers of which the main island accounts for 62,409 square kilometers, and the surrounding islands make up the balance. The state's size in area is roughly equal to that of Ireland, but the population is only 512,000 (ABS 2012).

Thanks to its large and relatively unspoiled natural environment, Tasmania is promoted as “the natural state”, a place where adventure, culture, heritage and luxury converge. In fact, almost 37 percent of Tasmania is protected within the borders of reserves, national parks and UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Tasmania has a diverse economy with many significant exporters, with most exports going to Asia. According to the state government’s current Economic Development Plan, the largest contributors to Tasmania’s export sector (i.e., exports to mainland Australia and overseas) are mining and mineral processing (37%), forestry and related products (32%), and food and agricultural products (30%). Notably, none of these sectors are major sources of employment, with mining and mineral processing accounting for merely 3.5 percent, forestry and related products 2 percent and agriculture 9 percent. Instead, the service sector generates the most jobs (about 48%) (GoT 2013).

Heated, divisive debates within Tasmania and across Australia about the use of the island’s unique indigenous forests played a key role in the formation of Tasmania Together. State and federal governments, recognizing the importance of forestry products to Tasmania’s export economy, generally promoted harvesting over conservation in order to maintain economic output. These aims clashed with the broad popular desire to protect unique forests, generating considerable social tensions throughout the island state.

Sustainable development policies and strategies in historical context

The Australian context

Australia has been a global leader in the formation of political parties targeting sustainability. The world’s first “green” party, the United Tasmania Group, was formed in Tasmania in 1972 and had a member elected to the state parliament in 1982. Established initially as a response to the acrid forestry debates underway in Tasmania, the party changed its name to The Green Independents after five of its candidates won seats in the 1989 state elections. The party changed its name again in 1992 to the Tasmanian Greens, and in the same year, the Australian Greens party was also formed.

Green parties, often in coalition with the Labor party, have continued to play a significant role in Tasmanian and Australian politics. The current government in Tasmania is a coalition of Labor and Greens, with the latter securing one-third of the seats in the House of Assembly in the state election held on March 20, 2010.

Australia is also a global leader in the development of sustainability strategies, with all levels of government having adopted a National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development (NS-ESD) in December 1992, five years after the publication of the Brundtland Report. Under this strategy, all Commonwealth organizations, departments, authorities, companies and agencies are required to incorporate principles of ecologically sustainable development into their decision-making and to produce an ecologically sustainable development report as part of their annual report. In 1999, this requirement was legislated within the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (DSEWPC 1999), marking the enactment of an important policy initiative.



In 1999, the Productivity Commission, an independent research and advisory body to the Australian government, conducted an extensive review of the NSESD strategy's implementation (Productivity Commission 1999). In its review, the commission identified natural resource management and environmental protection as two policy areas in Australia in which the integration of economic, environmental and social considerations figure prominently. These policy areas also provide best case examples of NSESD implementation: "A common feature in these areas is the application of various forms of partnerships among key stakeholders to achieve mutually agreed, integrated NSESD outcomes (ibid.)."

Highlighting tensions in the development of a regional forest agreement process, the report noted: "In some cases, [...] action has been 'crisis driven' – only taken in response to a looming problem" (ibid.). In Tasmania, NSESD requirements have long been included in many state and territory-level measures, including Tasmania's Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995.

Australia's NSESD strategy has attracted much academic research as interest in the role of communities as well as the barriers to institutional change have grown. Highlighting a core challenge in the quest to develop a more sustainable future in Australia, Professor Stephen Dovers, Director of the Fenner School of Environment and Society at Australian National University, stated (Dovers 2001): "Patterns of unsustainable behavior have emerged over long periods of time and are highly resistant to change." In fact, he noted, "Virtually every discussion of sustainability concludes that our existing institutional arrangements are part of the problem and that significant reform is required."

The national NSESD strategy has shaped in many ways the evolution of environmental sustainability policies in Tasmania. For example, the Department of Environment, Land and Water is now explicitly tasked with ensuring sustainable development. Sustainable develop-



ment policies developed under the State Policies and Projects Act (1992) govern a broad range of land and water issues, including coastal protection. However, the NSESD strategy appears to have had less influence on other policy areas, where feasible social and economic policies grounded in principles of sustainability have yet to be developed (McAllister, Wilkins and Croissant 2011).

Social and political forces driving the creation of Tasmania Together

Grounded in principles of community empowerment and partnership, Tasmania Together was conceived as a means of engaging a broad group of citizens in creating a shared vision of everyone's future. The idea originated with newly elected Premier Jim Bacon in 1999. A charismatic politician, Bacon was inspired by the example of a plan called Oregon Shines in the U.S.

state of Oregon. The Oregon initiative, like others worldwide, was based on the recognition that broad social, economic and environmental sustainability problems can be solved only through input from the community at large.

Conscious of the contentious nature of the issues facing Tasmania – such as efforts to manage the long-standing practice of clear-cutting forest land – Bacon saw the need to develop a process of consensus building in his home state. Others saw political concerns at play. During an interview conducted in January 2013, one person associated with the project noted that “the Tasmania Together initiative was all about a Labor government re-engaging with society after a conservative government had disengaged.”

In February 2000, when launching the initiative, Premier Bacon called it “a bold new state plan, the first medium- to long-term [20 years] plan ever attempted by an Australian state” and one that would establish “a sea change in Australian thinking” (Salvaris et al. 2000: 145). A year later, when introducing a parliamentary bill that would establish a statutory authority to oversee Tasmania Together, Bacon stressed that it was “a plan for the people and not a plan for me or other politicians. It is one of the very few ‘grass roots’ community owned and driven plans of its kind in Australia” (sic) (Tasmanian Parliament 2001: 38). Elsewhere, he had described it as a “community-government partnership.”

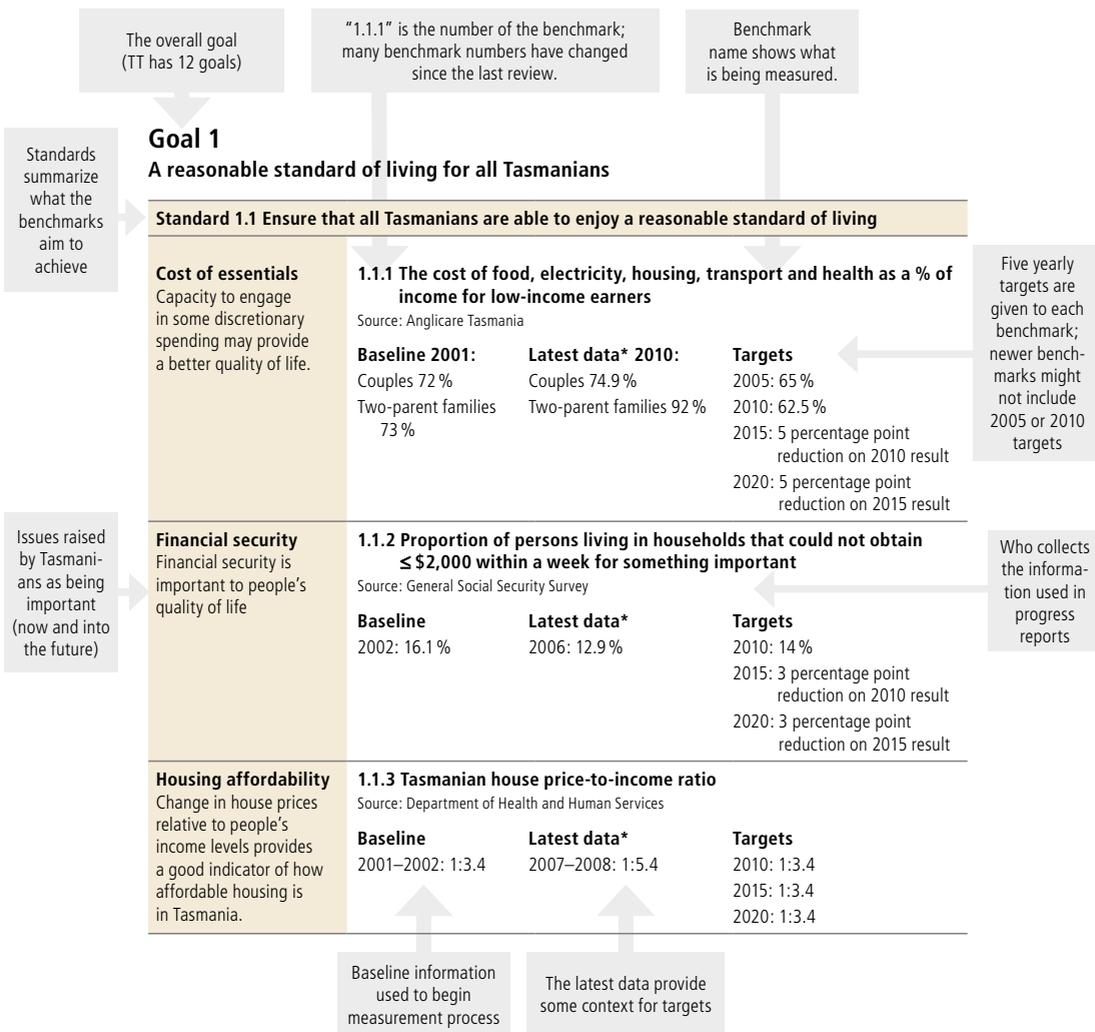
Community members were involved in the project from the start. In May 1999, following consultation with all political parties, Bacon appointed 22 members to a Community Leaders Group, tasking them with the development of a draft vision for Tasmania's future through 2020. A few months later, this group hosted a "search conference" in Hobart, which was attended by people from all walks of life.

The concerns and desires expressed at this conference served as the basis for a draft vision statement aimed at defining broad goals for Tasmania Together and at producing a framework under which wider community consultation could take place. This led to input from a further 60 individuals and to the compilation of draft goals subsequently sent to 14,000 citizens and organizations for comment. Sixty community meetings and a series of other consultation opportunities culminated in the first official vision statement and set of goals in October 2000.

Tasmania Together timeline

- August 1998: A new Labor government is elected; Jim Bacon becomes premier and promotes the idea of a community-led vision for Tasmania.
- May 1999: A Community Leaders Group is established to start the process, and a Search Conference is initiated to begin the consultation process.
- December 1999: A draft vision and goals is published and followed up by statewide community consultations through May 2000.
- October 2000: The initial 24 goals developed through the community consultations are published; these are then integrated into the ongoing Community Leaders Group's work in developing the first set of 221 benchmarks (released June 2001).
- June 2001: The Tasmania Together Progress Board Act (2001) is passed by parliament. This act provides for the appointment of an independent board to be serviced by government. The board is tasked with ensuring the ongoing operation of Tasmania Together and providing biennial progress reports to parliament.
- September 2001: The Tasmania Together action plan is formally published. First partnerships with other organizations are formed.
- March 2004: Jim Bacon steps down as premier due to terminal cancer.
- August–December 2005: Consultations held for the first five-year review of the action plan.
- August 2006: Five-year Tasmania Together Progress Report is presented in parliament.
- December 2006: Parliament approves a revised vision and the refinement of 12 goals and 143 benchmarks.
- November 2009: Parliament endorses 35 new or amended benchmarks.
- September–December 2010: Consultations held for the second five-year review of the plan.
- November 2011: Tenth-year Tasmania Together Progress Report is presented in parliament and sparks robust debate between the government and the opposition party about funding for the Tasmania Together plan. The government strongly defends the value of Tasmania Together.
- October 2012: The Tasmania Together Progress Board Repeal Act 2012 is presented in parliament and passed.
- December 2012: The Tasmania Together Progress Board is dissolved.

Figure 1: Tasmania Together goals and benchmarks



* Latest data available at time of Parliamentary reporting (Nov. 2011). For latest benchmark updates and detailed information, including explanation of measures, graphs and tables, please visit www.ttbenchmarks.com.au.

Source: Tasmania Together Plan 2011

In summarizing motivations for Tasmania Together, consultant Mike Salvaris noted that the history of conflict over issues such as forest use demanded a program that could help residents define and understand their own progress: “Tasmania has some compelling reasons to resolve its own problems of measuring progress. Essentially the problem is the discrepancy between popular perceptions of the quality of life in the community, and well-being as measured by narrower and more conventional economic indicators. This is quite like the situation that led some overseas communities to develop community indicator programs.

The capacity to understand the phenomenon, and develop an alternative way of seeing progress and quality of life, is a potentially important outcome of the Tasmania Together plan” (Salvaris et al. 2000: 152).

But it was the plan's political promise – a new approach to political democracy offering real power to the people – that proved its institutional Achilles heel. The Progress Board became, according to one interviewee, “the protector and defender of the process – the board was the process.” Moreover, the Tasmania Together action plan never became fully embedded in government agencies, many of which ultimately did no more than meet minimum reporting requirements.

Conceptual design and goals of the strategy

Established by statute in 2001, the independent Tasmania Together Progress Board was comprised of nine members, each appointed by the premier, with members of parliament exercising their right to comment on appointments. Aided by a small team of public servants, the board was tasked with overseeing the ongoing development of goals and benchmarks. In addition to conducting research and collecting data related to the benchmarks, the board was responsible for promoting Tasmania Together's objectives and developing coalitions of interest within and across communities.

The board was also required to report publically on progress made toward benchmarks. Finally, it was tasked with refining and revising stated goals through major reviews that involved a broad participatory process and were conducted at five-year intervals.

For the project's designers, a key feature of its community-driven vision lay in these participatory review processes. Indeed, the 2005 and 2010 review processes resulted in modifications to the project's goals and benchmarks that reflected changes in residents' concerns. By 2012, the Tasmania Together action plan comprised a set of 12 goals (Table 1) and 155 benchmarks in various social, economic and environmental areas. Progress toward these goals was assessed through core indicators, which generated a strong focus on the processes of statistical compilation and reporting.

Thus, the action plan was strong on outputs and statistical reporting but fell short in many other areas. Yet Tasmania Together was not explicitly conceived as a sustainable development strategy per se. Nonetheless, its underlying principles and aspirations, in particular the creation of a community-derived vision of the future promoting community participation in policymaking and encouraging long-term thinking in leadership, dovetail with the concept of sustainable development.

Around the world, barriers preventing the progress of sustainability strategies are frequently found within institutional arrangements. This certainly appears to have been the case with Tasmania Together. These barriers are rarely a product of design; rather, they derive from habitual institutional practices: departments separated into silos, a focus on output rather than outcomes, a concern with short-term goals rather than the long term, a politicization of budgetary processes and core ideologies that limit vision.



Tasmania Together faced all these issues during implementation and was further hampered by a core disconnect between the community goal- and benchmark-setting process (which took place within the Tasmania Together framework) and the policy actions needed to achieve these goals (a government function). These two crucial elements of the process lacked an institutionalized link, leading one interviewee familiar with the project to state, “The Tasmania Together model can add great value [to Tasmania’s quality of life] but it’s a scary approach – state-level autonomy and village-level issues!”

The primary limitation to the project’s approach was that gathering evidence to support the standards and benchmarks became the effort’s core activity. These benchmarks and their statistical foundation represent excellent outputs, but there was little focus on what tangible activity was needed in order to achieve the desired outcomes or goals. The Tasmania Together Progress Board did not interpret this as part of its role. Indeed, there appeared to be broad confusion as to the division between policymaking, which is a government function, and the task of researching policy options, which the Progress Board was empowered to do.

This confusion may well have had institutional roots: While the Tasmania Together Progress Board was statutorily independent of the government, its staff, being permanent civil servants, had no such separation. This ultimately meant that the staff and board, whether consciously or unconsciously, were functionally at odds with each other. The staff clearly had the power within the framework of their reporting process to research implementation options, but it focused instead on the ex ante aspects of policy formulation. This was a key limitation within the plan’s governance model, and it undermined the realization of Tasmania Together’s full potential.

Table 1: Tasmania Together: goals and core indicators

Goal	Indicator
1. A reasonable standard of living for all Tasmanians	Cost of living
2. Confident and safe communities	Feeling safe
3. High-quality education and training for lifelong learning and a skilled workforce	Literacy and numeracy
4. Active, healthy Tasmanians with access to quality and affordable health care services	Avoidable mortality
5. Vibrant, inclusive and growing communities where people feel valued and connected	Urban/regional population
6. Dynamic, creative and internationally recognized arts community and culture	Attendance at cultural and heritage sites
7. Acknowledgment of the right of Aboriginal people to own and preserve their culture, and share with non-Aboriginal people the richness and value of that culture	Cultural interpretation at visitor centers
8. Open and accountable government that listens to and plans for a shared future	Local government elections
9. Increased work opportunities for all Tasmanians	Workforce participation rate
10. Thriving and innovative industries driven by a high level of business confidence	Investment growth
11. Value and protect our biodiversity and natural heritage	Land protection
12. Sustainable management of our natural resources	Greenhouse gas emissions

Implementation process

The core activities of Tasmania Together included the initial establishment phase (1999–2000), the major consultation phase (2000–2001), the formulation of the vision, goals, and benchmarks (2001), and the five- and 10-year progress reviews. In addition, Tasmania Together presented to parliament annual finance and work program reports and biennial progress reports. On an ongoing basis, the project was primarily devoted to compiling benchmarks and measures of progress (indicators) and keeping an excellent online database up to date. In 2007, a program of headline indicator reports, referred to as the “Snapshots of Progress” reports, was initiated to highlight particular benchmarks.

The process underlying this set of tasks proved beneficial in itself. As one interviewee noted, “Tasmania Together has broken down the poorly managed resource, economic and social data sets into clear pieces.” Similarly, another interviewee pointed out that a core intent of the original benchmark indicator design “was to design [indicators] that would influence budgets” and “to incorporate into Tasmania Together measures that could lead to the development of composite measures, such as Genuine Progress Indicators.”

Indeed, the benchmark data set may be the most enduring legacy of Tasmania Together. After 10 years of collecting data from many sources (though 50% came from the Australian Bureau of Statistics) into a central database, Tasmania now has one of the most comprehensive

statistical resources of any state in Australia. This database is still readily accessible on the Tasmania Together website.

From the outset, Tasmania Together had a Partners' Program designed to help the Progress Board raise the profile of certain issues and spotlight important contributions toward relevant benchmarks being made by key community and business organizations. This program was initiated to help community and business organizations outline the actions they were taking to promote priority goals and benchmarks. Until its dissolution in December 2012, the board in return promoted partner activities as much as possible through its own communication activities. The program appears to have begun with good intentions in the Jim Bacon era, and some funding was provided to early partners. However, as Tasmania Together evolved, partnerships failed to become "truly embedded in the whole Tasmania Together program," as one interviewee explained.

In 2008 and 2009, many of the partnerships were revised and renewed. During this process, a Coalitions of Interest initiative was launched with partners to identify a set of priority benchmarks requiring action. The initiative involved extensive community-engagement work with partners and resulted in the identification of 15 benchmarks that were then given priority.

Communicating the work of the Progress Board, thus conveying the value of and outcomes associated with the Tasmania Together project as a whole, was fundamental to the success of the initiative. Most communication activities appear to have been focused on maintaining an excellent website, communicating with partners, reporting to parliament, conducting surveys in advance of the five- and 10-year reviews, and – beginning in 2008 – running an innovative Youth Challenge program and maintaining a presence on the Facebook and Twitter social networks.

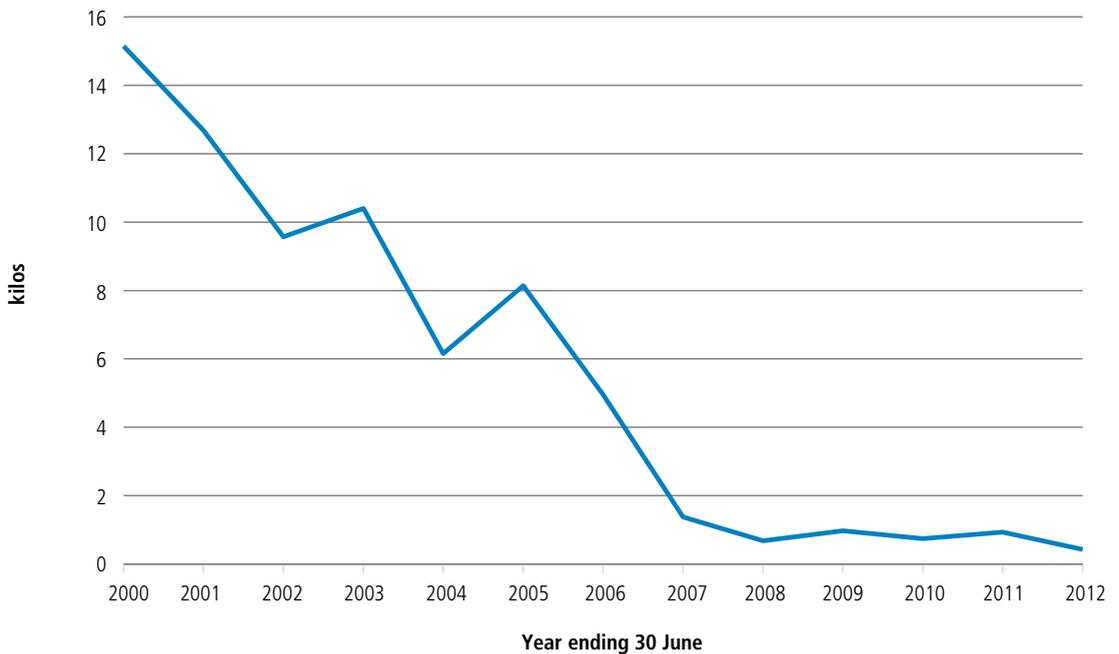


Despite these individual successes, the overall communication effort proved disappointing. Many commentators criticized Tasmania Together's low profile. According to one interviewee, only 200 articles on the project can be readily located for the years 2004 to 2012. There was also concern that the level of initial and ongoing communication with public servants was too low. In the eyes of one interviewee, this represented a "fatal mistake of early engagement."

Outcomes and achievements

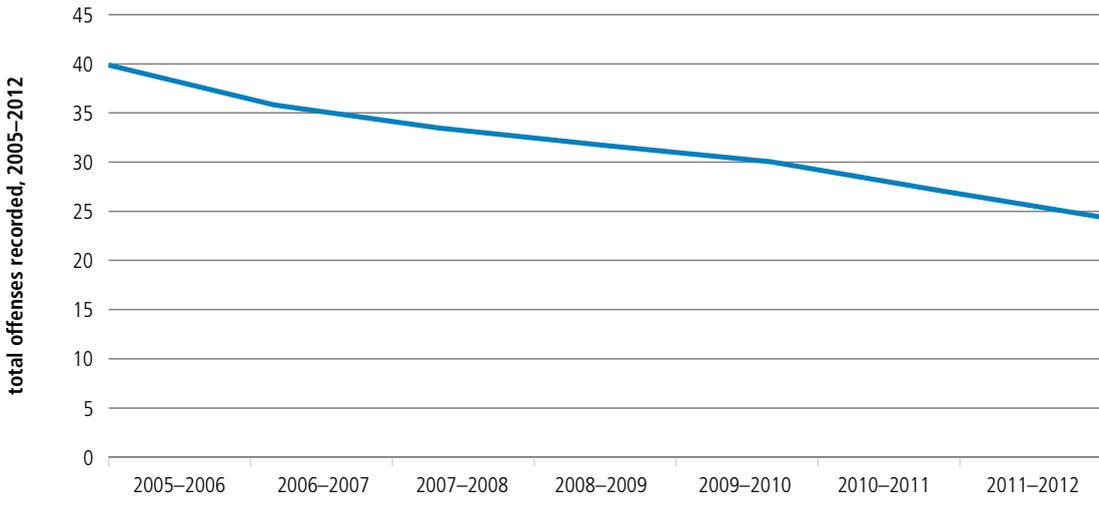
Tangible outcomes from the Tasmania Together project, such as a number of benchmarks that were ultimately achieved, have been well documented by Tasmania Together's benchmark statistics. Some high-profile examples of specific successes include: a reduction in the use of the mammalian toxin sodium fluoroacetate (1080), which relates to the 12th goal of sustainable resources management and the benchmark "reduce reliance on chemical use" (Table 1, Figure 2); a reduction in total offences within certain communities, which relates to the second goal of fostering "confident and safe communities" (Table 1, Figure 3), and a reduction in avoidable mortalities, which relates to the fourth goal of promoting "active, healthy Tasmanians with access to quality affordable health care" (Table 1, Figure 4).

Figure 2: Levels of mammalian toxin (1080 sodium fluoroacetate) use



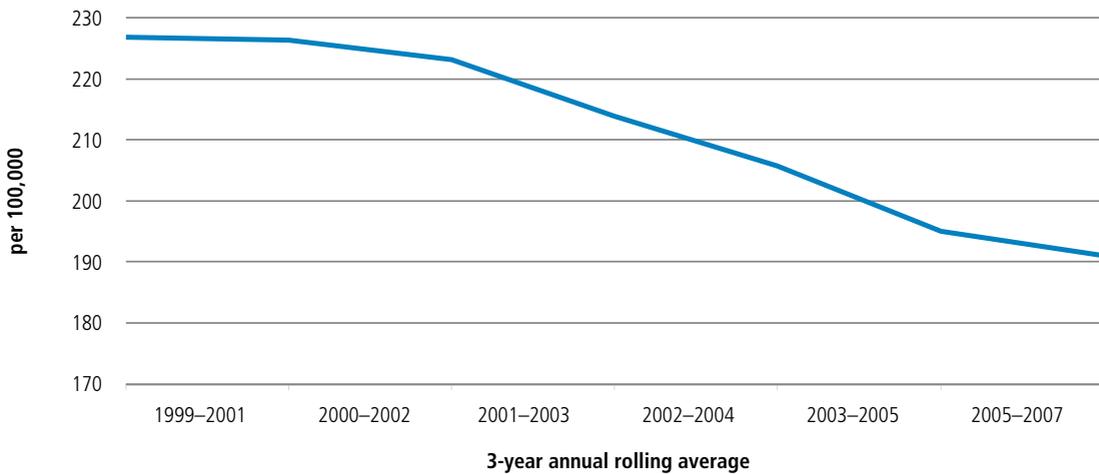
Source: Tasmania Together Benchmarks 2012

Figure 3: Confident and safe communities



Source: Tasmania Together Benchmarks 2012

Figure 4: Active, healthy Tasmanians with access to quality affordable health care services (avoidable mortality)



Source: Tasmania Together Benchmarks 2012

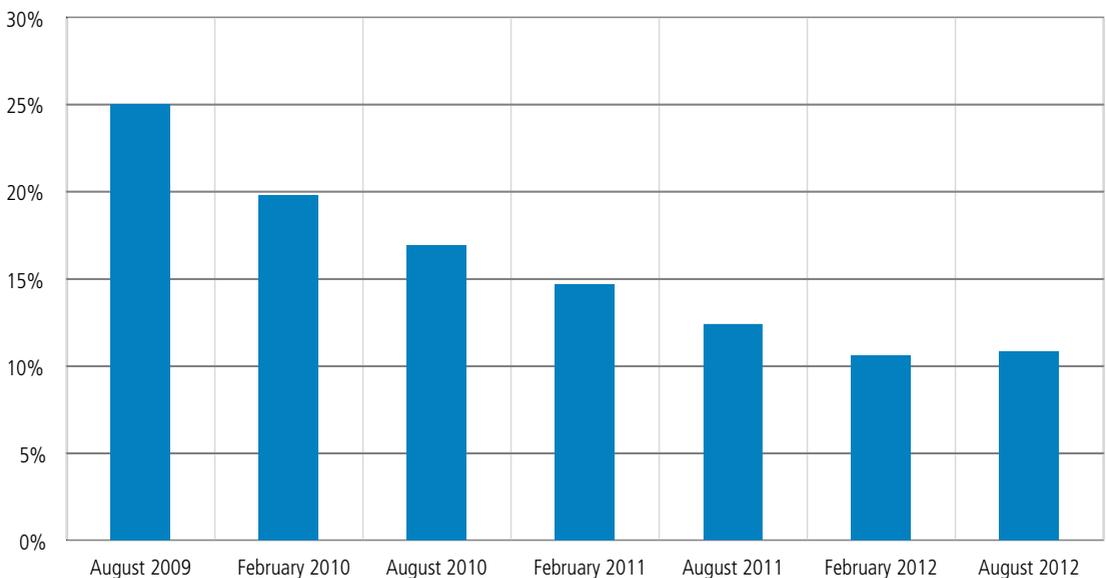
Nonetheless, several high-profile examples of community dissatisfaction emerged from these benchmarks, as well, such as a decline from 2012 to 2009 in the share of Tasmanians saying they were satisfied that the state government both listened to and acted on community wishes (Figure 5). According to some external observers, this decline in satisfaction points to Tasmania Together’s capacity to promote government accountability by raising public awareness of issues as well as public expectations regarding the government’s policy response to these issues.

In short, a more informed citizenry will raise the bar in its expectations of government and express greater dissatisfaction with its activities. In general terms, the public consultation on issues vital to the communities' futures can be seen as having led to improved communication and heightened participation (Hall and Rickard 2013).

However, improved communication and participation do not necessarily lead to community consensus. Tasmania Together did not usher in a resolution to the contentious forestry debate that had prompted its creation. According to one interviewee, "Tasmania Together needed to create a new legitimacy – it lost its way after 2005, some would say, because it did not 'solve' the forestry debate."

Yet, as a whole, excellent summaries were compiled for all benchmarks and for the groupings of benchmarks (economy, well-being, environment) that informed each goal. These are the visible outcomes of the Tasmania Together plan, relating directly to its ability to achieve its stated goals. Any initiative of this complexity has subtler outcomes, as well. In this case, the use of Tasmania Together-compiled statistics by state agencies and NGO groups, in contexts such as the preparation of the state's annual budget, proved an important indirect result. NGOs, including Anglicare (a Christian care organization) and the Education Union, acknowledged that they had used the Tasmania Together statistics themselves, while the Health Workers Union cited the creation of the benchmark measuring the number of qualified ambulance paramedics in rural regional areas – initially a dangerously low figure – as being a major factor in subsequent improvements. As a result of the benchmark's publication, the problem became visible.

Figure 5: Percentage of Tasmanians expressing satisfaction with the state government's accountability



Source: Tasmania Together Benchmarks 2012



Another less visible but nonetheless valuable outcome has been the use made of the Tasmania Together goals and benchmarks in formulating the current Economic Development Plan. According to interviewees, significant elements of this plan were based on Tasmania Together benchmarks.

In the eyes of many interviewees, Tasmania Together's most important outcome lies in the fact that it raised community expectations regarding government accountability and the reporting of public data. Another oft-cited outcome is the sense that it had a profound effect on agencies such as the police. As a result, statistics in Tasmania have today taken on a much higher profile in government policy development. This is manifest in the constitution of a new public-sector group called Stats Matter, which is tasked with driving a cultural change in attitudes to statistics within the public sector. This group's creation was prompted by the perception that too much government data goes underutilized, in part because of a low level of data literacy and a widespread lack of appreciation of data's value. The initiative thus aims to improve the quality and breadth of the statistical information the government considers critical to its priority policy areas. Stats Matter is viewed by many interviewees as an "offspring" of Tasmania Together, but not a replacement.

A core tension within Tasmania Together lay in the treatment of its goals and benchmarks by the government. These goals had their source in the community, and there was no clear mechanism in place by which they could be adopted and meshed with existing government structures and policy frameworks. Ministries were required to report on what they were doing to meet the goals and underlying targets (i.e., what inputs were being utilized), but they had no real input during the plan's original conception phase. Moreover, there was limited scope

for ministries to reach out to communities and work collectively to meet specific benchmark objectives.

Less tangibly, the launch of Tasmania Together and its support by Premier Bacon – along with a handful of other initiatives – inarguably gave Tasmanians a new sense of hope. Throughout 2000 and 2001, commentators spoke of a palpable sense of renewed aspiration. This was a period during which many young professionals came back to Tasmania, the economy grew, tax revenues from federal sources increased and house prices doubled in some areas. To be sure, some of this ebullience was associated with the development of a classic economic bubble. However, the dialogue associated with the Tasmania Together project did help focus minds on the issues deemed most important and set in motion a process to quantify progress – or the lack of it.

Underscoring the importance of less visible but nonetheless palpable outcomes, one interviewee lauded Tasmania Together's contribution to agenda-setting in the island state: "Tasmania Together was successful as a political process: It helped the debate to be focused, and it helped raise awareness and create a social license."

By allowing the community to participate in setting the political agenda, Tasmania Together provided the framework in which a "social license" (i.e., the level of ongoing acceptance or approval granted to an organization's operations by the local community and other stakeholders) could be sought. Indeed, as communities in Tasmania participate more directly in crafting their collective future, the capacity of institutions – in particular government institutions – to obtain a social license has become urgent.

Challenges ahead

Tasmania Together, as well as its governance and support model, had a number of well-designed and well-implemented features. Support mechanisms for community input during the plan's initial phase were robust, progress was reviewed at five-year intervals, parliament received periodic reports and data-collection processes were established in partnership with a wide range of public and NGO agencies, thereby facilitating the benchmarking process. Indeed, according to a 2007 review of Tasmania Together, it "is a sophisticated planning exercise with all the mechanisms in place to steer sustainability efforts should these ever be made, with effective processes for ongoing stakeholder involvement and the capacity to utilise and effectively manage information" (Crowley and Coffey 2007).

However, the project and its governance and support model lacked access to resources that could have enabled effective communication of its findings to the entities ultimately responsible for delivering on the goals – primarily government agencies or their NGO service-delivery agents. Indeed, it would appear that this limiting approach to communication was partly by design, perhaps as a response to antipathy to the Tasmania Together project felt within government circles. This deficiency, combined with the governance issues noted in "conceptual design and goals," constrained the project's ability to establish public-sector or government partnerships, particularly in agencies overseeing policy areas in which benchmarks were failing to meet targets (e.g., education or health).

This tension may have been inevitable; however, it could have been resolvable if the Tasmania Together board and team had been provided with appropriate means of institutional communication. One lesson to be drawn may be that all parties to a complex community project of this nature must be kept fully informed and must be reminded through regular community sessions that progress toward some targets (particularly in the case of difficult social and economic challenges) will be slow, but that suggestions from communities as to how they might be achieved are welcomed on an ongoing basis.

If a project as ambitious as Tasmania Together is to succeed, it needs mechanisms that enable it to evolve. It must be resilient and able to adapt to its surrounding social, economic and political landscape. Many things changed in Tasmania over Tasmania Together's 12-year life: The Labor government changed leadership several times, economic conditions surged and then collapsed under the pressure of the global financial crisis, and community expectations evolved. There is little evidence that Tasmania Together responded in any significant way to these changes apart from having a late-2010 reduction in executive staff.

In its original form, Tasmania Together appears to have ended up being a casualty of its own political difficulties. The low level of debate (in parliament and beyond) regarding the Progress Board's dissolution underscores the board's inability to effectively communicate Tasmania Together's value and purpose.

At the time of this writing, it is unclear whether Tasmania Together's exhaustive set of benchmark data will be maintained for use in crafting evidence-based policy. Tasmania Together's staff members are now slated to work closely with the Stats Matter project. This partnership between the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Tasmanian government is tasked with developing a whole-of-government strategy to guide the improved production, use, management and reporting of statistics. The project aims to bring order to statistical practices and systems across government by fostering collaboration and a culture in which information resources are valued. However, it is unknown whether this strategy will embrace the Tasmania Together plan, despite their similar aims.

In summary, Tasmania Together helped communities and government focus on and rationalize the issues important to their future. It fostered improved cooperation between government departments and mature exchange in societal debates over sensitive issues. For many interviewees familiar with Tasmania Together, its activities created "fertile ground" upon which important debates about what progress means could grow. These discussions continue to "echo in the debates today," leading several interviewees to speculate that Tasmania Together could be reborn in a revised format, in particular as global debates over which measures should be used in guiding a society toward sustainable development gain traction.

As one of the first strategies to look beyond GDP as a measure of progress in society, Tasmania Together served a valuable function. If a form of Tasmania Together does re-emerge, it could include a wider range of partners, such as a "place-based" organization like the Tasmanian Planning Commission, a university or a local government collective. No matter where and how it emerges, however, it must be developed in true partnership with state government institutions.

What we can learn from Tasmania

Tasmania Together faced numerous challenges over its 12 years of operation. While not explicitly designed with issues of sustainability in mind, it nevertheless contained many of the requisite ingredients, in particular a vision as well as goals and indicators (benchmarks) that enabled progress to be monitored and policies and resource investments to be adjusted as needed. The most valuable lessons for similar approaches in other contexts lie within key aspects of Tasmania Together's architecture and operation:

Sustained, energized, patient and wise leadership is essential – both within the community and in the traditional political sphere. Tasmania Together was born of the insights and energy of a group of highly engaged people and launched by a premier with exceptional leadership capabilities. Following his untimely death during the early stages of the project, the strength of leadership weakened, and observers of the project's subsequent development have since highlighted a number of necessary leadership-based requirements that Tasmania Together lacked. First, a project of this type needs a clear process of leadership succession should change be necessitated by circumstances such as a death. Second, the leader needs to be a clear champion for the project. This person does not need to be at a premier or similarly high level, but he or she must be widely respected by the communities involved and at all levels of government. Moreover, the individual must be dedicated to the project's objectives, have the power and resources to fulfill his or her tasks, and be an excellent communicator. The creation of the Tasmania Together Progress Board chair position, supported by other board members, had the potential to serve as a conduit of this kind of leadership.

Sustained leadership on complex issues like sustainable development requires, in the Tasmanian context, the development of truly independent institutional models. Oversight bodies



must themselves be deeply democratic, embedded within the broader set of democratic institutions, statutorily empowered and provided with public resources by parliament rather than by executive decision. The 2001 creation of the Tasmania Together Progress Board achieved this in part; however, although board members were declared independent, the body was funded and staffed by the government and thus susceptible to shifting political winds. Governments and legislative bodies in other political contexts may define the autonomy and discretionary powers of such a body differently.

Sustained participation by the community, agencies and partners was a crucial ingredient of the Tasmania Together plan. In simple terms, the first stage represented the issuance of a promise, the second an effort to embed this promise institutionally, and the third a period of results. Retaining the interest of all parties through such a journey is like keeping a flywheel spinning – regular additions of energy (consultation and participation) are required. All participants need to be able to see outcomes, not just outputs, on an ongoing basis. Aspirations captured in a vision statement must ultimately be accompanied by evidence that the imagined possibilities are becoming a reality. It is crucial that all participants feel they are truly contributing to the journey. For example, communities can offer much more than simply identifying problems and setting goals; they are also rich sources of potential solutions. For this reason, consistent back-and-forth consultation between community and agencies is essential.

Communication is central to the success of an initiative like Tasmania Together. There are many stakeholders, and goals typically range across a complex mixture of social, political, economic and environmental topics. Moreover, the actual experience of the project is inevitably conditioned by the specific values and beliefs held by the community and government participants. Success depends on a constant reinforcement of the project's vision by telling and retelling the stories of success – and of failure – as they unfold.



This communication effort needs to be multifaceted, targeting a broad spectrum of audiences and ages. It needs to be cognizant of the range of values and beliefs existing within participating communities and frame communication so as to ensure connection. Above all, communication of such a project has to have a “face” – that is, it needs to take place on a personal level. Certainly this requires individuals with good communication skills and vibrant personalities, but it may also mean resorting to non-traditional communication mediums, such as music, dance and drama. Within Tasmania Together, the annual Youth Challenge was one such example.

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Interviews were conducted from January 21 to 25, 2013 in Tasmania by Céline Diebold, Andreas Esche, Ingeborg Niestroy and Morgan Williams. Christa Rust of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) conducted basic research in advance of the interviews. The authors alone take responsibility for the content and views expressed in this report. We would like to thank everyone in Tasmania who took the time to speak with us:

David Adams, Professor of Management, University of Tasmania, Launceston, and Social Inclusion Commissioner, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Hobart; *Megan Alessandrini*, Senior Lecturer, University of Tasmania, Hobart; *Robert George (Bob) Campbell*, Chair, Tasmania Together Progress Board, Hobart; *Lynne Ferencz*, Former Member, Tasmania Together Progress Board, Burnie; *Catherine Fernon*, Business Manager, Institute of Regional Development, Burnie; *Ruth Forrest*, Member of Legislative Council of Tasmania, Independent Member for Murchison, Hobart and Wynyard; *Philip Hoysted*, Assistant Director, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Public Sector Management Office, and former Director, Tasmania Together Progress Board, Hobart; *Peter Hoult*, Chairman, Tasmanian Gaming Commission, Department of Treasury and Finance, Hobart; *Ann Hughes*, Acting Manager – Social Action and Research Centre, Anglicare Tasmania Inc., Hobart; *Tim Jacobson*, Assistant State Secretary, Health and Communication Services Union, Hobart; *Roger Jaensch*, Executive Chairman, Cradle Coast Authority, Burnie; *Greg Johannes*, Deputy Secretary Policy, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Office of the Premier, Hobart; *Hayden Jones*, Acting Director, Tasmania Together Progress Board, Hobart; *Ted Lefroy*, Director, Centre for Environment, University of Tasmania, Hobart; *Michael Lynch*, Deputy Chair, Tasmania Together Progress Board, Hobart; *Peter McGlone*, Director, Tasmania Conservation Trust Inc. (TCT), Hobart; *Holger Meinke*, Head of School of Agricultural Science / Director of Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA), University of Tasmania, Hobart; *Sakura Oddie*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Hobart;

Terry Polglase, Branch President, Australian Education Union, Hobart; *Jessica Radford*, Deputy Chief of Staff, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Office of the Premier, Hobart; *John Ramsay*, Lawyer, John Ramsay Associates, Hobart; *Mike Salvaris*, Adjunct Professor, Applied Human Rights and Community Wellbeing, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne; *Cassy Short*, Project Officer, Policy Unit, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Hobart; *Randal Stewart*, Associate Consultant, People and Strategy, Canberra; *Judy Tierney*, ABC News, Hobart; *Rob Woolley*, Chairman, Bellamy's Organic, Launceston.