

MEDIA RELEASE**Wednesday September 7, 2022****University's massive spin spend referred to Electoral Commission**

The State's Electoral Commissioner has been requested to examine the legitimacy of the costly PR campaign being waged by UTAS to sell its controversial and unpopular plan to move its campus from Sandy Bay into Hobart city.

The Save UTAS campus group has written to the Tasmanian Electoral Commission pointing out the unfairness and extent of the UTAS advertising, marketing and public relations campaign in the lead up to the elector poll being conducted alongside the Hobart City Council local government elections.

Save UTAS campus group convenor Professor Pam Sharpe questioned how a poll could be fair when one side was spending hundreds and hundreds of thousands of largely taxpayers' dollars, money that should be spent on providing educational opportunities for Tasmanians, yet the opposing voice had no funds and had to rely on a few community members to get its message across.

Professor Sharpe said the UTAS campaign was nothing more than a slick propaganda effort devoid of any accountability and designed to avoid public scrutiny and mislead the community.

"With this saturation campaign in the press and on electronic media Tasmanians may be witnessing the biggest and most expensive PR activity ever undertaken, certainly by any public institution.

"UTAS is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars in a media blitz designed to varnish over its unpopular proposal to relocate from Sandy Bay to the Hobart CBD.

"The relocation plan involves moving students to renovated buildings around the Hobart CBD and retail area and replacing the magnificent Sandy Bay campus with a housing estate of 2700 apartments in around 70 apartment blocks.

"In the October elector poll Hobart citizens will be asked for their views and it appears UTAS believes it can heavily sway the vote though its PR blitz, even though it has announced it will take no notice of the result."

Professor Sharpe said UTAS had refused to engage in any real and meaningful public consultation on its disastrous relocation plan even though it had been directed to by the Hobart City Council in March this year.

"It is currently running a carefully selected 'community panel' that is not only not permitted to even discuss the actual relocation, but also not allowed to talk about whether it's good or bad for Hobart or for the university. It is a sham and should be derided as such.

“The massive spend on the advertising campaign and associated ‘varnishing’ costs, should be spent on the refurbishment of the Sandy Bay campus, and providing education opportunities for students, which is UTAS’s fundamental role.

“We have asked the Electoral Commission to intervene to control this irresponsible and undemocratic spending by UTAS. To allow it to continue will render the elector poll outcome meaningless as the public will be saturated by ongoing and misleading information from only one side of the debate. That information cannot even be questioned, or an alternative view posed,” Professor Sharpe said.

The Save UTAS Campus group also will be making a supplementary submission to the Legislative Council’s parliamentary committee which is presently reviewing the University of Tasmania Act 1992 management and governance arrangements to ask that the Act be amended so that never again could the university waste public funds on this scale.

Ends....

For more information:

Save UTAS Campus Convenor: Pam Sharpe Mobile: 0408 461 514