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Seas No Longer Divide

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Abstract

A three-part historic paper by Alan Tulip in the Telecommunication Journal of Australia in 1988 describes the political campaign for the connection of Tasmania to the Australian mainland telecommunications network after World War I, not completed until 1936.

Introduction

This three-part historic paper (Tulip, [1998a](#) ^[5]; [1988b](#) ^[6]; [1988c](#) ^[7]) is unusual in that it documents the political machinations surrounding the connection of Tasmania to the Australian mainland telecommunications network between World Wars I and II.

Two submarine cables already existed between Tasmania and the mainland, installed in 1909. They suffered from technical problems and were unsuitable for connection to the wider Australian telecommunications network.

This frustrated a number of Tasmanian politicians and business leaders who saw the mainland states benefiting from the latest technology advances, denied to Tasmania because of the 300 km wide Bass Strait crossing.

After World War I, significant advances were made in submarine cables and radio, and these two technologies jostled for preference to replace the current submarine cables. The Postmaster-General's department (PMG) conducted several detailed technical investigations and determined that submarine cable was a better technical choice over radio; however, it was approximately twice as costly and these were the lean years of economic depression.

The historic paper details the political pressures that were brought to bear on the PMG, as well as the agitation of the vested interest groups. When the Federal Government finally accepted the recommendations for a submarine cable around 1930, the funds were not available, owing to the Depression. Contracts were finally signed in 1934 with Siemens Bros and STC.

So, for nearly 20 years after World War I, Tasmania was effectively not connected to the mainland telecommunications network. When the submarine cable was fully commissioned in 1936, it was hugely successful and the usage far exceeded the planned take-up. This was not surprising to the Tasmanians, who had agitated for a better connection since World War I.

References

Tulip, A. (1988a). Seas no longer divide — Part 1, *Telecommunication Journal of Australia*, 38(1), 69-74.

Tulip, A. (1988b). Seas no longer divide — Part 2, *Telecommunication Journal of Australia*, 38(2), 71-77.

Tulip, A. (1988c). Seas no longer divide — Part 3, *Telecommunication Journal of Australia*, 38(3), 77-84.

The Historic Paper

Please see the PDF download for the full paper, including the historic paper reprint.

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