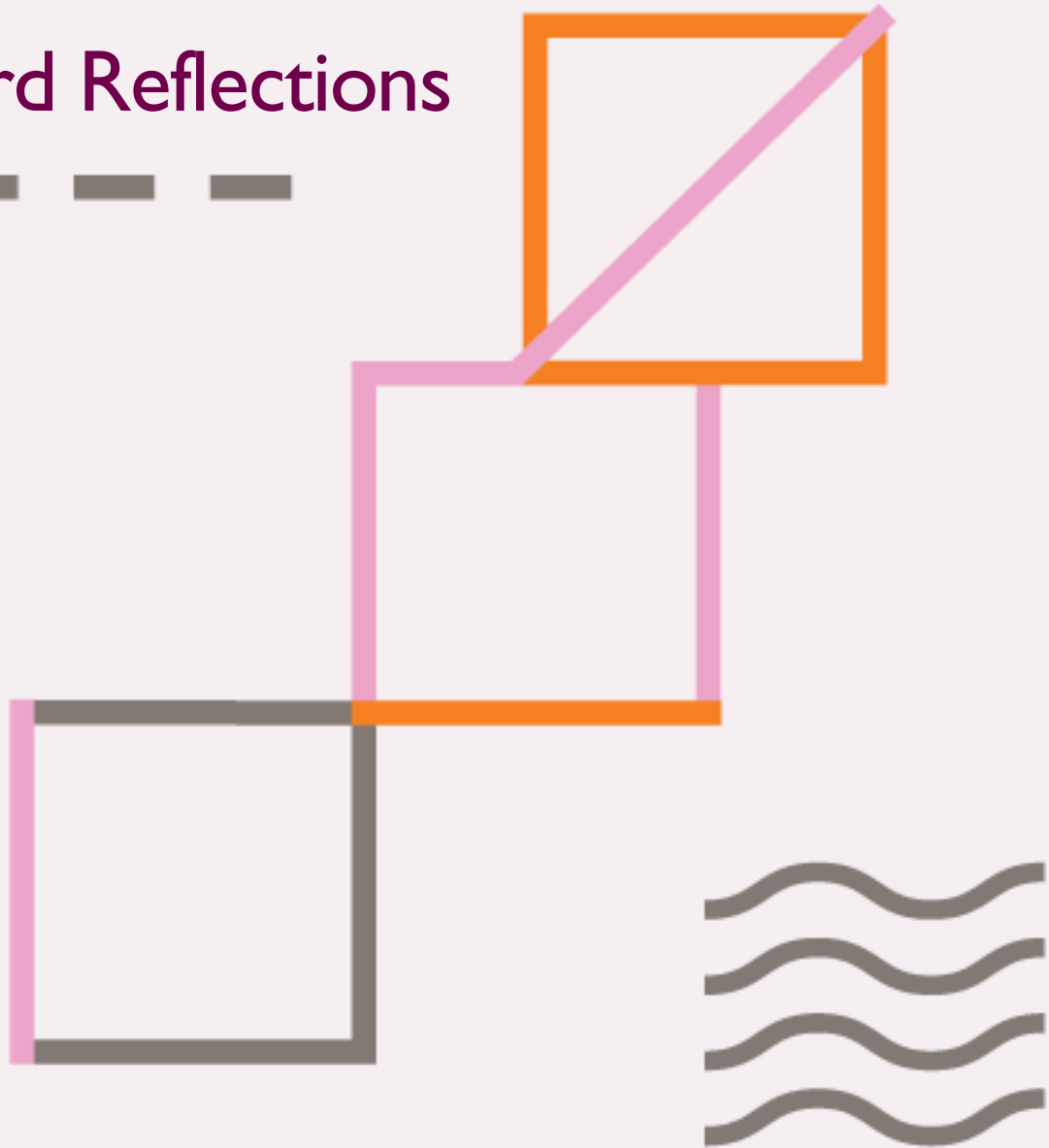


Engagement with Aboriginal Communities and Younger Tasmanians

Board Reflections



March 2023

“Councils’ traditional engagement approaches have not been effective in reaching younger Tasmanians and Aboriginal communities.”

Understanding the needs of all members of a community is an essential first step in servicing that community, and we want to ensure councils have the capability, and the impetus, to do that.”

The Hon Sue Smith AM

The Local Government Board has sought to give all Tasmanians the opportunity to have their say in the Future of Local Government Review (the Review). At the end of Stage 1 we became aware that our engagement was not reaching Aboriginal communities and people aged 16 to 44 (referred to as “younger Tasmanians” in this paper).

To ensure we heard the views of these important communities, we delivered two targeted engagement programs. The approaches were quite different, but each proved to be quite effective. They are

outlined in the two reports published on our website:

- *Future of Local Government Review: Report of Survey of Tasmanian’s Aged 16 - 44*
- *Future of Local Government Review: Targeted Aboriginal Communities Engagement Report.*

For younger Tasmanians, who are leading busy lives, establishing their careers and raising families, we used an online survey that was promoted through social media. The survey allowed for both simple multiple choice-style responses as well as more

detailed written responses. We were pleased that many people took the opportunity to provide written responses, rather than just ticking the multiple choice boxes. They gave detailed and considered answers, showing that they had thought deeply about how local government could and should play a role in their futures.

For Aboriginal communities, the Board worked with community-based facilitators to convene workshops in nipaluna (Hobart), Launceston and Ulverstone. These were informal workshops, with Board members listening to the issues raised in a free-flowing discussion. We heard a wide range of concerns presented, which helped the Board to get a better understanding of the priorities of Aboriginal communities. Participants had much to say on the role of all levels of government in their lives, including local government.

COMMON MESSAGES WE HEARD

- Several of the messages we heard were common to both Aboriginal communities and younger Tasmanians.
- Both groups felt disengaged from local government. This was to be expected, given we had targeted these groups because we had not heard much from them to date.
- Both Aboriginal communities and younger Tasmanians felt that local government was not representing them, and did not give them the opportunity to have their say on local issues and decisions that impact them.
- Neither group saw their own cohort represented on council and few

participants had considered standing for council themselves.

- While they cited a range of reasons for not seeking election to council, one common factor was the unappealing culture of councils, which they perceived as imbued with bullying and infighting.
- Younger Tasmanians were also put off because the remuneration for a councillor did not match the work expectations of the role.
- Aboriginal communities referred to a variety of other barriers to standing for election, including the cost of campaigning, a limited understanding of the role and an absence of role models.
- Both groups felt that councils need to more effectively engage with, and listen to their communities. Only by doing that can they understand and respond to the needs of those communities.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

- The concerns we heard from Aboriginal communities reflected the disparity in outcomes they generally experience in all areas, including education, health and employment.
- While their concerns covered domains well beyond local government, there was a strong view that local government should be recognising and understanding the position many Aboriginal people are in. Many said local government was poorly equipped to do that.

- Many council structures and processes were not seen as respectful, welcoming or appropriate to Aboriginal communities.
- Community members mentioned a range of measures that councils could adopt to better meet their needs. These included:
 - rate reductions for people on low incomes,
 - providing suitable facilities for traditional community activities such as campaign and ‘yarning’ around the fires, and
 - drawing on traditional knowledge in managing parks and reserves.
- Relatively simple, symbolic measures, such as displaying Aboriginal art in council chambers or flying the Aboriginal flag, were described as important foundations for a closer relationship.
- There was great enthusiasm for better representation of Aboriginal people on council, and amongst council staff. In particular there was a strong desire for Aboriginal Liaison Officers to be employed within local government, both to educate others within government and to improve communication with the Aboriginal community.
- As the level of government ‘closest to the people’, councils were seen as convenient contact points for hosting and delivering a range of services on behalf of all spheres of government. This ‘one-stop shop’ approach would be particularly helpful for people unsure which sphere of government was responsible for a particular service.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOUNGER TASMANIANS

- There were no surprises in the concerns raised by younger Tasmanians for the future of their local area, as they are already issues today. Climate change, the cost of living, housing, planning for population growth, and access to essential services have been fundamental concerns for decades, and younger people see them continuing into the future.
- While these concerns are not the sole responsibility of local government, they are all issues in which councils play a crucial role.
- For example, there were a range of linked issues under the heading of planning for population growth where councils are key players: land use planning, development control, managing local traffic, providing paths and cycleways, providing green spaces and tree coverage.
- It was also notable that younger Tasmanians want to see strong local leadership and action on environmental sustainability. Examples of actions proposed include supporting community gardens, and innovative green waste and recycling services.
- Linked to this was a desire to see councils taking the lead on local action on climate change, particularly through ‘future-proofing’ infrastructure, urban cooling through green spaces and natural disaster preparation and recovery.

HOW WE WILL CONSIDER IT IN THE REVIEW

- Effective community engagement by councils, and participation by the community in council decision-making, have been themes the Board has been pursuing since the beginning of the Review.
- Councils' traditional engagement approaches have not been effective in reaching younger Tasmanians and Aboriginal communities.
- The Board has been considering how to require councils to use consistent, contemporary community engagement strategies. Understanding the needs of all members of a community is an essential first step in servicing that community, and we want to ensure councils have the capability, and the impetus, to do that.
- The Board has been looking at how to attract a more representative cross-section of the community to stand for election to council. Measures like increasing councillor remuneration, and providing more training for elected representatives will continue to be developed in the Review.
- We have floated the idea of developing a workforce strategy for local government to address the current shortages. Such a strategy would present opportunities for better targeting recruitment to a wider range of local residents, including Aboriginal candidates.
- We also want to ensure that councils are thinking about the wellbeing of their communities, and how to be well prepared for all the challenges the future will bring.
- All of the long-term concerns identified by younger Tasmanians are aspects of community wellbeing, and we have been considering how to embed that into key council strategic planning and service delivery processes, which can then flow through to community engagement frameworks. We will continue to develop that as the Review comes to its conclusion.
- The suggestion that councils could expand their role as local service hubs has come from many stakeholders in the Review. The Board is aware of work underway by Service Tasmania to look at increased integration opportunities and we are interested in pursuing that.
- Finally, the suggestion that councils need to strengthen their relationships with Aboriginal communities is an important one.
- The Board is aware of the Local Government Aboriginal Audit that has been undertaken for the *Closing the Gap Tasmanian Implementation Plan 2021 – 2023*. The Board will consider how its recommendations might be able to complement that work, so Aboriginal communities are well recognized and appropriately involved in councils' work.



More information?
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**The future of
local
government
review**

