

1 May 2022

Local Government Board
Future of Local Government Review
Phase 1 Submission

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To whom it may concern,

RE: FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Future of Local Government data collection phase. Many of our Councillors and staff have participated in the consultation sessions but also believe it important that the elected representatives as a collective submit a representation to the review.

Council recognises that the first stage of consultation focuses on what Tasmanians expect from local government and the needs, challenges and opportunities councils will meet in the future; this submission focuses purely on these aspects. We also note the emerging trends that will have implications for Tasmanian communities as identified by the Board in *The History of Local Government in Tasmania – Board Reflections* document – namely:

- the ways in which people live, work and access services continue to evolve because of demographic and technological changes;
- the functions of local government continue to expand into a broader range of social and community services;
- there will likely be adjustments to, and the blurring of, some boundaries between our three levels of government as collaborative service models evolve, and this is likely to be a good thing for citizens overall;
- climate change will present significant planning, environmental, and infrastructure management challenges for all levels of government, and local government will be in the 'front line' in addressing many of these.

Council agree with the trends as identified however whilst supportive of collaborative service models, do not agree that blurred lines make for a healthy system and would prefer review outcomes that are clear and easily understood by all stakeholders. Many of the criticisms of Councils is related to issues that are in the remit of State or Federal Government. Strong community engagement, clearly defining the role of Federal, State and Local Government is imperative.

In 2016 Waratah-Wynyard Council, in conjunction with Circular Head Council, West Coast Council and King Island Council adopted the Sustainable Murchison 2040 Community Plan. The plan and community vision are the product of an extensive program of community and stakeholder engagement that involved more than 1,900 people. The suite of Sustainable Murchison documents, although over five years old, will provide invaluable reference

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material for the Board in exploring opportunities for this part of the state.

Waratah-Wynyard Council has been a leading advocate and participant for resource sharing. Although not relevant to this stage of the reform process, it is important to note the progress and continuation of strong working relationships with Circular Head Council. There are many benefits from this arrangement, and it would be further enhanced by a more sustainable model, aided by modernised regulation and legislation, to ensure the gains are realised and entrenched irrespective of good will or relationships.

Council welcomes changes from the review that result in positive outcomes for the Waratah-Wynyard community however any recommendations from the Board must ensure that existing service levels are maintained, local representation is maintained, and the financial status of the community is strengthened.

Waratah-Wynyard feels it is well placed to comment on the need to deal with differences within communities. The Council has distinct and unique population centres at Wynyard, Somerset, Yolla, Boat Harbour, Sisters Beach and Waratah, each requiring a tailored approach to community engagement and consultation. This approach, rather than a one-size-fits all approach, ensures that the community voice is heard and needs met as much as possible. Whilst managing differences is a current strength of Council, broadly linking larger urban councils with smaller neighbouring Councils will present risk in this regard and perceptions will need to be carefully managed to ensure community needs continue to be met. Elected representation does not need to be in place for every town, however all ratepayers need to be sure that their voice and that of their community, is being heard. The notion of communities of interest is an important consideration.

As part of the review, at a minimum, there needs to be greater consistency in service delivery from Councils. A customer should expect upon entering any Council in Tasmania that there are the same forms, same fees and timeframes for processing a service request or application. The current environment means there is little to no similarities in this regard. Visitors and even locals, should not be constrained by local government boundaries, rather, should have the ability to have confidence their enquiry or request will be dealt with in the same manner no matter which service centre they contact. Standardisation of the customer interface is critical. This model has been achieved in almost every other public sector service in Tasmania outside Local Government and needs to be a non-negotiable outcome from the review regardless of the number of Councils.

In relation to governance, across the state, there remain challenges with the culture of councils and ensuring high-quality candidates are attracted to the role of elected member. Thought needs to be given to safety of elected members, protection from both online and verbal abuse, and particularly strengthening the sector's ability to attract and retain diverse representation. Professional development opportunities for elected members also needs enhancement.

The sheer volume of work associated with the role makes work life balance difficult. Typical Board numbers are less than many Councils have as their governing body. The question needs to be asked as to whether Tasmania can support the existing number of elected members, and the existing number of senior staff whilst maintaining a quality of work and output that is optimum for the sector. Anecdotally, this is questionable at present.

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The same applies to attraction and retention of senior staff capable of driving the sector forward. Local Government needs to provide employees with a safe secure workplace with various professional development and growth opportunities. Many specialist skills, including asset management, finance, environmental health and planning are becoming increasingly difficult to find across the sector and this needs to be considered as part of the review.

Council does not necessarily share the view being circulated that planning services need to be consolidated into a separate entity or regional entities. The same applies to a rationalised or state-wide waste model. It is recognised however that greater efficiencies and improvements can be made in this area. An independent process to assess applications when Council is the applicant would be beneficial as would greater use of the major project's assessment process, with enhanced local representation. Each time a service is removed from a Council there is a resultant loss of economy of scale and ultimately losing these services presents some risk to sustainability of Councils.

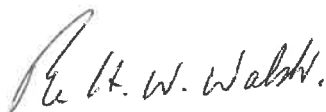
The review also needs to take into account and provide recommendations that will reduce duplication of effort. In many cases, 29 Councils are simultaneously undertaking the same tasks, that could be completed by one body on behalf of the sector. Economies of scale need to be explored at a service level.

The viability of a local government is associated with having adequate resources to provide the services that the community requires and having the best structure to exercise appropriate stewardship over these resources. Should Council have greater involvement in additional services such as further road maintenance on State owned roads, housing and homelessness issues or preventative health, it must be supported and funded accordingly.

One of the flaws of the existing governance model in Tasmania is the inward facing strategic planning that is undertaken in Councils. Each Council develops its own strategic direction, at times competing with neighbouring Councils, duplicating services and infrastructure and not considering broader regional implications. The Sustainable Murchison Plan was developed to address this type of issue. Streamlining governance processes and developing a coordinated economic development plan may provide further opportunity to attract investment.

To summarise, Waratah-Wynyard Council welcomes changes as a result of the review that result in positive outcomes for the Waratah-Wynyard community including ensuring that service levels are maintained, local representation is maintained, and the financial status of the community is strengthened.

Yours sincerely,



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MAYOR

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