



CIRCULAR HEAD COUNCIL

Please quote our ref: Future of Local Government
Reform in Tasmania
Your ref:

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Local Government Board
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To whom it may concern

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM – PHASE 1 SUBMISSION

Circular Head Council is pleased to contribute a submission to inform the Local Government Reform Board's initial deliberations.

Summary

Our submission focusses on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for local government as a sector. It discusses the importance of local planning; resource sharing as a solution for small councils; keeping services local (e.g., waste management) and reform to local government election principles.

We have noted the trends identified by the Board in its *Reflections* document, including:

- The need for services to evolve in response to demographic and technological changes
- The potential for collaboration at all levels of government
- The likely impact of climate change which cannot yet be fully quantified.

Planning

Local planning meets local need. A local planning operation understands local cultural drivers and is best placed to sensitively address local concerns. That said, it is challenging for councils in the North-West to attract and retain staff, allied to which there is a trend towards larger, more complex and more contentious planning applications requiring the use of specialist skills. It is not feasible for small Councils such as Circular Head to retain this diversity of specialisms in-house therefore we would propose that a pool of planners be established, potentially on a regional basis and with skills relevant to the region, for councils to tap into.

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Resource Sharing

We strongly believe in resource sharing/shared services as a sustainable solution for small councils. It supports the principle of subsidiarity, where higher levels of government perform only those functions which cannot be performed at a more local level. It maintains local representation at a local level, avoiding the democratic deficit that trails in the wake of amalgamation.

In 2016 Council, together with Waratah-Wynyard, West Coast and King Island Councils came together to develop the Sustainable Murchison 2040 Community Plan. This is a regional framework strategy in which the Councils committed to regional cooperation for mutual benefit, encompassing community, business and industry as well as the public sector. It was based on extensive community and stakeholder engagement involving just under 2000 people. We encourage the Board to consider the opportunities it presents.

Circular Head and Waratah-Wynyard Councils have been on a shared resource journey for over 10 years and are committed to continuing to work closely together to align systems, processes and policies, delivering economies of scale and supporting the provision of professional expertise across both Councils. It is anticipated that discussions will take place with West Coast and King Island Councils to understand the current opportunities.

Additionally, resourcing sharing provides an opportunity to reduce duplication. There is potential to extend this across the sector where tasks could be completed once on behalf of all, thus driving economies of scale. Streamlined governance processes and greater consistency across the sector will only enhance the viability and financial sustainability of local government. A more standardised customer experience is very achievable.

Local Service Provision

It is crucial that any reform does not disadvantage rural and remote communities. Council would (for example) strongly advocate against any move to shift responsibility waste management to a location outside the Council area. Currently two councils use the Circular Head waste facility at Port Latta and if this facility were to be closed, Circular Head would have to truck its waste to Dulverton. The additional distance and truck movements would be likely to mean the cost of waste management would exceed the cost of current local operations, leading to potential additional costs to ratepayers. We do not believe this is appropriate or sustainable.

Community Health and Wellbeing

Circular Head Council understands the very important role councils play in enhancing community health and wellbeing. Our joint plans with Waratah-Wynyard Council cover Health & Wellbeing, Age Friendly Communities and Youth, and recognise that Council is best placed to facilitate local place-based solutions.

Council understands issues at a very local level and has the networks that can bring stakeholders together to lead collective advocacy for appropriate funding, thus minimising and rationalising the current piecemeal approach that creates a mismatch between funding and need. Ongoing

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operational funding for identified and planned programs and projects is required for Council to meet the increasing mandate from community to build local capacity and wellbeing.

Reform to Local Government Elections

We believe there is merit in a return to the system whereby half the council is elected at a time on a rolling basis so that the potential for major change and loss of knowledge is minimised.

Electing half the council provides for greater continuity and supports Council to continue operating smoothly on a longer-term basis, instead of the 'stop-start' impact of a whole of Council election.

With half the members not up for re-election at any one time, background knowledge of current initiatives is retained; and there is a pool of experienced Councillors who understand how local government operates, which provides for extra support for incoming Councillors who may be standing for the first time and unfamiliar with the extent and diversity of Council operations and their decision-making powers as the collective decision-making body of Council. This supports a smooth transition and better exercise of local democracy without the hiatus engendered by a whole of Council election, where a majority of Councillors may require time to familiarise themselves with local government operations.

Secondly, it is considered that the Deputy Mayor should be elected by Councillors. This could be for a one or two-year term and provides greater opportunities for all ordinary Councillors to 'step up' in the Mayor's absence and experience leadership responsibilities.

In conclusion Circular Head Council welcomes change that recognises local government as a vital element of the local governance landscape, that supports local government to modernise and enhance service levels and acts to enhance the viability of local communities.

Yours sincerely

Daryl Quilliam
MAYOR