



*Office of the Mayor*

• 38 Bligh St Rosny Park  
• PO Box 96  
• Rosny Park TAS, 7018  
• **Dx** 70402  
• **Ph** 03 6217 9500  
• **E** [clarence@ccc.tas.gov.au](mailto:clarence@ccc.tas.gov.au)

8 September 2022

Ms Sue Smith  
Chair  
Future of Local Government Review  
Via email: [LGBoard@dpac.tas.gov.au](mailto:LGBoard@dpac.tas.gov.au)

Dear Ms Smith,

On 22 August 2022, council held a workshop discussion regarding the Future of Local Government Review, Interim Report - Stage 1. While not wishing to provide a formal, council endorsed response at this stage in the review process, elected members requested that I provide some informal, high-level feedback to the Review Board.

Noting that council staff and elected members are contributing to the current review process in a variety of ways, our Council will provide more detailed feedback at the end of the next stage of the process.

The interim report identified four core challenges and opportunities for local government. While we have discussed each of the four challenges, our key feedback can be distilled to three points at this stage.

### **The paradox of size**

A key challenge facing this review is that a 'one size fits all' model of local government is not realistic. There is no 'model' council that can be reliably used as an example or benchmark. In this context, the legislative review should, as a point of principle, aim to ensure councils remain nimble and flexible and that any future legislative framework reflect that aim.

Some community comments regarding amalgamation have focussed on the question of what is the right 'number' of councils in Tasmania. The Interim Report identified amalgamations as a potentially 'blunt and relatively simplistic approach' which, in the context of the 'right number of councils' debate, is perhaps true.

Like others, we have wrestled with the paradox of size. Within our sector there are small councils that are agile, financially sound and delivering good outcomes for their community. Equally, there are larger councils that arguably struggle with debt and other issues,

notwithstanding their size, population and other key attributes. This suggests that deciding a preferred target number of councils is not an ideal approach to reform. But it does suggest that looking at the circumstances that create sustainable councils should be preferred.

With the above in mind, we would like to suggest that the Review Board consider development of a multi-factor model to test the viability and sustainability of existing councils irrespective of size, prior to any proposal for amalgamation. That is, do not write off amalgamations as a possible outcome, but judiciously develop a framework to test candidate councils within the context of economic, population, financial and political imperatives.

### **Structural sustainability**

The interim report recognises two potential models – boundary mergers to form larger councils (amalgamations) and service consolidation at a regional or state-wide level as possible considerations for structural sustainability within the sector. The issue of amalgamated councils has been briefly discussed above.

Within the context of shared services models, we feel that great care needs to be taken here. Widespread service consolidation, like amalgamation, has the potential to give rise to adverse outcomes that may not be clearly understood at the outset. The case in point is TasWater and its predecessors.

Similar to our suggestion regarding amalgamation models, sector-wide modelling should be undertaken to understand whether genuine economies of scale can be achieved through service consolidation. That modelling should consider whether duplications of effort will arise, whether inter-dependencies associated with current council functions will be lost, potentially leading to poor outcomes and inefficiencies that currently does not exist. For example, as things currently stand, in many councils there is an integration of services related to planning, engineering and regulatory services. These work areas work in a close and integrated way to ensure planning applications have appropriate engineering and compliance requirements built in. Similarly, when subdivisions or homes are being built, engineering and regulatory service areas work with their planning departments to ensure what is built complies with permit requirements. Establishment of a regional planning authority (for example) runs the very real risk of breaking these internal council linkages and work processes to the detriment of our communities.

### **Local voice and representation**

The potential loss of 'local voice' has been raised and will be a fundamental concern for many communities. While minds will differ on what an appropriate level of local voice and representation might look like, a couple of high-level points are relevant.

In basic terms, while changes may be contemplated in relation to the number of councils and / or service models, as well as the scope of responsibilities councils may be responsible for, the level of representation within the local government sector should be maintained.

Within the context of maintaining established levels of representation, we encourage the Review Board to give consideration to how better support and funding can be provided to elected members – to make the role more sustainable and professionally well-regarded within the community. This could include better payment levels that have the effect of attracting bigger field of qualified and capable candidates, along with clearer role definition. These two steps could compliment the good work already underway in terms of training programs for elected members.

### **Conclusion**

We are looking forward to the outcome of Stage 2 of the review process. We have provided the above suggestions as a high-level contribution to discussion and debate at this stage. Both the General Manager and I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further if you think that would be beneficial.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Doug Chipman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Councillor Doug Chipman

**MAYOR**