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From: Robert Hogan [redacted]
Sent: Monday, 2 May 2022 7:58 PM
To: Local Government Board
Subject: Local Government Review

After completing the on line survey and attending a workshop I'm a bit unsure whether the issues I wanted to raise have been addressed so I would like to include these comments in addition to my other comments.

1. **Relationship and Role of Local Government**
   Because of its lack of inclusion in the constitution, local government is a product of state government legislation. As well as its legislative mandate through the Local Government Act the state government can direct councils to do or not do certain things. From my observations the state government has generally maintained a bit of a 'hands off approach'. Perhaps it is time for a bit more of a hands on approach. This does not necessarily mean amalgamations but more about systems and processes. For example why are there two types of rating system. Is this just an unnecessary complication.

   A further example of unnecessary complications is computer software. Over the last three or four years a number of Hobart area councils have purchased and installed new computer systems for rating, finance and asset management. Different councils have purchased different systems. Although there are not a vast number of systems available there are still differences. This has implications for staff moving from one council to another as well as more generally being able to use/integrate similar data from different councils.

   So possibly more state government direction on systems and processes. It may be that state government funding would be required to achieve improvements in these and similar areas. This is a particular area for councils that have not updated systems recently but need to or will need to in the not too far distant future. With some state government direction, moving to more common systems seems to have a number of advantages.

2. **Community (integrated planning)**
   Division 2 of the Local Government Act 1993 sets out various requirements in relation to plans. This is the basis of an integrated planning approach but needs to be expanded and be more definitive. It should require a four year term of council plan that fits under the strategic plan and over the annual plan. Conceptually, I believe the strategic plan is the communities plan based on relevant consultation, a four year plan would represent what a council is doing during that particular term in office to implement the strategic plan and the annual plan would be in effect the council's work plan for that year implementing the council's four year plan.

   The legislation needs to improve reporting, the strategic plan should be reviewed within six months of a council election to assist with the development and adoption of the propose four year term of council plan. The current legislation does not have a timeframe. In addition, there should be a requirement for 'an end of term' report' to the community prior to the end of a council's four year term. This should also be legislated.

   Reviews of LTFP and LTAMP should be timed around the review of the strategic plan.

   In addition, there should be a requirement for a workforce plan. A workforce plan completes the suite of plans that enable the strategic plan objectives to be met. Meeting strategic plan objectives requires the finance (LTFP), assets (LTAMP) and the necessary people or skill (Workforce Plan).

   There is also a need for improved direction from the state government in relation to community engagement about the strategic plan. This could be legislated through the requirement for a detailed and public engagement strategy or a direction about what proper engagement looks like. Further, there is also a

need for more direction from the state government in relation to measures and targets in plans. Such direction does not need legislation but should endeavour to set some 'standards' for activities.

3. **Amalgamate or not**

There is much said about the benefits of amalgamations, however, the NSW experience and research from NSW suggests that the savings envisioned may not happens. Amalgamations created bigger councils and as a result the need for more specialised staff as a consequence staff numbers and costs at amalgamated councils increased. In addition, much of the local in local government was lost. How to keep local representation in local government is essential in any amalgamation discussion.

While not a new idea I think a better approach is looking at combining back of house services such as HR, insurance, risk management, accounts, rates and purchasing to service a number of councils. There are also efficiencies to be gained in better management of plant and equipment across councils. I believe this is particularly important for smaller councils. While smaller councils have staff undertaking back of house functions they often don't have back up or the specialised knowledge or skill in some areas. Audit reports often find a lack of separation of duties in finance areas in smaller councils. In addition, key back of house staff in smaller councils are often reluctant to take leave as there are limited resources to fill in during their absence and agency staff lack the knowledge required for short term engagements. Staff not going on leave has financial implications.

AI believe efficiencies and better responses to particular issues can be achieved by combining back of house services. However, as indicated in point 1 above, this would likely require greater state government intervention and also initial funding support. With mostly good internet a combined back of house service organisation could be located outside the Hobart or Launceston metro area.

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