

Talking Point: Don't let chopper flights blot angling and wilderness gem

IN my book *Frog Call* I wrote what are quite possibly the first widely distributed stories about Lake Malbena and Halls Island. In my latest book, *Water Colour*, I wrote several heartwarming stories about my friendship with the proponent of the current development proposal. Also, I introduced the previous leaseholder to the current developer. Nonetheless I simply cannot support the current development proposal. What went wrong?

As a supporter of tourism, I shudder when I look back at the bad old days of the Franklin blockade and the forest wars. They were nasty times, and they had a very negative effect on visitors' perceptions. What turned tourism around was a conscious decision by previous governments to focus on finding common ground.

The first major achievement was coming up with a community-endorsed management plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (this was the result of countless thousands of hours of unpaid work by hundreds of stakeholders.) The second was the ending of the forest wars through consensus.

The current Hodgman Government seems to want to return to the bad old days. First, it tried to reignite the forest wars, but with limited success.

Then it tried to have large swathes of wilderness removed from UNESCO's World Heritage list. When that failed, it turned its attention to trashing the management plan through an expressions of interest process when there was no public appetite for development in core wilderness.

In land management, especially WHA management, a community-endorsed management plan is akin to a constitution. A strong constitution is integral to a society's prosperity. It is not something to be changed on a whim. In functional democracies, it is tweaked only on rare occasions, and any changes have to be endorsed by the overwhelming majority of the people. When the people allow a government to unilaterally rewrite a constitution, you can be sure that the country is well on the way to hell in a handbasket.

Back to the Malbena development. There appears to be no acknowledgment of the overwhelming public agreement that helicopters must not be used for commercial operations in core wilderness (wilderness, by any rational

definition, must be free at its core from mechanical access). And what of the unilateral rezoning of wilderness areas to accommodate developments at all costs?

As stated, I have known the proponent of the Malbena development for more than a decade and have counted him as a friend. The angst that this project has wrought is almost unbearable to me.

We don't have to put up with wedge politics. It really is time for people like us — the majority who abhor hatred and division — to insist that our elected officials start working for the common good. It worked in Wentworth!

The problem for the State Government on this issue is that it has misread its constituency. The great majority of visitors to the Western Lakes are passionate anglers, not necessarily traditional Green voters, and there are lots of them. Trust me: even proud economic conservatives will vote against the Government on the issue of unsuitable development in what I have long argued is one of the five best fly fisheries in the world.

This is what we need now:

WE NEED politicians to stand up and be counted. Will you support a return to the main provisions of the community-endorsed management plan or not?

WE NEED a genuine public debate on the future of tourism in the TWWHA, and the process has to be at least as rigorous as the one leading up to the implementation of the 1999 plan.

WE NEED a debate on whether there can be a compromise on the current Malbena proposal (perhaps a return to the proponent's original idea of walking a small number of clients into Halls Island via Gowan Brae might be acceptable to the majority of stakeholders).

And if all else fails? Well, there's always direct action. If it comes to that, I for one will be there on the shores of Malbena standing up for both wilderness and democracy.