

Award double for exporters



Tasmanian firms Pivot Maritime and Autech Software & Design have each won their category in the 2009 Australian Export Awards, giving Tasmania two wins from

nine divisional entries. Autech, based in central Launceston, is well-known to eFriends, but Pivot Maritime, from suburban Legana in the same city, is a more recent export pace-setter.

Founded by Dr Jeff Hawkins in 1996, Pivot has carved itself a niche in the international market for maritime simulation, training and consultancy because of its flexible and cost-effective simulation systems. The company produces and exports a wide range of maritime simulators, from small speedboat simulators to integrated ship-bridge simulators, to meet the varying needs for training, consultancy, research and development in different maritime industry sectors. The company has customers in commercial shipping, defence and the recreational sector.

Pivot uses its simulators in maritime training and consultancy – and this is a critical component of its success. Lessons learned through training and consultancy are applied in the refinement of simulator design. Design improvements, in turn, enrich Pivot's programs and consultancy projects. The synergy is powerful, enabling the company to constantly innovate and stay ahead of its competition.

Judges at the awards ceremony in Canberra in November said Pivot's exceptional innovation in product service made it the standout company in the Small to Medium Services Award category. The judges also remarked on Pivot's opportunistic approach to finding customers, a strategy that includes creating simulations based on state-of-the-art boat designs.

Pivot has experienced very strong recent growth, with staff numbers doubling over the past year, in order to keep pace with demand for software programming, modelling, export marketing and management.

Autech, which provides leading-edge electronic colour software, won the 2009 Regional Exporter award. Autech had won many national and international awards and its software is used in more than 25 countries.

The 2009 Prime Minister's Australian Exporter of the Year Award was won by a Queensland business, NOJA Power Switchgear.

\$20m to ease north-west jobs crisis

Tasmania's north-west is being pushed into a phase of painful industrial transformation by the impending closures of the Wesley Vale paper mill and McCain's vegetable-processing plant at Smithton, along with the possible closure of Burnie's paper mill. The State and Federal governments are providing \$20 million to encourage



job creation over the next five months to off-set the loss of up to 675 positions in the north-west.

Tasmanian Paper (a wholly owned subsidiary of Paperlinx) announced in December that the Wesley Vale mill, with 252 employees, would be shut in March 2010. A down-sized Burnie mill will continue to operate into the New Year, but will close if a buyer has not been signed up by June, 2010. There are 170 employees at Burnie.

In a statement, Paperlinx Managing Director, Tom Park, said: "While this was a difficult decision to make, it provides greater certainty for all of our stakeholders and removes one of the key uncertainties that had been overhanging the company and its employees. From a Paperlinx perspective we are pleased to have been able to significantly reduce the net cost of our exit from Tasmania from the initial estimates."

Paperlinx expects the closure of the two mills to cost the company about \$170 million, including redundancies, site remediation and exiting contracts.

The 60-year-old Burnie mill produces carbon-neutral photocopy paper and was always considered by Paperlinx to be a more attractive sale prospect than Wesley Vale.

Earlier, multinational vegetable processor, McCain, told 115 workers at its Smithton plant that processing would end in April next year and the plant would close when packing operations finish in November 2010. McCain Foods Australia's Managing Director, Steve Yung, said investment needed in the 60-year-old plant could not be economically justified. McCain will continue to process potatoes in its newer Smithton facility.

Federal Innovation Minister, Kim Carr, and Premier David Bartlett, announced their \$20 million response to the crisis outside the Burnie mill. They invited manufacturing companies to apply immediately for funding. Senator Carr said he wanted to see new manufacturing projects up and running by April and employing blue-collar workers. "Many businesses are looking [to invest] and the banks are loath to lend at this time," he said. "Applications for shovel-ready projects can be lodged from today."

Paperlinx had conducted a 10-month review of its Tasmanian mills before it made its decision and workforce representatives said the outcome was not unexpected. Mr Bartlett said: "Families will [still] be devastated no matter what they were anticipating to hear, but workers can be assured we will stand shoulder to shoulder with them as we work towards creating jobs right now."

Sid Sidebottom, the Labor Party's Federal Member for Braddon, said a major part of the region's industrial history might be coming to a close, but the people of the north-west could work with governments to create a new future for themselves.

Burnie Mayor Alwyn Boyd said both levels of government should carefully assess every opportunity to attract new industry to his city and the whole region.

The Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry said demand for skilled labour remained high in the State, but many available positions might not fit the existing skills of paper-mill and vegetable-plant workers.

Our pinots win seven golds

By Graeme Phillips



When it comes to show results for pinot noir, there's no more awarded region in Tasmania than the Huon Valley. Pinots from Jette and Eric Phillips' Elsewhere vineyard at Glaziers Bay, before a change of ownership in 2000, had won more State and national trophies and medals than any other pinots in the State, possibly in the country. Now the laurels have passed to Terry and Rosemary Bennett's Home Hill vineyard at Ranelagh.

In the past nine years, consecutive vintages of Home Hill pinot noirs have accumulated a total of nine Australian show trophies and 12 gold medals, including the top trophies at such prestigious events as the 2006 National Cool Climate Wine Show and the 2007 Tri-Nations Challenge, where their 2005 Pinot Noir, selected to represent Australia, beat the best from New Zealand and South Africa.

The only Tasmanian pinots to come close to Home Hill's record in the past few years have been those from Fred Peacock's Bream Creek vineyard, overlooking Marion Bay.

Now Home Hill has done it again, with the 2008 Pinot Noir taking out the Best Tasmanian Red Wine Trophy and just being pipped by New Zealand's Villa Maria Estate for the Best Pinot of Show Trophy at a show that attracted 2,535 wines from 282 vineyards across Australasia, including 66 Tasmanian vineyards.

Chairman of Judges, John Ellis of Hanging Rock Winery in Victoria's Macedon Ranges, described this year's event as a Chardonnay Show.

"Chardonnays from 2007 and before put in a fantastic performance," he said. "Nineteen gold medals were awarded for chardonnays, including three from Tasmania. It's an extraordinary outcome, and shows that Australian producers are extending their grip on this market segment. In comparison to chardonnays of earlier years, we found wines that were complex, subtle, and restrained, which are good to drink now, or will age wonderfully."

Rieslings also performed well, gaining nine gold medals. Mr Ellis said Tasmanian producers could be proud of the fact that they picked up five of those golds, but he considered the stand-out variety for Tasmania to be pinot noir.

"The winner of the Etihad Airways Trophy for best pinot in show was a marvellous New Zealand entry," Mr Ellis said. "Judging was very close, and in the end Tasmanian pinot noirs accounted for seven of the nine gold medals awarded in this area. In other words, Tasmania blitzed the field in pinot noir, and demonstrated that it now has a firm grip on this variety."

The signature award for the best pinot noir is the Royal Agricultural Society of Tasmania Trophy, sponsored by Etihad Airways, reflecting the position of the Wrest Point Royal Hobart International Wine Show as Australia's premier pinot noir show. The trophy was won by the Villa Maria Estate 2007 Taylors Pass Pinot Noir and carries a prize of return airfares to Paris for two to enable the winners to visit Burgundy.

Trophy results for the Tasmanian entries were:

Best Tasmanian Wine: Stefano Lubiana 2006 Estate Chardonnay

Best Tasmanian White Wine: Stefano Lubiana 2006 Estate Chardonnay

Best Tasmanian Red Wine: Home Hill 2008 Pinot Noir

Most Successful Tasmanian Exhibitor: Pressing Matters.

On a regional basis, wines from the Coal River Valley won 23 gold and silver medals while those from the Tamar Valley won 10, followed by the East Coast with 7, the Derwent Valley 5, Pipers River 3 and the Huon Valley 2 (both for pinot noir).

Footnote: Frogmore Creek vineyard has consigned an initial shipment of wine to Hong Kong following a joint trade mission that also involved Domaine A, Sugarloaf Ridge, Spring Vale Vineyards, Tamar Ridge Estates, Pirie Tasmania and Stefano Lubiana Wines. The seven producers were assisted by the Department of Economic Development, Tourism and the Arts to participate in the Hong Kong International Wine and Spirit Exhibition. Following tastings at the show, local distributors have expressed interest in the full range of Tasmanian wines displayed.

Boyer converts to plantation softwood

A \$50 million joint venture at Boyer has converted the newsprint mill from using native eucalypt to total reliance on plantation softwood



and turned the operation's history on its head. The plant was built near New Norfolk in the Derwent Valley in the 1940s to take advantage of a recent technological breakthrough that made it possible to produce paper from eucalypt. Within 20 years, the pioneering Australian Newsprint Mill was producing more than half of Australia's newsprint needs.

Times change and so do newsprint specifications. Paper produced from *pinus radiata* will better suit publishers' contemporary requirements for a lighter, thinner product, while environmentalists have applauded the move away from native hardwood. Other environmental benefits include a 60 per cent reduction in *biological oxygen demand loading* to the River Derwent; a 15 per cent reduction in carbon emissions; a 25 per cent reduction in effluent volume per tonne of paper; and a 20 per cent reduction in solid waste to landfill.

The conversion involved two separate projects. Firstly, Norske Skog committed \$27.6 million to convert Boyer's production lines from cold caustic soda processing of a softwood/eucalypt mix to the thermo-mechanical pulping of softwood only.

Secondly, BIS Industrial Logistics invested \$22.5 million in an integrated woodchip plant, which it will own and operate.

The conversion will impact on the Tasmanian and Australian economies, with annual production of newsprint and related grades of paper representing about 40 per cent of total Australian consumption. Interstate customers will absorb 97 per cent of production.

The Minister for Economic Development, Michael Aird, said the Tasmanian Government had provided Norske Skog with a \$10 million loan, while a \$4.6 million grant had been provided through the Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement's industry-assistance program, which is jointly administered by the Tasmanian and Australian governments.

Mr Aird said the mill was a key customer for the State-owned rail network and a major user of Bass Strait shipping. Each year, Boyer transports more than a million tonnes of raw materials and finished product. "The mill's annual contribution to Tasmania's Gross State Product has been estimated at approximately \$390 million, and it generates more than 900 jobs, including 340 direct jobs," he said.

Last century, Boyer gave the lie to a long-held scientific view that paper could not be made from eucalypt wood because its fibres were too short. A West Australian, Isaac Boas, challenged the theory and used rudimentary equipment to produce a sufficiently impressive sample in 1919 to win financial backing from Australia's notoriously hard-nosed newspaper owners. One of Boas' fellow researchers, L.E. Benjamin, was attracted to Tasmania by its huge stands of eucalypts. Processing tests in Canada showed that paper could, indeed, be produced from Tasmanian eucalypt pulp and work began on building a plant at Boyer in 1941.

Boas's breakthrough also opened the way for the establishment in Burnie of a major pulp and paper mill to turn native hardwood into printing, writing and wrapping paper. *The Pulp*, as it was known locally, started operations in 1938 and generated a population surge in Burnie from 4,000 to 10,000 in the space of a few years. Burnie remained essentially a single-industry town for decades and the era finally ended in 1998 when the troubled 60-year-old pulping plant was closed down.

Energy supply is drought-proofed



Tasmania's energy supply has been drought-proofed through the commissioning of Aurora Energy's \$451 million Tamar Valley Power Station. The new genera-

tor, near George Town, can provide 14 per cent of the State's energy through combined cycle natural gas-powered generation.

Aurora's Chief Executive, Peter Davis, said the project had been completed on time and \$30 million under budget. He told guests at the official opening in October that the station's 390-megawatt capacity would reduce pressure on Hydro Tasmania's dams, which fell to an all-time low of 17 per cent of capacity during the recent drought.

Aurora Energy (Tamar Valley) Pty Ltd, trading as AETV Power, is the owner and operator of the plant. The wholly owned Aurora subsidiary is the first substantial competitor to enter Tasmania's domestic energy market, which has been the exclusive domain of Hydro Tasmania for nearly a century.

After the station's initiator, Babcock and Brown Power, withdrew from the project during the global financial crisis, the Government stepped in and decided that Aurora would be the most appropriate operator because of national energy market regulations in relation to monopolies.

The construction phase provided 340 jobs and there are 30 full-time positions involved in operations. The plant will increase the economic benefits of the gas pipeline and the Basslink electricity cable under Bass Strait.

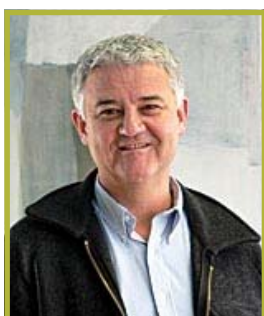
Commissioning of the new station enables Aurora to diversify from its previously restricted role as a retail supplier.

Hydro Tasmania's ageing back-up station at Bell Bay, which has been progressively converted from diesel to gas generation over recent years, has now been de-commissioned and will be disposed of.

In its last financial year before taking on the generating role, Aurora Energy made an operating profit of \$25.4 million, down \$4.6 million on the previous year. The GBE's annual report disclosed:

- An increase in assets from \$1.1 billion to \$1.5 billion;
- An increase in current liabilities from \$158 million to \$654 million;
- Nominal losses on price-risk hedging of \$363 million; and
- A \$9.9 million dividend to the State Government.

Vision of Oxbridge on the Derwent



The University of Tasmania should be moved from Sandy Bay to a new sandstone campus on the Hobart waterfront to create a precinct to rival Oxford or Cambridge, according to Professor Jonathan West, head of the Hobart-based Australian Innovation

Research Centre. In his *Innovations Strategy for Tasmania*, handed to the Premier, David Bartlett, in October, Professor West stipulates that all new campus buildings must be constructed of stone because "it is impossible to build an ugly building in stone".

The vision includes reclaiming UTAS' original sandstone "home" on the Domain and creating new infrastructure on the rail yards site. "The railcards would make an ideal location for the university on a spectacular site that no other Australian university could match," the report says. "The university and the waterfront area it would shape would mould the experience and life of Hobart city, literally placing creativity at the centre of the city's life."



Among Professor West's other key recommendations are:

- An effective auction of power when long-term contracts with major industrial users are due for renewal.
- Ending the moratorium on growing genetically modified non-food crops.
- Holding a competition with a \$10 million prize for the best future business model for Tasmania.
- An extra \$1 billion in Federal irrigation funding, to turn Tasmania into Australia's food bowl.
- Greater use of the \$2 billion invested in Tasmanian superannuation funds, to support innovation investment.
- Decentralising the departments of Economic Development, Tourism and the Arts and Primary Industries, Water and the Environment to small towns, so officers would live in the communities they are trying to transform.
- Construction of a second Basslink power cable across Bass Strait to double the potential for renewable energy exports.
- Incentives to attract new hi-tech businesses, such as global data centres and "server farms" to Tasmania.

The report says the sale of power to major industrial users at less than the cost of generation is depriving the Tasmanian Government of up to \$220 million in annual revenue. Professor West points out that the three relevant industries - Comalco and Temco at the Bell Bay Major Industry Zone and Nyrstar in Hobart - now employ 1,400 people, many fewer than when their long-term power deals were negotiated.

Professor West said his report indicated that Tasmanians could enjoy prosperity in the future without radical "gut-wrenching" transformation. He also contends that *Innovations Strategy for Tasmania* would help reduce conflict between advocates for the economy and environmental activists. "This is a good-news, practical report that if implemented can guarantee the social and economic benefits we all want to enjoy; and overcome the divisions of the past," he said.

Accepting the report, Mr Bartlett said Professor West's influence was already being reflected in Government policies on renewable energy, the broadband network and irrigation expansion. "No doubt this report will create a whole range of debates and that's good for Tasmania," he said.

A formal Government response has been promised.

Meanwhile, Mr Bartlett told a National Press Club luncheon in Canberra that the National Broadband Network (NBN) would vault Tasmania to global prominence in the digital age. He used his nationally televised speech to announce that Kingston Beach, South Hobart, St Helens, Triabunna, Deloraine, Sorell and George Town would be part of the State's stage II NBN rollout.

In stage I, Scottsdale, Smithton and Midway Point are to become the first towns in Australia to be serviced by ultra-fast optic fibre cables, which are now being laid.

Mr Bartlett said the rollout would turn Tasmania into a "digital laboratory" with half a million homogenous, English-speaking people ready to test the potential of new technology for all and any corporate players. "No one knows the industries this will spawn," he said. "There are just so many potential applications, most of which haven't even been thought of yet."

Mr Bartlett, 41, expanded on his plans to turn the State into Australia's irrigated food bowl and to double renewable energy production. He told national viewers there was more to Tasmania and its more than 250 islands than physical beauty. "I want to explain why it is my firm belief that in the coming decade, Tasmania will strut the national stage because of a very different set of achievements, and make a contribution to Australia that will be the envy of other jurisdictions. On the first day that I became Premier, I said that I wanted Tasmania to be a clever, kind and connected place. We are working to make that a reality. Right now, we are embracing challenges in a way that will make us not just an Australian leader in key areas - but a global one. It's happened quietly and perhaps unspectacularly - but as I stand here today, Tasmania has become the 'tiger economy' of Australia."

He said Tasmania was now 10 years into a 20-year transformation.

"That transformation is economic, cultural and social ... Since January 1999 over 40,000 new jobs have been created. ... Our population has grown by a net 29,000 people to 500,000.

Our tourism numbers have also grown exponentially, and we now welcome over twice our population - over one million people - to Tasmania each year."

Mr Bartlett explained how Tasmania was facing up to three critical global challenges:

- The management of increasingly scarce water resources;
- The imperative for creating sustainable and renewable energy; and
- The rapid pace of the telecommunications revolution.

"These are the issues being faced by every State in the nation, and by every nation on the planet. And in each one, Tasmania has natural advantages that we must and will seize for the future," Mr Bartlett said.

The National Press Club speech can be viewed at: www.media.tas.gov.au/release.php?id=28183 .

Giant winches sheik up market

Muir Engineering Pty Ltd has exported the first of a new range of winch equipment - its largest components ever - to the Middle East. Managing Director, John Muir, said the order, destined for a 141-metre-long vessel under



construction, comprised an anchor winch, a chain compressor and four docking capstans.

"We worked very closely with the customer from the outset to ensure the final product met their particular requirements," he said. "The project took eight months to complete from start (design) to finish (delivery)."

The VRC24000 anchoring system, finished in highly polished stainless steel, is suitable for vessels up to 150m long and Mr Muir expects strong demand.

Muir has been designing and manufacturing premium quality anchoring equipment for more than 40 years and has established a strong global brand within the super-yacht, defence and work-boat sections of the global marine engineering sector, Trading as Muir Windlasses Australia, the company exports its anchoring and mooring systems to more than 50 countries, reinforcing the Tasmanian brand across a growing customer base.

Seaweed extractor in spotlight

Leading Tasmanian biotechnology company, Marinova Pty Ltd, has won the Technology and Innovation Award in the 2009 NAB Australian Agribusiness Awards for Excellence. Marinova's Cambridge extraction facility has been developing medical and nutritional applications from brown seaweed harvested in Tasmania, Canada and Argentina since 2006. The company has generated more than \$20 million in export earnings.

Marinova's Managing Director, Paul Garrott, said: "Our process uses bioactive polysaccharide extracts (fucoidans) from brown seaweed as active ingredients in nutritional capsule and tablet products, wellbeing beverages and topical cosmetics. The global skincare market alone is set to exceed US\$44 billion in sales by 2010, and we are the world's only supplier of organic, Halal and Kosher certified fucodian products."

Meanwhile, a strong Tasmanian delegation attended the 2009 AusBiotech Trade Show and Conference in Melbourne in October. The group included Essential Oils Tasmania, Selbourne Biological Services, Xderma, the Australian Centre for Research on Separation Science and UTAS's schools of Pharmacy, Engineering, Plant Science and Agricultural Science, as well as representatives from the Department of Economic Development, Tourism and the Arts.

Shakespeare festival for 2010

An inaugural Australian Shakespeare Festival will be the centrepiece of a planned Tasmanian Winter of Festivals in 2010. A partnership between the Tasmanian Government and the University of Tasmania will enable the festival to be held over three weeks in August, with William Shakespeare's works featured through theatre, opera, concert, conference and film.

The Government has contributed \$200,000 to the event, which will be delivered under the leadership of the Head of the UTAS Conservatorium of Music, Professor Kevin Purcell, and Artistic Director, Paige Newmark. It is anticipated that respected Shakespearean academics from the world's top universities and leading international Shakespearean actors will join well-known national performers in Tasmania. Organisers hope to tap into the two million arts patrons worldwide who choose Shakespeare festivals as their primary reason for travel.

Ralphs Bay canal estate rejected

Walker Corporation is considering its response to a draft assessment by the Tasmanian Planning Commission that its proposed \$300 million canal-style residential development on 97ha of tidal flats at Ralphs Bay should not go ahead. "Although well-designed and engineered, the proposed development would be a major and unacceptable intervention into Ralphs Bay," the interim report said. "The only substantial factor in favour ... is that the 'reclamation' stage of the project would most likely bring economic benefits for the State ... in the order of \$35.6 million."

The commission recommended that the Australian Government should reject the development under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act because it would have an unacceptable and detrimental effect on red-necked stints and pied oystercatchers and would exacerbate the threat to the endangered spotted hand-fish.

Hartz is bubbling back

Hartz Tasmanian Mineral Water is bubbling back into the marketplace, with Juicy Isle Pty Ltd re-launching the original branding and green bottles first seen almost 20 years ago. The Managing Director of Hartz, Mr Michael Cooper, said: "Hartz Tasmanian Lightly Carbonated Mineral Water is produced from one of the purest water sources in the world. Water from the remote wilderness of south-west Tasmania contains the perfect natural balance of minerals and elements and it has a distinctive, fresh taste." The new Hartz range of lightly flavoured minerals waters includes lemon/lime, cranberry and raspberry, orchard peach and light bitters. The original owner of the brand, Powell Holdings, was wound up in October.

Port Arthur sets another record

The Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority has reported record numbers for the second year in succession, with a total of 308,478 visitors to the site. The precinct made a \$46.3 million contribution to Gross State Product in 2008-09, while winning the Major Attraction and Heritage and Cultural Tourism categories at the 2008 Tasmanian Tourism Awards, the best Heritage Tourism category at *The Australian* Newspaper Travel and Tourism Awards and the Best Heritage Tourism award at the 2009 *Australian Gourmet Traveller* Magazine Awards. The authority's annual report is available at: <http://www.portarthur.org.au/pdfs/PARreport08-2009Final.pdf>

Jansz rosé wins national trophy

Jansz Tasmania 2005 Vintage Rose outscored 31 other sparkling wines from around Australia to win the Bathurst Regional Vignerons Association Perpetual Trophy for bottle-fermented sparkling wine. Judges at the cool-climate show said it was among the best rosé wines ever produced in Australia. Jansz won silver in the same class for its 2003 chardonnay/pinot noir blend. Other Tasmanian gold medal winners were Moores Hill 2009 riesling, Brooke Eden Waters Edge TRS riesling 2009, Holm Oak 2008 riesling and ese 2008 pinot noir.

Farmers' market is a sellout

A new farmer's market sprang to life in Hobart in October with more than 1,000 customers turning up for the first day of operations. Held in a CBD carpark in Melville Street, the Tasmanian Farm Gate Market was scheduled to run from 8am to 1pm but most stallholders had sold out by 10am. Hilary Hartley, who ran a Grown for Taste stall, said: "I expected the market would take a while to build up, but obviously Hobart is really ready for it. Farmers markets are very empowering for both the buyer and the seller." The market is scheduled to operate every Sunday.

Triple success for Roar Film

Hobart-based Roar Film was a finalist in seven categories and collected three major awards at the annual ATOM Awards in Melbourne. The boutique film-maker's *DIY Doco* won the best instructional/training resource and best multi-media learning resource categories and *European Voyages to the Australian Continent* collected the best multi media award. The Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) awards are held annually "to celebrate the very best of Australian and New Zealand production."

Crime drops again, by 6pc

The number of offences recorded by Tasmania Police fell by 6 per cent in 2008-09, following a 7 per cent fall the previous year. Police clearance rates were maintained at 46 per cent, with 94 per cent of offences against the person (assault, sexual assault, robbery etc) being resolved. A recent National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing conducted by Roy Morgan Research found Tasmanians feel safer in public places and at home, including at night, than Australians in other States and territories.

Brewer launches James Boag's Pure

Brewer Lion Nathan has launched a new Tasmanian beer, James Boag's Pure, into the international "super-premium" market. Boag's Operations Director, Phil Hargans, said the James Boag's Pure would be marketed in a different brand space to the highly successful Boag's Premium. The new beer has a recommended retail price of \$57.99 a carton or \$17.99 for a six-pack.

Jobless rate remains unchanged

Tasmania's trend unemployment rate remained unchanged at 5.1 per cent in October - 0.7 per cent below the national average of 5.8 per cent. Meanwhile, long-term unemployment in Tasmania increased 3.6 per cent in the year to October, to an average of 2,400 people. Nationally, the number of long-term unemployed increased by 23.6 per cent over the same period. Australian Bureau of Statistics data also revealed a 1.8 per cent increase in job advertisements for October.

Funding for Low Head heritage

The State Government has committed \$990,000 to better preserve and ensure the long-term sustainability of the historic Low Head Pilot Station, regarded as a place of national importance and one of Tasmania's most significant cultural assets. A grant from the Urban Renewal Heritage Fund will be used to protect and maintain the nation's oldest group of pilot buildings, which date back to 1805.

Derwent recuperation continues

Pollution in the River Derwent has fallen substantially because of a 20 per cent reduction in sewage effluent and improved environmental management by major industries, according to the latest annual Estuary Report Card. Little penguin colonies are growing, spotted handfish populations have stabilised and heavy metal pollution is slowly reducing. Mercury detected in shellfish and some fish species is still above levels recommended for consumption.

Silicon decision in 2010

The Tasmanian Government expects Munich-based Wacker Chemie Ag to make a decision on the location of its proposed \$500 million silicon smelter early in 2010. Media reports that the plant could be built at the Port Latta Major Industry Zone prompted the suspension of trading in October in the shares of Macquarie Harbour Mining, which holds leases over reserves of very high-grade silica. Macquarie's shares soared quickly to a high of 40c after resuming trading at 9c. They were trading at 28c late in October.

Funding for Falls Festival

The Tasmanian Government has provided the organisers of the Falls Festival at Marion Bay with dollar-for-dollar funding that will result in a total investment of more than \$575,000, ensuring the future of the popular musical event. Tourism Tasmania figures show that the 15,000 festival attendees contribute more than \$22 million in direct spending and stay an average of a week to 10 days in the State.

Living treasure draws 55,000

A world-class collection of Chinese poetry, literature and paintings, the *Jao Tsung-i: The Amalgamation of Mind and Universe* exhibition attracted more than 55,000 people to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Professor Jao Tsung-i, 92, is a renowned scholar-artist, considered a national living treasure in China. Hobart was the first city outside Asia to display his works.

House prices holding up

House prices in Tasmania increased by 1.8 per cent in the three months to September, according to figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Retail trade increased 0.4 per cent to \$441 million in September and building approvals showed a 3.4 per cent increase. Research released by the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in November showed that Tasmania's small businesses are the most confident in Australia.

Big iceberg near 'Macca'

An iceberg, estimated to be 500m long and 50m high, has been spotted by expeditioners about 8km north-west of Macquarie Island. Antarctic Division glaciologist, Dr Neal Young, said icebergs were a rare sight around the island halfway between Tasmania and Antarctica. He said it was likely to be part of a massive berg that broke off the Ross Ice Shelf eight or nine years ago.

Cycling trails for Western Tiers

Four new cycling trails covering a total of 300km were opened in the scenic Great Western Tiers area in November, following a joint project involving the Meander Valley Council, the Great Western Tiers Tourism Association and the State Government. The Great Caves Trail, the Great Country Trail, the Great Gourmet Trail, and the Great World Heritage Trail are each linked to a significant aspect of the region.

State gets \$35.4m recovery bonus

Tasmania will reap an extra \$35.4 million in GST payments from the Federal Government because of Australia's faster-than-expected economic recovery. The national economy is now forecast to grow by 1.5 per cent during 2009-10. Tasmania will benefit by an additional \$161 million in GST income over the next four years.

Grant to cut island emissions

A Federal grant of \$15.28 million will enable Hydro Tasmania to undertake a demonstration project integrating wind, solar and biodiesel generation into the King Island electricity grid. The project has potential to significantly reduce emissions from diesel generators on the island, where 2.5 million litres of diesel was used in 2008-09.

Beerfest prospers on the wharf

Organisers of the annual Tasmanian Beerfest were encouraged by their first event in the Princes Wharf No. 1 shed on the waterfront in October, with more than 25,000 litres of beer consumed by nearly 12,000 attendees. Most small brewers sold out their stock and it's likely the event will again be staged at the venue in October 2010.

Liners to bring 120,000 visitors

Sixty cruise ships are scheduled to visit Tasmanian ports this season, adding 120,000 passengers and crew to the State's visitation list. About 75 per cent of cruise ship passengers are from overseas.

Vice Chancellor to retire

The University of Tasmania's Vice Chancellor, Daryl Le Grew, announced in October that he would leave at the end of his present contracted term - at the end of 2010.

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