

The committees for Bass Strait Transport Equality and the two National Sea Highway committees, two Prime Ministers, Keating and Howard, on two occasions, three premiers of Tasmania Groom, Rundle and Lennon have collectively given all Australians an opportunity for comprehensive “highway equivalence” by sea across Bass Strait.

Despite this and with two ferries capable of travelling two sailings a day across Bass Strait, uncapped and relatively untargeted Federal funding of about \$38 million a year, Australians are yet to enjoy comprehensive surface “highway equivalence”.

I believe that there is every ingredient capable of delivering that outcome within months if there were the will to do so.

Instead despite 14 years of lobbying, amazing levels of Commonwealth support and a national mandate, and with ferries clearly capable of clearly delivering this outcome we are yet to see comprehensive highway equivalence actually delivered.

Instead of moving the demand curve for sea access to and from Tasmania outward, studies of minor movements along an existing demand curve seem to be the flavour of the day.

Without this outward movement through “sea highway access”, the full potential of Bass Strait policies and resources will never be met, freight volumes will be unnecessarily low, barriers to crossing will be increased and Tasmania and Victoria will bear the major loss. Victorian will not have their fair share of substantial federal funding through the non-delivery of such a new southern route. Tasmanians will be denied sea-based equality and all that stems from it.

There is a clear policy case for northbound exports and competition policy to apply within Tasmania and for highway equivalence for people and vehicles.

Any movement, from what all other inter-capital links provide is unsustainable.

TFES and the BSPVES are only in jeopardy if they are not enhanced to deliver what every other inter-capital link enjoys. The link Melbourne - Hobart should not remain skewed.

Maintenance of the status quo is unsustainable on any sound policy basis.

The issue is not that TFES is in jeopardy. The issue is what enhancement can be made to existing schemes to offer parity with all other inter-capital links.

Freight volumes cannot be accurately assessed without looking over the fence to the potential impact of BSPVES, if applied to highway equivalence.

The case for comprehensive equalisation has been clearly made out, and made out a number of times. The case will probably be made out yet again by this Commission.

A thorough investigation needs to be made to see why this outcome cannot, despite substantial Federal resources, be actually delivered.