

Macquarie Harbour Worker Transition Plan

The science is clear - if the Maugean skate is to survive, fish farms must be removed from Macquarie Harbour immediately. However, we must also recognise that without proper support from the government and alternative employment pathways, this will have a significant impact on workers and the Strahan community.

Government leadership can turn a challenge into a positive opportunity for the West Coast.

Protecting The Maugean Skate

The Maugean skate has lived since the time of the dinosaurs. This remarkable creature should be celebrated and protected, but instead it has been pushed to the brink of extinction by massive industrial-scale fish farming operations in its only habitat - Macquarie Harbour.¹

The scientific evidence and recommendations are clear that *"the most important anthropogenic contributor to the oxygen debt in Macquarie Harbour is ongoing salmonid aquaculture."*²

The Greens will work to protect the skate's future by getting fish farms out of Macquarie Harbour and working to restore its health.

Transition Support for Workers

While we must remove fish farms from Macquarie Harbour to protect the Maugean Skate from extinction, there is no denying the

importance of the local jobs this industry now provides for the community.

According to the industry, there are 60 local jobs provided by Macquarie Harbour fish farms.³ In a community of about 700 people, this is significant,⁴ accounting for about 16% of all jobs in Strahan.⁵

The Greens plan is to guarantee every local fish farm employee a new job and provide dedicated ongoing support contacts to help them navigate their options.

Public Employment

There are many important jobs that could and should be done through the public sector in the West Coast region.

Our plan guarantees every worker has access to a job in the public sector – on the West Coast, and at the same pay or better.

Filling these positions not only provides ongoing and secure employment for workers,

¹ Grant MI, Moreno D, Semmens J, Simpfendorfer CA, [Population viability analysis of the Maugean skate *Zearaja maugeana*](#), Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 2023.

² Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water, [Conservation Advice for *Zearaja maugeana* \(Maugean Skate\)](#), 2023.

³ Salmon Tasmania, [Macquarie Harbour](#), n.d.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Strahan: 2021 Census All persons QuickStats](#), 2021.

⁵ Ibid.

but it also provides a significant community benefit, meeting needs that are currently inadequately addressed.

These opportunities include:

- Establishing and staffing a West Coast Public Works Division
- Ongoing funding for extra permanent full-time positions with the West Coast Council
- Field officers and rangers for the Parks and Wildlife Service
- Staff to work for the Department of Natural Resources and Environment in field activities for marine and river science
- Remote area firefighting

West Coast Public Works Division

There are real housing shortages in parts of the West Coast, with the local mayor stating in the lack of housing is “the key economic issue” in the region⁶, and the Council’s general manager agreeing⁷. The lack of housing has increased in the Drive-In, Drive-Out workforce, which has a negative impact on the local community and economy.⁸ There’s many other infrastructure needs, including school and health facility upgrades.

We would establish a West Coast Public Works Division which would focus on addressing these needs, with workers provided jobs and training through the agency.

West Coast Council

Like many councils, the West Coast Council

has difficulty meeting all the community’s needs within a very limited budget.

We would provide ongoing funding for permanent positions for affected workers to take up positions with the Council, providing a significant community benefit.

Parks and Wildlife Service

Under the Liberals, the Parks and Wildlife Service has faced significant cuts, and many protected areas are not being managed appropriately, with a particular deficit in infrastructure maintenance and upgrades.

Strahan sits in one of the most remarkable parts of the world, close to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and many other special places. It is a perfect place to base an expanded Parks workforce, improving attention given to protected areas like the TWWHA and national parks, and providing support for future protected areas.

We would offer affected workers the opportunity to take up positions as field officers or rangers within the Parks and Wildlife Service.

Department of Natural Resources and Environment

Like the Parks and Wildlife Service, staff numbers in other environment protection areas were cut when the Liberals took office. Given the big challenges in the health of both Macquarie Harbour and Tasmania’s rivers and streams, there is a desperate need for people to do field work for expanded scientific monitoring and oversight.

We would offer affected workers the opportunity to take up positions in the

⁶ The Advocate, [West Coast Council Mayor Shane Pitt: housing ‘key economic issue’](#), 17 August 2021

⁷ The Advocate, [Catholic school to build homes at remote town to better attract teachers](#), 6 March 2024

⁸ Tasmanian Policy Exchange, [The changing nature of employment on Tasmania’s West Coast](#), 2022

Department of NRE to assist with work in marine and river science.

Remote Area Firefighters

As climate change worsens, Tasmania faces an increasing bushfire risk. We need to expand and diversify our firefighting capacity, especially in regional and rural areas. Rapid response remote area firefighting teams need to be at the centre of climate resilience planning. These teams can help stop bushfires at their source before they get out of control and threaten communities and lives.

We would offer affected workers the opportunity to pursue a career in remote area firefighting, offering full time positions and providing them with the training they need to take on this role.

The Greens plan is to guarantee workers a new job – at the same or higher rate of pay – working for the State Government or in new jobs at West Coast Council paid for by the State Government.

Direct Wage Assistance Program

While there are a range of guaranteed employment pathways within the public sector, some workers may prefer to seek employment outside of Government. Wage subsidy programs are currently used by the Australian Government to stimulate new jobs for specific cohorts of people.⁹

These programs often have conditions to ensure they are not exploited and to ensure they involve genuine, new jobs. For example being an ongoing, quality job,¹⁰ and not being

a reinstatement of a position made recently redundant.¹¹

Wage subsidies improve employment prospects,¹² as well as providing a long-term overall increase in employment without displacing any other local jobs.¹³

Creating a Direct Wage Assistance Program for workers will provide further flexibility in career opportunities into the future.

The Greens plan is to establish a Direct Wage Assistance Program where we pay local businesses \$30,000 per year for four years to employ impacted workers.

Education and Training Support

Rather than moving directly into a new job, workers may want to take the opportunity to undertake further education or training. However, some may not be eligible for government support like Austudy - and we know these payments are too low even for those eligible. Providing financial support will make this option more achievable for people who wish to pursue this pathway.

The Greens plan is for payments of \$42,000 per year – twice the maximum rate of Austudy - for up to three years, for workers who choose to undertake further study or training.

Transition Team

We recognise that even with support and alternative career pathways provided by government, the transition period may still be

⁹ Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, [Wage Subsidies](#), Australian Government, n.d.

¹⁰ Community Solutions, [Wage subsidies for employers](#), n.d.

¹¹ AFS Partners, [Wage subsidies explained](#), 2023.

¹² Dubin, JA, Rivers, D, [Experimental estimates of the impact of wage subsidies](#), Journal of Econometrics, 56(1-2), 1993.

¹³ Kangashurju, A, [Do Wage Subsidies Increase Employment in Subsidized Firms?](#), *Economica* (74), 2007.

difficult for some people. To make sure workers and their families make it smoothly through this period, it's important they receive ongoing and personalised engagement.

The Greens' plan is to establish a dedicated Transition Team within the Department of Premier and Cabinet to keep in touch with workers and provide any other guidance and support they need - whether that's talking through the opportunities available, career counselling, education resources or support.

Budget (\$m)

Our plan would cost up to \$5 million per year, with final expenditure based on the employment options pursued by workers.

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