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THE VOICE OF TASMANIA

MERCURY

Growth good but get it right

ECONOMIC development is a good thing. And if Premier Will Hodgman wants to adopt the time-honoured tradition of using the number of cranes on a city's skyline as a measure of how well things are going, then good on him.

The Premier is right when he says that cranes on the skyline are often "symbolic of a state's economy that is booming" — it has been for at least a century, as former Queensland premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen knew all too well back in the 1970s and 1980s.

And things are certainly tracking along pretty well in Tasmania at the moment, at least in Hobart. As those cranes show, there are plenty of cashed-up investors willing to sink their money into our city.

As residents of this great state and this great city, we should all agree that — generally — that's a good thing. And any government worth its salt should be welcoming that investment, and celebrating it when the cash starts flowing.

We all know this is a pretty amazing place to live. But if things are happening, if our property prices are rising and jobless figures are falling, then all the better. Those things just underline to us all that we are living through generally good times, and that positivity then helps build momentum of its own.

So good on the Premier for pointing it out.

But there are two major challenges here: first, that the Government and councils must ensure that any new developments do not undermine what makes us unique; and, second, that the economic success of Hobart is shared across the entire state.

On the first point, as the *Mercury* has consistently said, this is an exciting time to be a Tasmanian — with what we offer in high demand. But let's hope our

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response is more nuanced than the approach taken by that other crane-counter, the pro-development Sir Joh — Queensland premier between 1968 and 1987.

For Sir Joh, it was all about development for development's sake. Rarely were environmental or heritage issues even considered as his government rushed headlong into approving whatever it was the developers wanted to do. Beautiful old buildings were bulldozed overnight, entire ecosystems were razed to make way for resorts, and high rises put some of the world's best beaches in the afternoon shade.

The state boomed, emerging from one which people elsewhere in the country made constant fun of to one where people wanted to move to. But so much was lost along the way.

And so back to Tasmania in 2017.

We know our city and our state is changing. And we want it to change. But we want it to be the right kind of change. The kind of change that doesn't destroy what makes us special in the first place.

And as the economic success, so rightly spruiked by the Premier, attracts more people to visit and then move here, that is inevitably going to put pressure on existing infrastructure and create demand for new facilities. It is vital, then, that our planning authorities get the balance right.

The second challenge here is that while it's all well and good to stand at the Hobart Cenotaph and count the cranes, a plan to ensure that prosperity flows into the other four electorates is actually what will determine who wins the next election.

At the *Mercury*, we continue to wait patiently for both sides to unveil the detail of those plans.