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Dear Members of the Literacy Advisory Panel,

**RE: Final Consultation Report for the Development of Tasmania's Community-wide Framework-February 2023**

I am writing in response to the panel's consultation document. Firstly, may I commend the panel on the preparation of this excellent framework and wish them every success in its implementation.

As Chairman of the Tasmanian Ministerial Thyroid Advisory Committee, I was delighted to see the critical importance of the micronutrient, iodine, being elevated to attention by the Panel's work. Iodine is an essential micronutrient required in foetal and early childhood neurological development. Of particular relevance to Tasmania, is the impact of iodine deficiency during the first 1000 days of life. Iodine deficiency induced deficits in the development of the literacy enablers, working memory and auditory processing remains problematic for pregnant and lactating women in Tasmania.

An analysis of Tasmanian NAPLAN and SARIS data has revealed an association between maternal iodine deficiency during pregnancy and reduced literacy outcomes. Reductions of ten per cent for spelling, 7.6% for grammar, and 5.7% for SARIS English literacy, compared to Tasmanian mothers with adequate iodine nutrition during pregnancy are evident. The research indicates that the level of iodine deficiency during pregnancy in Tasmania is impacting foetal and childhood brain development. This is fundamentally impacting subsequent literacy acquisition.

The National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recommends that during pregnancy women receive a supplement of iodine (150 mg daily). I would encourage the Panel to consider reflecting this recommendation overtly in the final framework namely, *"that all Tasmanian women during pregnancy and lactation are provided education and opportunity to receive an iodine nutritional supplement in accordance with NHMRC guidelines, and that population monitoring of supplementation is periodically ascertained and reported"*.

I would also make the following general comments in relation to the final consultation report:

Page 12; the ecological model of learning/literacy. The model and diagrammed depiction of learning and literacy is excellent. I would recommend that the panel consider accentuate the role of parenting and families during the first 1000 days.

Page 15; Parent, Families and Carers;

- Dot Point 1 - ... *"the important* role that parents, families and carers play ... *"Consider replacing the word "important" with the phrase "foundational and critical".*
- Dot Point 2 - ... *"Immersion in spoken language – speaking and listening, as well as reading activities at home, have significant positive influence ..."* might be strengthened by replacing the word *"significant"* with *"foundational"*.
- Dot Point 5 – Substitution of the word *"continues"* for the phrase *"is vital"* in the sentence " ... and literacy outcomes *continues* into the teenage ...".

Page 16: - What this tells us.

- Dot Point 1; - consider using the word “*must*” rather than “*should*” in the sentence “... *should be prioritised ...*”.

Page 16: Key Themes;

- Dot Point 1. It is noted that “*highly capable educators are required to teach literacy in the early years.*” It would be worth considering explicitly stating that “*highly capable educators are by necessity highly literate educators.*”

Page 17:

- Dot Point ... “*a need for continuous, quality assured, evidence-based ...*”. Consider strengthening this from “*a need*” to being “*a necessity*”.

Page 18:

- Dot Point 9. “*Highly literate and skilled graduate educators are essential for delivering quality literacy outcomes*”. Consider elevating this dot point 9 to dot point 1 under the heading “*What this tells us*”.

Page 23 – Early Years

“*The developing brain and literacy*” consider accentuating the importance of the first 1000 days by including this on the page 23.

The First 1000 days It is noted that “... the micronutrient iodine is key to ... “. Consider modifying to note “... the *essential* micronutrient iodine ...”. In the second sentence of this dot point I would suggest that the words ... “*iodine is an important building block for supporting learning ...*” be modified such that the word “*learning*” is substituted for the phrase “... *learning, literacy ...*”.

Page 24 – The First 1000 Days. I would suggest overtly noting.

- “*The critical role that the maternal physical and psychological wellbeing has on foetal development and consequently to infant, early childhood and later life wellbeing*”.

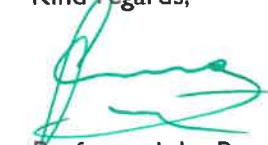
Page 26 – “What this tells us about the early years” I would suggest adding the following

- “*policy and programme should aim to optimise the precursor of literacy in the first 1000 days, including sufficiency of maternal nutrition including iodine nutrition, maternal psychological and physical wellbeing*”.

**Page 53 – “Measures and Targets”** consider inserting a “*First 1000 day*” heading prior to the “*Early Years*” to note the importance of maternal, nutrition and adequacy of micronutrients, such as iodine, for foetal health and wellbeing and to articulate a target for monitoring and attainment of NHMRC nutritional guidelines particularly in relation to iodine nutrition during pregnancy and lactation.

I would also like to draw the Committee to the document “*Barriers and enablers to maternal iodine supplement use in Tasmania Report 2022* attached prepared by the Education Department in collaboration with the Ministerial Thyroid Advisory Committee. This report clearly outlines the challenge and importance of achieving adequate iodine nutrition during pregnancy and lactation.

Kind regards,



Professor John Burgess  
Chair  
Ministerial Thyroid Advisory Committee

20 March 2023



Barriers and  
enablers to materna