



**HON JOSH WILLIE MP
TASMANIAN LABOR LEADER**

12 June 2026

Tabatha Badger MP
Chair, House of Assembly Select Committee on Caretaker Conventions

Submission of Hon Josh Willie MP, Leader of the Opposition

Dear Ms Badger,

Thank you for the invitation to provide a submission to the Select Committee on Caretaker Conventions on behalf of the Tasmanian Labor Opposition.

Relevant caretaker conventions

The Tasmanian caretaker conventions exist because, once the House of Assembly is dissolved, executive government cannot be held accountable to the Parliament in the usual way, and every election carries the possibility of a change of government.

The 2025 Caretaker Guidelines state that governments should avoid:

- making major policy decisions likely to commit an incoming government or limit its freedom to act;
- making significant appointments;
- entering into major contracts or agreements, or approving major variations or terminations of major contracts;
- using government resources in a way that advantages a particular party.

The Guidelines also state that where a major policy decision must be made during caretaker and would bind an incoming government, the relevant Minister, after agreement with the Premier, would usually consult the relevant Opposition spokesperson beforehand.

The central issue for the Committee is therefore not only whether the Government said it had “briefed” or “notified” the Opposition. The issue is whether there was genuine consultation before

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major decisions were made, whether relevant information was provided, and whether government entities remained politically neutral.

Project Marinus

The Government proceeded during the caretaker period toward an intergovernmental agreement relating to Project Marinus.

Project Marinus was clearly a major policy and financial decision. It involved a significant infrastructure commitment, intergovernmental agreement, and long-term financial implications for Tasmania.

During the caretaker period, Labor raised concerns that the Government was pressing ahead without releasing the whole-of-state business case and without providing sufficient information to allow proper scrutiny. The Government advised the Labor Opposition that it wished to brief us on matters relating to Project Marinus and requested our attendance the following day.

At the time, Dean Winter as Opposition Leader and Janie Finlay as relevant Shadow Minister attended. During the briefing they were provided access to a substantial volume of documents and material relating to the proposal. I was unable to attend the scheduled briefing but was able to access materials for a two-hour period later that day in a supervised committee room.

However, the circumstances of the briefing made meaningful consideration of that material impossible. We were not permitted to retain the documents, had limited time to review them, and were expected to consider highly complex financial, legal and policy matters within an extremely compressed timeframe.

Following the briefing, the Government demanded Labor's agreement to the proposed arrangement.

Labor did not agree to the proposal. We were not in a position to do so, having been given insufficient time and information to properly assess a decision of such significance.

Importantly, however, the caretaker conventions do not require the Opposition to approve major decisions. They require consultation.

The relevant question for the Committee is therefore not whether Labor agreed to the proposal, but whether the Government provided a genuine opportunity for meaningful consultation before proceeding with a decision that was capable of binding an incoming government.

Following Labor's refusal to agree, the Premier publicly stated that he would seek legal advice before proceeding. It is unclear why legal advice would have been required. The caretaker conventions, as understood by the Opposition, do not require bipartisan agreement before a government may act. Rather, they require that the Opposition be appropriately consulted.

If legal advice was obtained regarding the Government's obligations under the caretaker conventions, the Committee should seek that advice, or a description of its substance, to assist in determining the basis on which the Government proceeded.

TT-Line financial assistance

TT-Line financial assistance was also plainly a major matter during the caretaker period.

On 25 July 2025, TASCORP wrote to shareholding ministers outlining liquidity issues facing TT-Line and advising that, subject to written confirmation of the maximum amount guaranteed by the State, it had approved a temporary increase in TT-Line's VRP loan facility limit from \$990 million to \$1.4 billion until 31 October 2026.

During Estimates on 17 November 2025, the Premier confirmed that he believed the Government first became aware of TT-Line's insolvency issues around 21 July 2025. The Premier also confirmed that the Auditor-General provided a copy of a section 11 notice to ASIC regarding TT-Line on 31 July 2025.

During that same hearing I placed on the record that, during the caretaker period after the election, I received a phone call from then Treasurer Guy Barnett. In that call, Mr Barnett informed me that he had increased the loan facility for TT-Line from \$990 million to \$1.4 billion.

I also placed on the record that, during that conversation, the then Treasurer did not reveal the Auditor-General's determination around insolvency for the company.

That distinction is important.

The Opposition was not consulted before the decision was made. The Opposition was informed after the fact. Further, the Opposition was not provided with all material information relevant to the decision.

The Government failed to meet the caretaker conventions in relation to TT-Line because:

- the increase in the loan facility was a major financial decision;
- the decision was taken during the caretaker period;
- the decision was likely to bind an incoming government or limit its freedom to act;
- the Opposition was notified after the decision had been made, rather than consulted beforehand;
- material information about TT-Line's financial position was not disclosed to the Opposition at the time; and
- the Government's approach reduced the Opposition's ability to properly assess the decision.

TasRacing and TasInsure

The TasRacing matter raises a different but equally serious caretaker issue: the use of a government-owned business in a way that promoted a Liberal Party election commitment.

On 3 July 2025, during the election campaign and caretaker period, TasRacing sent communications to racing industry participants about TasInsure.

The communications referred positively to TasInsure, a Liberal Party election policy, and stated that it could provide workers compensation insurance expected to be applicable to racing industry participants, subject to eligibility.

TasRacing is a government-owned business. During caretaker, government entities are expected to avoid using public resources in a way that advantages a political party.

Subsequent reporting revealed that a senior adviser in the Racing Minister's office was made aware of TasRacing messaging that may have breached election conventions. The message was later taken down.

On 4 March 2026, I asked the Minister for Racing in Parliament about ABC reporting that the Minister's office was aware of TasRacing communications promoting TasInsure before they were issued. The Minister stated that her office did not know about the text message, but also said an adviser had provided details of the policy and she was assured the adviser had no prior knowledge of the message.

I ask the Committee to examine:

- who provided TasRacing with information about TasInsure;
- whether that information came from the Government, a ministerial office, political staff, the Liberal Party, or another source;
- whether TasRacing was provided with information not publicly available at the time;
- who authorised the SMS and related communications;
- what contact occurred between TasRacing and the Minister's office before the communications were issued;
- why the communication was removed;
- whether the Minister or her office took sufficient steps to prevent a government-owned entity being used to promote a party-political policy.

The TasRacing matter was inconsistent with the caretaker conventions because:

- TasRacing used its resources to communicate favourably about a Liberal Party election policy;
- the communication occurred during the caretaker period;
- TasRacing is a government-owned business subject to caretaker expectations; and

- the communication risked advantaging one political party during an election campaign.

Serious questions remain about what the Minister's office knew and when.

Conclusion

The caretaker conventions are not merely technical rules. They are designed to preserve confidence in government during an election period, protect the neutrality of public resources, and ensure an incoming government is not improperly bound before the people have determined the composition of the Parliament.

Across Marinus, TT-Line and TasRacing, the Government's conduct fell short of those standards.

In each case, the issue is not whether the Government later claimed that a briefing occurred or that an entity acted independently. The issue is whether the conduct met the spirit and purpose of the caretaker conventions.

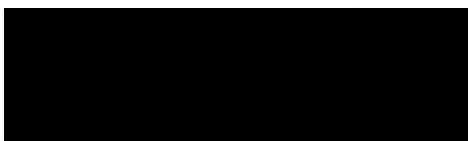
In relation to Marinus, Labor was not adequately or respectfully consulted.


In relation to TT-Line, Labor was informed after a major financial decision had been made and was not provided with all material information.

In relation to TasRacing, a government-owned business communicated favourably about a Liberal Party election commitment during the election campaign.

These matters were inconsistent with caretaker conventions and show a requirement for stronger, clearer and enforceable requirements for genuine consultation, disclosure of material information, and political neutrality by government entities during caretaker periods.

Kind regards



 Hon Josh Willie MP
Tasmanian Labor Leader