

## Researchers find rogue devil cell



Researchers have isolated cells that are the source of the deadly facial tumours that have devastated Tasmanian devils in the wild, while a captive breeding program is reported to be on track to establish a viable insurance population.

An international project involving Tasmanian scientists has discovered that Schwann cells in a sheath that protects nerves in the devils' mouths are the source of the disease. This ends theories that the tumours were a genetic condition passed down through generations; or that they originated in organs in the devils' bodies before metastasizing in the mouth.

The discovery also puts an end to speculation that in-breeding is involved in the outbreak that has forced the devils on to the nation's list of threatened species.

Although the search for a cure is now a step closer, scientists don't yet know why the Schwann cells are mutating. One of the roles of the cells is to protect nerves from infection and the reason they are failing is still unknown.

The leading author of a paper published in January in *Scientist*, Dr Elizabeth Murchison of the Australian National University, took biopsies from devil tumours and analysed their genetic data. Dr Tony Papenfuss from Melbourne's Walter and Eliza Hall Institute then led a team that determined which genes were switched on in the tumours and identified their genetic signature.

"When we compared the signature of the tumours to other normal tissues, we found the tumours were most like Schwann cells," Dr Papenfuss said.

Associate Professor Greg Woods from the University of Tasmania's Menzies Research Institute said the find was an important step forward. "Devils develop tumours of various types and the genetic markers we have identified are useful for telling apart the tumours that occur in DFTD [Devil facial Tumour Disease] from other kinds of tumours," he told *The Mercury*. "This helps us understand the disease a bit more."

Meanwhile, the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program has been forced to defend itself from a public attack by the Tasmanian Conservation Foundation. A spokesperson explained that the program had set out in June 2007 to progressively capture 150 disease-free devils and to use them in a breeding program to eventually establish a group of 500 breeding animals. By late 2009, 142 healthy animals had been trapped and successful breeding had built the so-called insurance group up to 277. The animals are housed in Tasmanian wildlife parks, Department of Primary Industry, Water and the Environment facilities, an experimental free-range enclosure at Bicheno and in seven interstate zoos and sanctuaries. A strategy to establish isolated populations on islands has not yet been implemented.

Last summer's disastrous bushfires in Victoria led to the temporary evacuation of all devils from the Healesville Animal Sanctuary in the Dandenongs. For whatever reason, the crisis was followed by an unprecedented breeding boom. Every female devil in the sanctuary gave birth to young, producing a record-breaking 28 joeys and pushing the sanctuary's devil population up to 59.

The NSW program has 38 devils housed at Sydney's Taronga Park Zoo and the Western Plains Zoo at Dubbo. Other parks in the national program include Adelaide Zoo and Monarto Zoological Park in South Australia, the Australian Reptile Park in NSW, Ballarat Zoo in Victoria and Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary and Dreamworld in Queensland.

Captured devils were initially isolated and housed in purpose-built quarantine enclosures in Tasmania before being sent to establishments that had been approved by the Australasian Regional Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria. The decision to move devils to other parts of Australia was based on the need to distance some animals from any risk of infection from diseased wild devils. Devils in the insurance population could play an important role, if needed, in helping re-establish healthy wild populations in Tasmania.

The devils' 2010 breeding season will extend from February to June and is expected to boost numbers.

## Medals awarded to 275 wines

By Graeme Phillips

The 20<sup>th</sup> Tasmanian Wine Show in Launceston in January saw medals awarded to 275 of the 449 wines entered. The President of the show society, Phil Laing, observed: "The very high strike rate of medals awarded is a true reflection of the quality of Tasmanian wine."



The Chairman of Judges, internationally renowned wine expert James Halliday was joined on the judging panel by Sydney-based wine writer and judge, Huon Hooke, Anna Pooley of Heemskerk Wines and Peter Bosworth of Morning-side Vineyard in Tea Tree. The associate or trainee judges were Tasmanians Sophie Houghton and Guy Wagner, winemakers at Hawley House and Bass Fine Wines respectively, and Peter Caldwell from Josef Chromy Wines. The panel reviewed wines from 82 producers.

The judges praised the '07 and older rieslings, where 82 per cent of entries won medals, as "a wonderful class of varied styles ... the '07s, initially disappointing, have developed beautifully," reinforcing the belief that Tasmania's rieslings need a few years before they begin to show their best.

Of the 73 pinot noirs from the 2008 vintage, 50 won medals prompting the judges to comment that it was "obviously a great class reflecting a great vintage, but a pleasantly wide range of styles, presumably reflecting terroir differences."

The judges did warn, however, that while there were very few winemaking faults, some wines showed "overripe/dead fruit and some enthusiastic use of oak."

The panel was a little puzzled by the "lack of positive varietal character" in the sauvignon blanc class, while encouraging our winemakers not to give up on shiraz.

Analysing the trophy and gold-medals results by regions, wines from the Coal River Valley won four trophies and 14 golds; those from the Tamar Valley three trophies and six golds, the East Coast one and four; and the Derwent Valley one and two; while the Huon-Channel area picked up three golds, the Pipers River region two and the North-West one.

Interestingly, the remaining five trophies and six gold medals went to multi-regional blends - wines made from fruit sourced and blended from different parts of the State. In Europe, especially in France, there's a long, respected tradition for *negociants* - people who buy grapes and/or wines from different vineyards to make, blend and bottle under their own label. This year, the trophy for the best wine of the show was awarded to a *negociant's* handiwork - the Kate Hill 2008 Pinot Noir. Mrs Hill, who came to Tasmania in 2006 had worked on vintages in Australia, France, California and Chile before spending four years as winemaker with Orlando Wyndham in the Riverina. Since then she has married, become a mother, made three wines and pocketed gold medals for each. The first was her 2008 Kate Hill Riesling, released in February 2009; followed by golds for her 2009 Kate Hill Riesling and her 2008 Kate Hill Pinot Noir at last year's Royal Hobart International Wine Show. These awards were topped off by the trophy and gold for her 2008 pinot in January.

Mrs Hill says the wine is a blend of pinot grapes from old vines in the Coal River Valley, chosen for their lifted fruit characters and tannins, while parcels from the Tamar Valley in the north delivered a full-bodied fleshiness. She gave the fruit a long pre-ferment maceration, vinified the batches separately, pressed them off immediately after fermentation to retain fruit freshness and then gave them about a year in oak, one-third of it new, before assembling the final wine.

"My wines have all natural acid without any acid adjustment and I like the pinot to have a touch of rusticity," she says.

"But, overall, I try to make wine with the consumer in mind. They have to sell. And, if truth be told, they're selling too fast at the moment and I risk running out."

### Tassie's a tiger economy, says Rudd



Enthused by a holiday in the State and the uplifting sight of a Ricky Ponting double-century at sun-drenched Bellerive Oval, the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, described Tasmania

as the nation's "tiger economy" and said it was the envy of every other State and Territory.

"What has impressed me since I have been down here on holidays is the positive buzz of confidence about the Tasmanian economy," Mr Rudd told media representatives at the third Test venue in January. "When you get out there and talk to people ... there is confidence out there in the State's economic future, which is honestly forming as a genuine tiger economy compared with many of the Australian States. When I look at the growth data from the other States I see Tassie has been the equal fastest-growing State economy across the country this is not just words, Tasmania has emerged as an economy, that is a reality, and it's during the most difficult financial circumstances of our history."

Mr Rudd said confidence radiating from the State was resulting in people coming to Tasmania from the economic hotspots of Queensland and Western Australia. "I think we're cooking with gas," he said. Tasmania's population rose by 825 in the June quarter 2009, to 502,627, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Mr Rudd's enthusiasm was no doubt based in part on the Tasmanian Government's *Mid-Year Financial Report for 2009-10*, released in December. It showed that:

- The Operating Balance for 2009-10 is estimated to improve by \$34 million compared to 2009 Budget estimates;

- The Operating Balance will still return to a surplus in 2012-13, as projected in the 2009-10 Budget;
- The Treasury's interim fiscal strategy remains on track.

The Treasurer, Michael Aird, said revenue would be \$250 million higher than predicted at Budget time in June 2009. The improvement was due to an additional \$55 million in GST revenue; \$78 million in other revenue from the Australian Government; \$59 million in additional State taxation receipts and \$30 million in additional receipts from State-owned companies and government businesses.

The increased revenue has enabled the Government to boost planned expenditure in the following areas:

- \$47 million for health front line services;
- \$13 million for education frontline services;
- \$3.5 million for justice frontline services;
- \$7.5 million for the North/North-West Assistance package;
- \$18.3 million for business land tax rebates;
- \$8.9 million for a payment to the Water and Sewerage Corporations to implement the 5 per cent cap on water and sewerage charges;
- \$4 million for tourism marketing; and
- \$4 million for Metro bus services.

Mr Aird said: "The net impact of the increased revenue and increased expenditure in 2009-10 is an improvement in the Operating Balance from the Budget estimate of a deficit of \$117 million to a revised estimate of a deficit of \$83 million."

Treasury now predicts that employment will fall by 1.5 per cent in 2009-10, compared to the previous estimate of 2 per cent and the average unemployment rate for the year forecast to be 5.25 per cent compared to 7 per cent at the time of the 2009 Budget.

The Premier, David Bartlett, said: "There are still many challenges to be faced by many businesses in Tasmania, but it is pleasing to see that employment conditions are expected to improve during the year. The Government will continue to do what it can to support and create jobs in Tasmania for the long-term."

The Government subsequently provided a 15-year, \$12 million loan to facilitate a capital-investment program at the troubled King Island abattoir by Brazil-based multinational JBS Swift. The loan will support a \$14 million upgrade to improve operational efficiency and profitability. The rescue package secures 90 jobs that are vital to the island's economy and will generate up to 20 additional long-term positions. The Government and the King Island Council worked with the company to save the abattoir after its closure was announced in March 2009.

Visiting the island to announce the deal, Mr Bartlett said: "This has been a collaborative effort. It is widely recognised that King Island beef is an iconic brand and the abattoir is crucial to this island's economy. The processing of beef on the island gives credibility to the King Island beef brand and the marketing and promotional synergies with other island-branded products are crucial. It is a key part of the King Island brand that supports tourism and promotion of the island to national and international markets."

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures released in January showed that Tasmania's unemployment rate was 5.5 per cent in trend terms in December, just below the average national rate of 5.6 per cent. On a seasonally adjusted basis, the State rate fell from 5.4 per cent to 5.2 per cent and was the second lowest of all States.

However, a decline in sales of zinc and aluminium ended Tasmania's long period of export growth in 2008-09, according to the ABS. The processed metal setback resulted in a 4.3 per cent drop in total exports. Nationally, the value of exports jumped by more than 22 per cent to \$283.8 billion as China's hunger for commodities and a diversifying trade base helped Australia sail through the global economic crisis.

Meanwhile, Western Australia and the ACT have overtaken Tasmania in a ranking by CommSec of State economies. Tasmania had headed the nation in CommSec's previous report.

"Tasmania's economy has continued to benefit from above-average population growth," the organisation's latest report says. "The US financial crisis has only had a modest impact on the State, especially compared with NSW and Victoria."

The economic upsurge in Western Australia was resource driven, while the ACT benefited from a boom in home construction. Tasmania's economy had grown faster than the national average in 2008-09, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics data. Gross State Product grew by 1.45 per cent in 2008-09, compared with nation-wide growth of 1.1 per cent.

Mr Rudd flew out of Hobart with his family on 15 January after spending time at Cradle Mountain and on the Freycinet Peninsula.

### Booming Taste to spread its wings

Nearly 300,000 people attended Hobart's 2010 Taste of Tasmania festival, rated by organisers



and many stallholders as the most successful ever. An estimated 30,000 enjoyed the Mona Foma festival that followed the Taste; the Falls Festival attracted 17,000 to Marion Bay; and other events enjoyed solid attendances as Tasmania continued to notch up record visitor numbers.

The Sydney Hobart yacht race turned into a light-wind cruise for most of the 100 entrants, with New Zealand super-maxi *Alfa Romeo* well outside the race record in taking line honours. The slowest yachts just managed to meet their traditional New Year's Eve celebration deadline. South Australian entry *Two True* survived a protest to secure the handicap victory.

While the post-race waterfront put on its party clothes, it was clear to organisers that the Taste had outgrown its home in the No 1 Shed at Princes Wharf. The 22<sup>st</sup> event next year will benefit from a \$7 million revamp of the old asbestos-lined cargo shed, with designers planning to double seating capacity and extend the event to Salamanca's lawns and the Parliament House Gardens.

After decades of debate about the unsightly shed, a plan for a modest redesign has been approved. The State Government advertised in January for building tenders.

Taste Festival consultant Neil Cameron was on the design team led by Hobart architect Robert Morris-Nunn. Mr Cameron predicts the renovation will produce a new super-sized event. "This will change things dramatically," he said. "If you can imagine it growing out and encompassing the parks and waterfront ... it's going to take over Salamanca."

Hobart City Council's festivals committee chairman, Marti Zucco, said some patrons this year had complained about a lack of shade and seating, particularly when crowds peaked at 50,000 on New Year's Day. "We will never have enough for what is Tasmania's biggest public event," he said. "We have increased seating, but what also has to be seriously considered is that the event is free. How much can you expect?"

Christmas Hills Raspberry Farm won the Taste's best stall concept, Angus Gourmet Steak Sandwiches won the Hobart City Council's best dish, while South Hobart seafood business, Flathead, won best use of Tasmanian produce.

The council insists the days of No 1 Shed being a car park for most of the year are over. The shed's new design will be flexible enough to host opera, fashion shows, conferences, festivals and 1,500-seat banquets. It will have capacity for national and international art exhibitions. "It will become a real community space," Mr Morris-Nunn said. "With the flexible seating you can do whatever you want inside, the limit is your imagination."

There was certainly no lack of imagination when the second Mona Foma festival established its headquarters in the shed for its January 8-24 extravaganza. The venue was transformed with art and music installations, giant lounging cushions, food and drink stalls and even a clinic, where patrons could have their heartbeats recorded.

Mona Foma was launched with a well-attended free outdoor jazz/funk concert featuring a rare confluence of instruments: a tuba; a didgeridoo; and a Japanese bamboo flute. Festival curator Brian Ritchie, who played the shakuhachi flute, said he felt the cultural diversity was a fitting start for this year's festival.

Ritchie, who is bassist with the pop group Violent Femmes, has often performed with tuba player Tim Jones from the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, but this was his first collaboration with the Northern Territory's Ash Dargan and his massive didgeridoo. The cross-cultural trio was followed by Japanese six-piece ensemble Mount Mocha Kilimanjaro, whose funk got many in the crowd to their feet.

All but two events at the 16-day festival were free, enabling locals and visitors to enjoy world-class talent from France, Japan, Germany, Britain, the United States and New Zealand, as well as performers from many regions of Australia. Musical highlights included John Cale, founding member of the experimental rock band The Velvet Underground, pioneering hip-hop musician and DJ Grandmaster Flash and the world premiere of acclaimed pianist Michael Kieran Harvey's *48 Fugues of Frank*.

At Marion Bay, blue skies and sunshine greeted revellers at the Falls Festival. Operations manager, Helen Ransom, said the event was the most trouble-free yet. "Operationally, I would say this has been the best year," she said. "There was a lot of planning to make sure we pulled off the best event we've ever done."

The crowd was spurred on from the start by the beats of Philadelphia Grand Jury's 54-year-old master drummer, Calvin Welch, who had been one of the founding members of Earth, Wind and Fire. They swayed to the serene sounds of Sarah Blasko and revelled in the French-inspired craziness of Art vs Science.

When temperatures climbed into the mid-30s on New Year's Eve there was a minor setback when an invasion of bluebottles, jellyfish and sea lice made it unwise to cool off in the bay's usually inviting waters.

Tasmania Police praised New Year's Eve revellers in all parts of the State for one of the tamest and most mature celebrations in years. A thunderstorm interrupted evening celebrations, causing blackouts in some districts.

As the Falls crowd disbanded on New Year's Day, police charged 16 people with drink-driving and arrested two for driving while under the influence of drugs. This was half the arrest rate of the previous year. There were none of the breath-testing traffic delays that had frustrated patrons in early 2009.

Mona Foma proceeded in happy co-existence with the three-day Cygnet Folk Festival and the one-day Soundscape Festival at the Hobart Regatta Ground. Organiser Roger Joseph said the three-day Cygnet event's 500-performer drawcard and its 7,000-plus attendances were the biggest in its 28-year history. "Soundscape is a different demographic, with bands for a different age group and taste. Mona Foma this year doesn't seem to have anything in direct competition with us," Mr Joseph told *The Mercury*.

With Launceston's major event, Festivale, beginning on 14 February, a new event, New Year on Royal, proved a highly successful test run for the Festivale committee. Chairwoman Lou Clark estimated attendance at 5,000 and said: "We were very happy with it. It was a really great night all round ... it was packed, it was really well supported by the community and we would like to thank the people of Launceston. There were some teething problems but ... the location [Royal Park] was great, it had a great atmosphere and ambience. I think it will be very hard not to do another one."

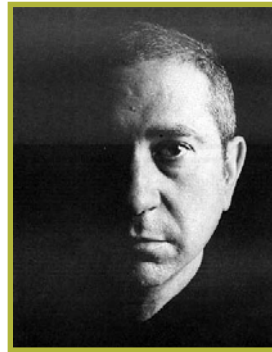
Even before the successful festival season, Tasmanian tourism was on a high. The latest Tasmanian Visitor Survey showed total visitor numbers to have increased by 4 per cent in the year ending September 2009, with 917,100 scheduled air and sea travellers. When cruise ship and navy visitors are added, Tasmania welcomed 1.024 million people during the period. Growth in off-peak September 2009 quarter was 5 per cent. Visitors to Tasmania are staying longer and spending more, with the total number of visitor-nights up 14 per cent to 8.31 million, the average length of stay up to 9.1 nights, and total expenditure up 4 per cent to \$1.47 billion. Nationally, Tourism Research Australia reported a decline in domestic interstate overnight travel (-7%), visitor nights (-7%), and expenditure (-6%) during the same period.

More than 60 cruise ships are scheduled to visit Tasmanian ports this season, bringing around 120,000 passengers and crew.

Yachting wasn't the only sport enlivening the holiday scene. The annual carnival series continued to attract some of the nation's finest athletes and cyclists, while the Moorilla Hobart International and the Burnie Challenger tennis tournaments and the third cricket Test between Australia and Pakistan at Bellerive Oval drew media focus, as well as sports-loving tourists to the State.

For more information about events in Tasmania visit: [www.eventstasmania.com](http://www.eventstasmania.com)

### Faustian deal gives Mona an artist's life



Artist Christian Boltanski has entered one of the boldest contracts since Faust, agreeing to have his every move until he dies filmed 24 hours a day in his Paris studio and streamed live to Tasmania's \$70 million Museum of Old and New Art (Mona).

Instead of making a deal with the devil, as Faust was said to have done, the photographer, sculptor and installation artist has signed with Moorilla winery, brewery and restaurant owner, David Walsh. The 65-year-old artist told the French press agency, AFP, that the deal would provide him with income until he dies. "This man [Walsh] thinks he can beat the odds and he says he never loses," Boltanski said. "Anyone who never loses or thinks he never loses must be the devil."

Walsh may not be a devil, but he is no run-of-the-mill mortal, either. Food and Wine Writer Graeme Phillips has described him this way: "A self-described eccentric, super-nerd and rabid atheist. He's also an autodidact; a multi-millionaire gambler; and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery's single biggest donor. He was named by *Business Review Weekly* as Australia's top art collector and is the owner of Moorilla Estate, one of Tasmania's oldest and most highly acclaimed wineries."

Walsh's deal with Boltanski means that the longer the artist can live the more his quirky artwork will cost Walsh. "If I die in three years, he wins," the artist said. "If I die in 10 years, he loses. He has assured me I will die before the eight years is up, because he never loses. He's probably right. I don't look after myself very well. But I'm going to try to survive. You can always fight against the devil."

Walsh shared his interest in Boltanski's projects with his fellow Tasmanians during January's Mona Foma festival. Boltanski is collecting sound recordings of human heartbeats for an archive to be installed on an island in Japan.

Mona Foma included a makeshift clinic in Princes Wharf No. 1 shed where volunteers could have their vital rhythms recorded. Their names were logged, they were given CDs of their own heart-beats and they became part of Boltanski's *Les Archives du Coeur*.

Walsh has clearly stated his intentions on other aspects of Mona in a classy publication with a sub-title "Over the waterfall in a barrel". A frontispiece warns: "A subversive Disneyland is emerging. Old and new art - displayed with intent."

The booklet was produced to promote the second Mona Foma festival held from 8-24 January, as well as Moorilla's existing tourism assets, including eight ultra-luxury accommodation pavilions. However, the booklet is also an effective appetite-sharpener. For example: "In 1999 the Moorilla Museum of Antiquities was established. Nobody came, so we declared it a triumph and decided to expand. When it opens in 2011, the Museum of Old and New Art will be Australia's largest private museum ... Mona will be a secular temple. 6,000 sq m is a lot of space to worship materialism. The views are stunning if you have X-ray vision [Mona will be underground]."

The booklet goes on to promise that visitors' beliefs will be battered in the multi-level museum designed by architect Nonda Katsallidis. The collection in Australia's biggest not-for-profit gallery will range from Africa, including Egypt, to Mesopotamia and Mesoamerica. Contemporary art has been sourced from Australia, Europe and the United States.

Walsh has said: "By the time I acquired Moorilla, the nucleus of my collecting philosophy had already appeared. Succinctly put, it is that art should not just have an aesthetic value but should have something to say about its own genesis - accessing sex and averting death. Satiation and propitiation was, before the West's inventing of art for art's sake, all there was and Mona will stand as a testimony to the power of sexuality to drive creativity."

Australian modernist Sidney Nolan will have a whole mezzanine reserved for his works, including a 1,600-panelled, 47-metre-long mural *Snake*. Other Australian artists will include John Brack, Brett Whiteley, Russel Drysdale, Charles Blackman, Peter Booth, Callum Morton, Del Kathryn Barton, Howard Arkley and Fiona Hall.

International works by such artists as Egon Schiele, Wassily Kandinsky, Gerry Judah, Su-en Wong, Fernando Botero, Damien Hirst, Jenny Saville, Chris Ofili, Paul McCarthy, Erwin Wurm and Susan Rothenberg are likely to generate their own wave of art-tourism.

The booklet also reminds readers that Moorilla's Source restaurant, its winery, its brewery and regular cultural events are available now and are complemented by high-class on-site accommodation at the river-front estate at Berridale. It says: "Mona has eight pavilions overlooking the Derwent River. Pavilions feature ancient and contemporary art (and bits in between). Each pavilion has its own distinct character and is named after an artist or architect who impacted Mona. Charles, Arthur, Sidney and Brett were designed by Crawford, Padas and Sherman Architects in 2001 and the interiors redesigned by Fender Katsalidis in 2009. Each features an original painting by its eponymous artist, an antiquity and has a collection of ancient coins. Roy, Robin, Esmond and Walter were designed in 2008 by Nonda Katsalidis. These pavilions feature video art from artists like Tamy Ben-Tor, an American performance artist who pokes fun at 'stupid rich people who buy art.'"

As well as art and views, the pavilions boast all the contemporary conveniences that fastidious guests expect.

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### Pulp mill switches to 100pc plantation

Gunns Pty Ltd's proposed Bell Bay pulp mill will use 100 per cent plantation timber from the outset and the Government has moved to curtail broad-



scale clearing or conversion of native forest on private land by 2015.

Gunns announced in January that it had been appointed by the liquidator of Great Southern as responsible entity for nine plantations formerly operated by the failed managed investment group. Chairman, John Gay, said in a statement: "The Bell Bay mill has always been planned and designed as a plantation based mill."

However, with Gunns' existing resources, it was not possible for Gunns to guarantee supply to the mill of 100 per cent plantation timber until five years after commencement of mill operations. Securing the Great Southern resource is an exciting new development for Gunns that allows us to accelerate our plantation strategy to supply the Bell Bay mill with 100 per cent plantation from mill start-up."

Mr Gay said the exclusive use of plantation wood would align the mill, planned for the Bell Bay Major Industry Zone, with benchmark Kraft pulp mills constructed in recent years in South America. He said the expanded resource base should mitigate any concerns stakeholders had held regarding fibre supply.

Predictably, the Gunns announcement triggered a renewed war of words. Greens Senator, Bob Brown, said the company now needed to remove chlorine from its Kraft bleaching process and one of the lobby groups opposing the mill, TAP into a Better Tasmania, said its opposition chiefly related to the siting of the mill in the Tamar Valley. "The fact that Gunns now intends to use only plantation timber doesn't alter the fact that the Tamar Valley is completely the wrong place to build their proposed pulp mill," spokeswoman Anne Layton-Bennett said.

The forest industry fired back, accusing pulp mill opponents of changing their conditions for agreement. Forest Industries Association of Tasmania Chairman, Julian Amos, expressed disappointment with "the head-in-the-sand approach of Senator Bob Brown and his fellow travellers, who keep moving the goal posts to achieve their aim."

The other major development in relation to native forests was a January announcement by the Tasmanian Government that clearing or converting native forests to other uses will be limited to 40ha per property per year until 2015, after which only 20ha per property will be allowed in any five-year period.

The Minister for Energy and Resources, David Llewellyn, said the progressive nature of the new policy would provide landowners with certainty that they would have an opportunity to undertake small-scale clearing to develop their farms over the next five years. "Provisions under the existing policy that allow clearing for essential infrastructure and routine agricultural activities remain unchanged," he said.

Mr Llewellyn said the revised policy would not restrict the sustainable management and harvesting of native forest on private land, but only the conversion of forest to plantations or other land uses. Native forest clearing or conversion has been limited in Tasmania since 1997 and 80 per cent of all the State's old-growth forests have been permanently reserved.

Meanwhile, Forestry Tasmania, which has a 20-year contract to supply 1.5 million tonnes of pulpwood a year to the proposed Bell Bay pulp mill, has begun preliminary discussions with the Forest Stewardship Council about accreditation. Forestry Tasmania said Japanese customers had asked it to consider adding to its existing certification under the Australian Forestry Standard.

Managing Director, Bob Gordon, said: "Forestry Tasmania has long held the view that the battle should not be between the two certification schemes - it should be between certified and non-certified wood. There would certainly be commercial advantage in holding both AFS and FSC certification, but we need to understand more before we commit to the FSC process. In exploratory discussions with FSC Australia, we have sought to gain a better understanding of what would be involved and how long it would take to complete the FSC-controlled wood certification."

FSC Australia's Michael Spencer said: "It is encouraging that there is now some engagement between the two organisations and we are hopeful of continuing dialogue."

In Canberra, the Federal Minister for the Environment, Peter Garrett, expressed confidence in Tasmania's forest industry after the release of the first 10-year review of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* by Dr Alan Hawke. Mr Garrett ruled there was no need for new mechanisms under section 38 of the act as it applies to regional forest agreements between the States and the Commonwealth, preferring to drive continuous improvement in the forests through the agreements' existing review mechanisms.

Dr Hawke singled out Tasmania for its achievements under a Regional Forests Agreement signed by the Federal and State governments in 1997.

Mr Llewellyn described the agreement, which has been the subject of two five-yearly reviews, as "a successful partnership between our two governments, the forest industry and the community."

He said Dr Hawke had found the agreement to be working successfully and delivering sustainable forestry operations.

Island Specialty Timbers Tasmania (ISTT), which was established as a result of the agreement, will open a new sales yard on the Bass Highway in Smithton early this year. Ground works and construction has begun on the new storage and showroom building that will be the Forestry Tasmania subsidiary's third outlet in the State. ISTT sources craft wood logs, stumps and burls for sale to makers of furniture, joinery, craft items and musical instruments. The Smithton facility will be operated in conjunction with existing outlets at Geeveston and Strahan.

Further information on the new native forest policy can be viewed at:  
[http://www.dier.tas.gov.au/forests/permanent\\_native\\_forest\\_estate\\_policy](http://www.dier.tas.gov.au/forests/permanent_native_forest_estate_policy)

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### Prolific Ponting delights Bellerive

The third cricket Test between Australia and Pakistan became a celebration in January as Tasmanian-born captain, Ricky Ponting, scored 209 and 89 to confound his critics and win the Man of the Match award. The game confirmed picturesque Bellerive Oval as a fortress for Australian teams who have never been beaten at the ground on Hobart's eastern shore.



Eight Tests have been played at Bellerive over 21 years resulting in six Australian wins and two draws. Tasmania's inaugural cricket Test in December 1989 resulted in a 173-run win for Australia over Sri Lanka. Subsequently, Pakistan (three times), New Zealand and the West Indies have all lost. Only New Zealand has been able to bat long enough to salvage two draws (1997 and 2001) on a pitch that is often described as ideal for batsmen.

Ponting had been under fire from some media commentators before the match, but became the first Australian batsman since Don Bradman to have scored five or more Test double-centuries, to the evident delight of the Tasmanian crowd.

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### Pay day for home generators

Aurora Energy will establish a feed-in tariff for household energy systems that provide excess power back to the grid, the Minister for Energy, David Llewellyn, told a Government business enterprise hearing in December. Mr Llewellyn also announced the commitment of \$380,000 to assist King and Flinders island residents to reduce their dependence on diesel fuel. The committee was also told that:

- A second Basslink cable could be built in the "medium term"; and
  - Hydro Tasmania is on track to record better-than-average generation of 9,500 gigawatt hours in 2009-10.
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### Free wireless up and running

The first stage of a trial of free wireless connectivity on Hobart's waterfront has been successfully completed by the Tasmanian Electronic Commerce Centre. The Tasmanian Government contributed \$178 000 to the centre to support an 18-month trial in which internet and intranet access is provided to anybody at Princes Wharf No.1 Shed, Salamanca Place, Salamanca Square or the Parliament Gardens who has a WiFi capable mobile phone, laptop, notebook or other fourth-generation (4G) device. For further information go to:  
[www.wirelesstasmania.com.au](http://www.wirelesstasmania.com.au)

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### Chromy's hotel ahead of schedule

The \$30 million redevelopment of the old Launceston General Hospital into a 99-room hotel, 14 luxury residential apartments and a business and medical centre is ahead of schedule and is now expected to be completed in mid-2010. Entrepreneur Josef Chromy has 100 people working on-site and 100 more employed off-site. The heavy construction phase of The Charles development is over and fitout is proceeding. On completion the hotel will employ about 30 people, while the medical and business centre will have about 50 permanent staff.

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## Medical pioneer dies at 89

Emeritus Professor Arthur Cobbold AM, OBE, Bsc, PhD, who devoted his life to broadening the study of medicine, died in Hobart in December. He was 89. Professor Cobbold, arrived in Tasmania in 1964 from St Thomas' Hospital Medical School in London, is credited with establishing and consolidating the reputation of the University of Tasmania's School of Medicine. He was foundation Professor of Physiology, headed the Department of Physiology for 21 years and was also Head of the Department of Physiology at the Royal Hobart Hospital until his retirement.

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## US Navy acquires Austal ship

Australian ship-builder Austal, which operates a shipyard at Margate in south-east Tasmania, has had a 127m littoral combat ship commissioned by the United States Navy and is building a 103m high-speed vessel in a deal it hopes will lead to up to 10 orders from the American armed forces. The littoral combat ship, named *USS Independence*, is designed for near-shore operations where it will be expected to deal with mines, quiet submarines and fast surface craft.

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## Biomass power on the agenda

A wood-fired power station near Geeveston in the Huon Valley is back on Tasmania's short-term agenda. Forestry Tasmania's Chief Executive, Bob Gordon, told a government committee hearing in December that he was "very optimistic" about the biomass electricity project. A second, smaller station could be built in Smithton. He said the passing of amended mandatory renewable energy target laws in Canberra in late October had changed the economics of building new renewable-energy facilities.

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## Retail growth rolls on

The value of retail trade in Tasmania increased by 0.5 per cent in October, to \$445.2 million - a monthly record. Tasmania's growth rate was the second highest in the nation and was experienced in cafes, restaurants and takeaways (up 0.5 per cent), food retailing (up 0.4 per cent) and household goods retailing (up 0.2 per cent).

A fall in retail trade was experienced in clothing, footwear and personal accessories (down 1.8 per cent).

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## Fillup for Clarendon House

The National Trust has been granted \$920,000 to help in the restoration of historic Clarendon House. The Australian Government provided \$800,000 in the form of a Jobs Fund grant and the Tasmanian Government added \$120,000 from its Urban Renewal and Heritage Fund. The funding will enable the trust to undertake critical repairs and maintenance on the 1838 property outside Evandale.

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## Railway bypasses Bell Bay

Decisions by newsprint business Norske Skog and zinc producer Nystar to transport their output through the port of Burnie has led Tasmanian Railway to focus on the Hobart-Burnie route at the expense of Bell Bay. The Minister for Infrastructure, Graeme Sturges, said services to Burnie would be increased from five to seven a week. He said there was now insufficient freight being directed to Bell Bay and that service had been suspended.

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## Incat's 'Hanger' Harris retires

The Managing Director of Incat Tasmania, John 'Hanger' Harris retired in January. Mr Harris, a commercial lawyer and well-known blue-water sailor, became a Director of the company in 1995. In a career change, he moved from Sydney to Hobart in 2002 to take on management duties at the Prince of Wales Bay shipyard and played a central role in negotiations for the sales of several of its biggest vessels.

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## House prices up 14pc

Hobart house prices improved 14 per cent during the 12 months to the end of October 2009, according to residential property data base RP Data. Nationally, property prices rose 11.3 per cent in a period described by the company as "an exceptional and surprising year for Australia's property market." Hobart's median house price is now \$350,000.

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