

Submission to the ongoing Local Government review by Peter Binny

1 Election of Mayors and deputy mayors in particular.

The Act prevents a person from nominating for both the mayor and deputy mayor positions. This prevents the unsuccessful mayoral candidates from filling the roll of deputy mayor. The most experienced candidates will nominate for the mayoral position and the consequence is there is always a “second rower” elected to the position of deputy mayor. This can be eliminated by have an election for mayor and deputy mayor combined, with any deputy elected having the option to not accept the role. This will usually get a more experience person into the role of deputy mayor.

2. Councillor allowances.

As a general observation the 1993 changes to the act and the prior decision to “pay” councillor allowances has diminished the quality of councillors. Many have treated the allowance as income and one recent candidate for the Derwent Valley mayoral position even called for superannuation to be paid on the allowance. I would have thought it preferable to pay the authorised travelling and reimburse other costs of councillors to attend meetings and other duties as was the case prior to these allowances being paid. These allowances are inequitable in that a councillor from Maydena would have significantly great costs in attending meetings than a councillor from within the town, yet they would both receive the same allowance.

3 Quorum _ Number of Councillors.

It would be naive to argue that Derwent Valley Council has functioned well, especially during the last year. One Councillor had an ongoing declaration of pecuniary interest in any and all development applications, others declaring pecuniary interest on spurious grounds, rendering meetings without a quorum. The administration were unaware of the requirements for a quorum when Councillors were no longer eligible to hold office. The Act could be more specific in this regard. The reduction in the number of Councillors in the Derwent Valley to eight has also had an adverse effect on the ability to maintain a quorum. Having an even number of Councillors has also been detrimental to achieving a quorum. I would suggest an increase in the numbers to nine Councillors is justified.

4 Representation.

Until the recent election of Clr. Bingley on a count back, all Councillors resided within a few kilometres of the town centre, there being no representation of the rural areas of the municipality which extends from Granton to Strathgordon. With the vast majority of electors living within the town of New Norfolk, canvassing and achieving the required numbers for election is much easier for town nominees. Rural nominees are at a distinct disadvantage because of distance and number of voters in rural areas. I suggest the reintroduction of electoral districts as allowed in the present Act. One rural district and one urban district with weighted numbers of councillors in each district not solely on the number of voters. Rural ventures including aquaculture, horticulture and agriculture are vital to the Municipality, provide employment, make a substantial contribution to the Municipal GDP, Municipal revenues and deserve representation on Council.

5 General Manager’s Electoral Roll.

There is very little knowledge of the General Manager’s electoral roll in the community. There are over 400 businesses operating in the Municipality, some businesses have dual lessees who live outside the municipality. Every business is entitled to nominate a person to vote on its behalf as a corporate nominee. Other land holders are absent owners waiting to build on a land purchased or live outside the Municipality and let their house as B&B accommodation. Non citizens who don’t qualify for the federal elector roll have a right to vote at council elections. All these persons are entitled to vote and some even have an entitlement to two votes. I would speculate there are some

1000 voters eligible to be on the General Manager's electoral roll, but there are only 189 such voters presently enrolled.

To be truly democratic all eligible voters should be enrolled and more emphasis and effort should be made to have these voters enrolled.

6 Planning.

All planning approvals should be issued by a central panel of experts. A system similar to the Northern Territory would work well once accepted. There is an expert panel which is joined by representatives of the council involved in the application. The panel can deal with multiple matters as the council representatives can be changed for each council district.

There is insufficient land zoned residential to cater for the future needs of the State. The Planning Commission has been reluctant to rezone land in the past citing sufficient is available. This is not the case. This has led to land being rezoned to Rural Residential or Rural Living on the perimeters of towns. Take Brighton for example. Residential area surrounded by Rural Living zone and no where to expand. The impractical South Brighton plan is a pipe dream incapable of being implemented as many existing residents all have to agree to the plan which will not suit many who have chosen that particular living style and don't want change. It will be very difficult to rezone and service land outside the rural living zone or indeed to resubdivide parts of this zone.

I have emailed the GM of Derwent Valley Council suggesting an area of Rural land, surrounded by Residential and Rural Living zones on the outskirts of New Norfolk, be rezoned to Residential to provide for future growth given the government want to build 10,000 houses over the next ten years. This would also provide competition in the land market and so reduce the cost spiral presently exhibited in land costs. The land in question is within the serviced area for water and sewage.

7. Amalgamation.

Just do it!! How many more reports do we need to get this going. The Munro, Eslake, Haims report recommended a single greater Hobart Council with the possibility of rural amalgamations to follow. Such a move will greatly enhance planning as well as service delivery and maybe some rate relief.

8. Housing costs.

A report a few years ago in the Australian Financial Review noted that 49% of the cost of a house and land package in Sydney was taxes and red tape. While other capital cities had slightly small percentages, none the less Government imposts add significantly to housing costs and a stream lining of Local Government planning, approvals and time delays would reduce these costs.

Peter Binny