

**EXCLUSIVE**

# FLY ME A RIVER

## New 'flying ferries' plan for Derwent

A fleet of "flying" ferries could soon be criss-crossing the River Derwent and carrying passengers as far as New Norfolk under an eye-catching plan to establish a passenger service using an "entirely new mode of transport".

The Mercury can exclusively reveal that local engineer Cameron McCulloch, a veteran of the renewable energy sector, has partnered with New Zealand hydrofoil manufacturer Vessev in an audacious bid to launch his own fully battery-electric ferry service in Hobart.

ROB INGLIS REPORTS, PAGES 4-5



**WOMEN TAKE A STAND**  
STORY, PAGE 2

## Two firms bid to build our stadium

Two contractors have been chosen to move to the next stage of the tender for the Macquarie Point stadium, announced by Minister Eric Abetz on Sunday and getting the nod by Civil Contractors Federation Tasmania.

"The combination of a clear master plan and two capable tenderers give industry confidence that Macquarie Point is moving from concept to reality," CCF boss Andrew Winch said.

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## Plibersek's blistering warning

Federal Labor frontbencher Tanya Plibersek has launched a scathing critique of right wing parties, accusing them of inflaming "culture wars" and peddling a "politics of division" threatening Australian values.

On Sunday, the federal minister addressed day two of the Tasmanian Labor Party's state conference, the first in seven years.

She also paid tribute to the late Patti Warn, Tasmanian Labor's first female state secretary.

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## UNITED AUSTRALIA PARTY

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Senator Ralph Babet  
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## Illness 'worse than Covid'

Alison Foletta

More than 50,000 Tasmanians will have federally funded access to the first vaccine for a respiratory disease that can feel "worse than flu or Covid".

The first respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccine, called AREXVY, will soon be available on the National Immunisation Program, and available for free for Australians aged 75 and over, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 60 and over from May 5.

This includes 52,000 Tasmanians like Glenorchy grandmother Beth Joyce, who said RSV left her struggling to breathe and unable to walk short distances.

Ms Joyce, 78, got sick over Christmas, her symptoms got rapidly worse and she spent a week in hospital.

While in hospital, Ms Joyce needed oxygen and significant medical support, and she said it was worse than the flu or Covid and the virus had "knocked the wind out of me".

RSV is a common, contagious respiratory virus, often mistaken as a cold. In older people, it can lead to serious complications like pneumonia and can be fatal.

It is four times more likely to be fatal in older adults compared with young children under five.

Even after being released from hospital care, Ms Joyce needed months of oxygen support and physiotherapy.

She lost a huge part of her independence being unable to drive, meaning she could not visit her husband who lives in aged care.

Ms Joyce said she was unaware RSV could seriously affect older adults, and wanted to help spread greater awareness about the virus and its impact.

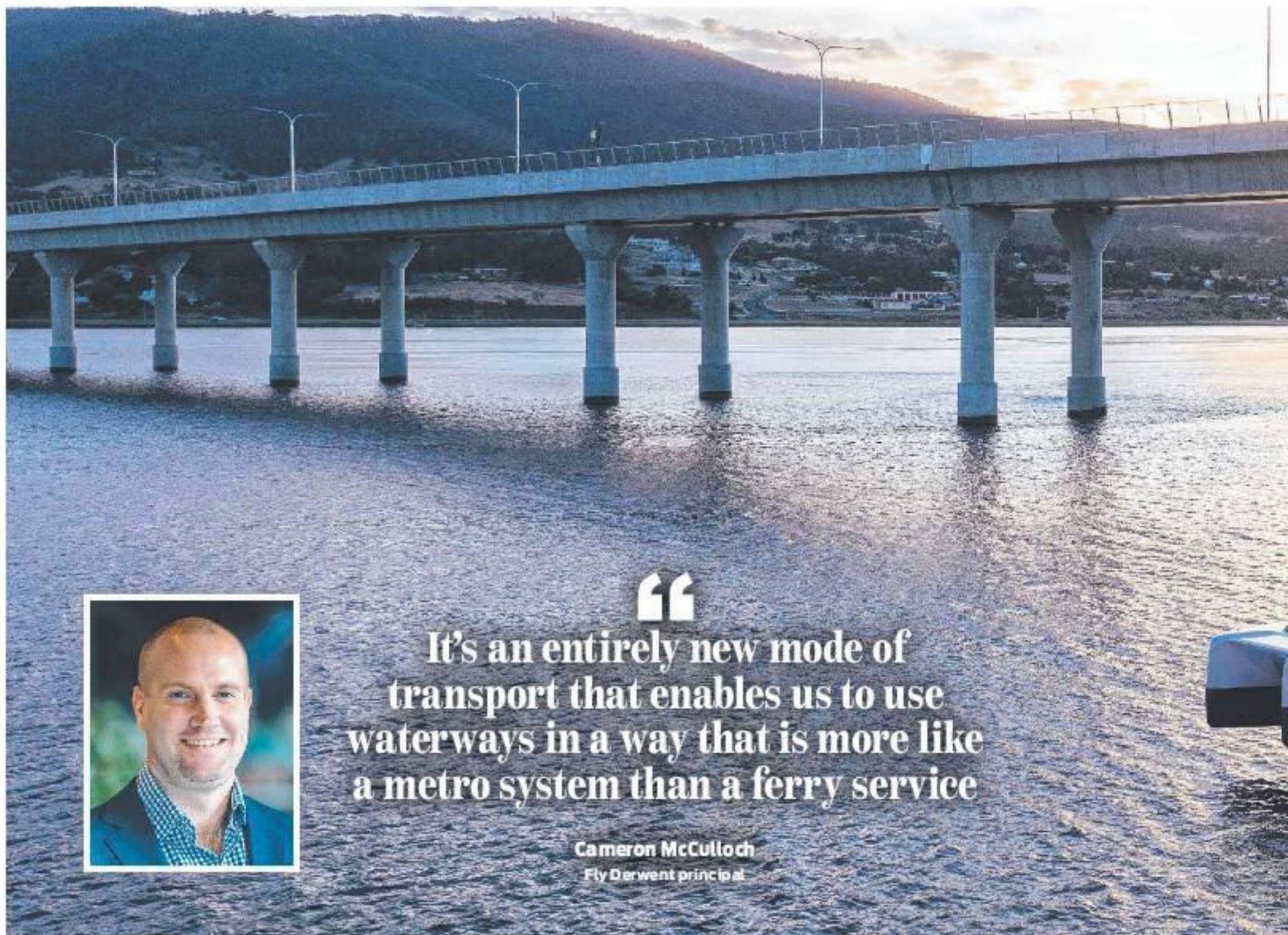
The RSV vaccine will be given by a GP or pharmacist.

Immunisation Foundation Australia executive director Catherine Hughes said this new addition to NIP showed "immunisation is a lifelong strategy, which doesn't stop at childhood".

"It will help to protect older adults from serious respiratory illness while preventing avoidable hospital admissions and easing pressures on the health system during peak respiratory seasons," she said.

## Audacious plan to give commuters a

# 'FLYING' FERRIES



“It’s an entirely new mode of transport that enables us to use waterways in a way that is more like a metro system than a ferry service”

Cameron McCulloch  
Fly Derwent principal

### Rob Inglis

A fleet of "flying" ferries could soon be crisscrossing the River Derwent and carrying passengers as far as New Norfolk under an eye-catching plan to establish a passenger service using an "entirely new mode of transport".

The Mercury can exclusively reveal that local engineer Cameron McCulloch, a veteran of the renewable energy sector, has partnered with New Zealand hydrofoil manufacturer Vessey in an audacious bid to launch his own fully battery-electric ferry service in Hobart.

Hydrofoils, the invention of

which can be traced back to 19th-century France, are named for the fins mounted to the underside of their hulls. The fins function like aeroplane wings, lifting the boats out of the water as they gather speed, giving them the appearance of flying.

Mr McCulloch's new tech start-up, Fly Derwent, has ordered one of Vessey's flagship VS-9 boats – a nine-metre, zero-emission catamaran with a top speed of 30 knots (about 56km/h) and the capacity to seat 10 people. It's set to be used for passenger trials and is expected to arrive in Tasmania in early 2027.

Fly Derwent has also re-

served four VS-12s, which are still in development and would fit 30 passengers, with Mr McCulloch hoping these, too, can be rolled out on the Derwent if the initial VS-9 trials prove successful.

The craft are said to offer a smooth and silent journey for commuters – even those prone to seasickness.

According to Mr McCulloch, the electric hydrofoil network would be up to 90 per cent cheaper to operate than a diesel ferry service.

"It's an entirely new mode of transport that enables us to use waterways in a way that is more like a metro system than a ferry service," he said.

The entrepreneur said the boats didn't require terminals and could theoretically use any standard jetty for boarding and disembarking, while charging infrastructure could be installed at some sites and ramps added for accessibility purposes.

"The thing about this [proposal] is it's adaptable and scalable," Mr McCulloch said.

"We're actually really open to proving and trialling it and demonstrating ... a number of different routes and locations."

Effectively generating no wake, hydrofoils benefit from reduced drag, which enable them to reach higher speeds

than traditional ferries, while also limiting impact on sensitive environments such as riverbanks.

Another benefit of a fully electrified transport network would be its "insulation" from the volatile fuel market, particularly in times of global uncertainty, Mr McCulloch said.

If fully implemented, the Hobart hydrofoil service would cover a span of 60km, all the way from New Norfolk to Opossum Bay, initially providing small-scale commuter and tourism offerings, with a base on the Hobart waterfront.

It could potentially operate as an "Uber-like" on-demand service, Mr McCulloch said,

## Alzheimers data flawed

Alzheimer drug hailed as the first-ever dementia treatments do not work, a major review claims.

But critics say the report is flawed and ignores decades of progress.

The row comes after scientists at the prestigious British Cochrane policy institute reviewed 17 trials involving 20,000 patients who took drugs to flush toxic amyloid proteins from their

brains. Build-up of the proteins causes Alzheimer's disease, the No.1 cause of dementia.

The review found no significant improvement in patients' memories and no sign the drugs could slow or stop dementia.

However, British charities said the latest study lumped together results from old, failed drugs together with newer, better ones.

## Foreign language teaching lost for words

Darcy Fitzgerald

A shrinking cohort of Australian students are studying foreign languages at school.

New research reveals just 7.6 per cent of Aussie students study a foreign language in year 12, down by a third since 2010.

In Europe, 96 per cent of students study a foreign language in their final year.

Indonesian has the lowest retention rate of just 3.7 per

cent, with overall student numbers shrinking 25 per cent, according to the most recent government schools data.

Indonesian, German and Greek have suffered some of the steepest declines, but Asian languages, such as Japanese and Chinese, and Spanish have shot up in popularity.

Overall, the number of students studying foreign languages has increased just above population growth levels.

Across Australia, it is common for students to learn a variety of languages, sometimes for only one term, often determined by which language teacher schools receive.

In submissions to a senate inquiry on Asian studies, Professor Heather Zwicker from the University of Queensland warned that "Asia capability is not simply an educational aspiration; it's a sovereign capability essential to Australia's security, prosperity and diplomatic influence".

The Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA) is calling for a co-ordinated national approach to language learning to drive reforms.

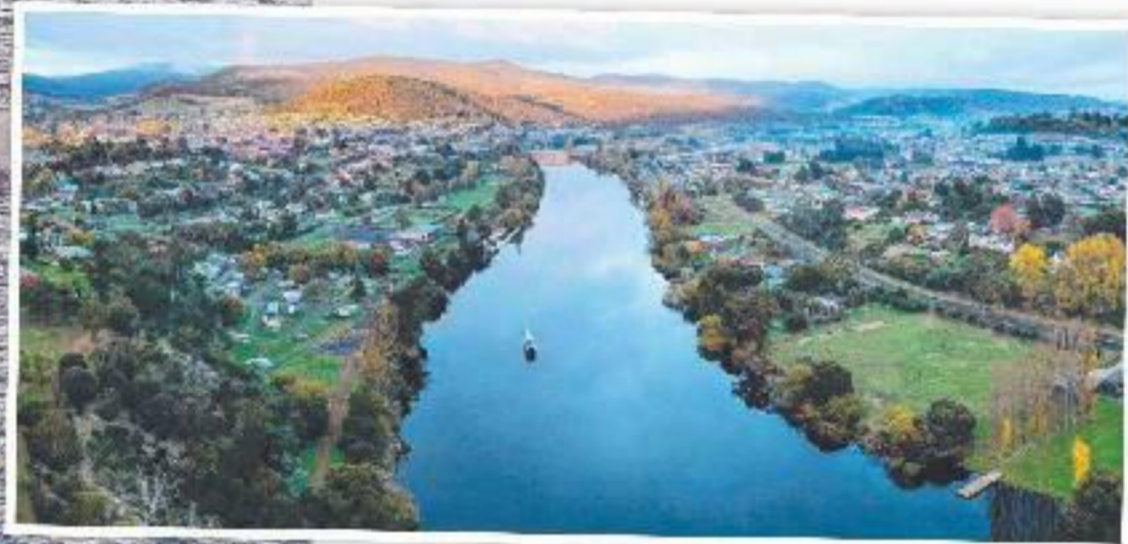
Both the Education Minister Jason Clare and Foreign Minister Penny Wong said foreign language learning was a way to open doors and better connect with our region.

# fully electric service along the Derwent

# SET FOR HOBART



Vessev co-founder and CEO Eric Laakmann will be in Hobart on Monday to pitch a proposal for an electric hydrofoil passenger transport network on the River Derwent, and, left and below, proposed designs of the new ferry network for the River Derwent.



giving passengers the opportunity to order a ferry for a direct pick-up.

Fly Derwent has mooted Sandy Bay and Kingston as possible destinations to showcase how an urban commuter hydrofoil network could work in practice.

Rather than competing with the Derwent Ferry, Mr McCulloch was adamant his project would be "100 per cent complementary" and relieve pressure on the soon-to-be expanded publicly-run service.

A number of financing options are in play for the proposed new network, including leasing arrangements and private investment. It's antici-

pated Fly Derwent would retain ownership of the fleet but contract an external operator to run the service.

Hydrofoils were used for water transport in the latter half of the 20th century, including in Sydney, before they fell out of favour in the 1990s due to high operating costs.

But electrification has prompted a reassessment of the craft's commercial viability for passenger transport, along with advances in foil geometry, sensor technology, computing power, and building materials.

New Zealand's leading ferry operator, Fullers360, launched a VS-9 service on

Waitemata Harbour in Auckland last year, while Vessev has also partnered with a Western Australian marine tech business to deliver a tourism experience on Perth's Swan River from 2027, with plans to eventually introduce commuter routes.

Vessev CEO Eric Laakmann, an electrical engineer who was instrumental in launching the first Apple Watch, will be in Hobart on Monday to help Mr McCulloch pitch his idea to stakeholders.

He said the Fly Derwent proposal was the first step in a worldwide shift towards urban waterborne transport.

"With projects now underway in both Tasmania and Perth, we're seeing genuine momentum build in Australia," Mr Laakmann said.

"Almost every major city has waterways sitting largely unused for passenger transport and electric hydrofoiling changes that."

Fly Derwent is also exploring whether it could partner with a local manufacturer to build Vessev's cutting-edge VS-12s in Tasmania.

It's hoped commercial certification can be obtained from the Australian Maritime Safety Authority to deploy the hydrofoils on the Derwent, provided planning and envi-

ronmental approvals are also granted.

Mr McCulloch is optimistic these regulatory hurdles can be cleared prior to the arrival of the first ferry in Hobart next year.

Trial passenger services using electric hydrofoils are currently under way in a handful of European cities, including Stockholm and Oslo.

And while Mr McCulloch's focus is on getting a Hobart network up and running, he believes there's potential to expand throughout the state.

"I don't want it to feel too Hobart-centric," he said. "I really want this to be a Tasmanian thing."

## Meghan 'spins threads of gold'

Mara Siegler

Meghan Markle has been accused of using her Australian tour with Prince Harry to promote her clothing.

"The Queen must be rolling over in her grave," a source close to the royal family said.

Early last week the Duchess of Sussex launched a page on fashion platform OneOff that allows users to check out her wardrobe, with many of the items being worn during the couple's visit.

An investor in the site, she also reportedly receives a percentage of the sales.



Meghan and Harry in Melbourne.

On Friday an image of her smiling while meeting with survivors of the Bondi terror attack that left 15 people dead was posted on the site promoting her outfit - a Matteau classic stripe shirt (\$440), Rolla's sailor jeans (\$139), a PJFemme sweater (\$670) and Freda Salvador sneakers (\$298).

The image was removed the same day and replaced with a picture of Meghan on a street in the same look.

A spokesman for her said: "Meghan wore that outfit all day during daytime hours yesterday, including times when she was enjoying Sydney and on a boating trip."

"OneOff does sometimes pull (images of stars) from (photo agency) Getty, but Meghan's team has been working closely with them to make sure they're using approved photography and correcting as needed."

When Meghan launched her page it included an image of her at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne meeting with children who suffer from cancer and other serious conditions - showcasing a Priscilla dress by Karen Gee RTW (\$1250), Puffy Hearts stud earrings by Real Fine Studio (\$780) and iridescent leather pumps by Christian Dior (\$120).

"The idea that these terminally ill children have come out to greet you because you're a member of the royal family ... and hours later you're promoting your 'hospital look' for money," the source said.



Ben Roberts-Smith.

VL - MEREDITH/IMA

## BRS attacks the 'spectacle' of his war crimes arrest

Chelsea Bunting

Ben Roberts-Smith has slammed the Australian Federal Police's decision to arrest him so publicly in front of his family as an "unnecessary spectacle", as he vowed to fight the war crimes charges laid against him.

Australia's most decorated living soldier used his first public statement since being charged with five counts of

war-crime murder to declare his innocence and thank his supporters.

Roberts-Smith said he and his family had been "subject to a decade-long campaign to convince Australians that I've acted improperly in my service in Afghanistan".

"As I've always maintained, I categorically deny all of these allegations, and while I would have preferred these charges not be brought, I will be taking

this opportunity to finally clear my name," he said.

He slammed the "deliberate, sensational arrest" at Sydney Airport on April 7, which happened in full view of his two teenage daughters, and called it an "unnecessary spectacle".

"I understand this journey will be long. I understand this journey will be difficult, but I can promise everybody that I have never run from a fight in my life, I will never give up, and

I will always be in the fight," Roberts-Smith said.

He declared he was proud of his service in Afghanistan and that he had always acted within his values, his training, and the rules of engagement.

"I'm also extremely proud of all of the men and women that served alongside me in Afghanistan, and their service and sacrifice should never be forgotten, particularly those who made the ultimate sacri-

ifice, many of whom were my friends," he said.

"I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank millions of Australians who have reached out to me, publicly and privately, to offer their support and well wishes. It means a great deal to me, and is extremely humbling."

Roberts-Smith, who lives on the Gold Coast, was released on strict bail conditions on Friday.