

The Secretary

Local Government Review Board

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FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW

Submission

Introduction

I am concerned that there has been insufficient public consultation on these very significant proposed reforms, which have the potential to impact all Tasmanians, as well as affecting the environments that we live in.

I believe that public information sessions were held in 8 or so LGA's – why so few?

I live in Glenorchy LGA, a major population centre in Tasmania, and there was no information session here.

To impose major changes on communities without genuine consultation risks getting things badly wrong. Heed the lesson of Philip Island in Victoria.

The need for reform

There is undoubtedly a need for reform – but reforms must be what will work in Tasmania, not just copying what has been done elsewhere.

It is clear that many Councils need support to manage the essential services and other work that they, and only they, carry out.

I support Pathway 3 (Options Paper, p.8 & p.40): A 'hybrid' model combining both targeted sharing of services and targeted boundary consolidation – if this is what the relevant Councils want.

Amalgamations

There are good arguments in favour of amalgamations but 'bigger is better' is not one of them.

The fact that Tasmania has a large number of Councils, for its population size, is not in itself a reason for amalgamations. Tasmania cannot be compared with Mainland States. We who live here know that Tasmania has not only very diverse landscapes but also very diverse communities, some with a very strong sense of community identity – contrast Queenstown

with Coles Bay, Georgetown with South Bruny. It is crucial that Councils represent their local communities and that people feel confident that their Council is there to look after the interests of their community.

Any amalgamations should take place only as a result of proper community consultation, meaning: -

- Informing community of pros and cons of amalgamation
- Inviting questions/comments from the community
- Responding to these, honestly
- Survey community (a vote, or plebiscite)
- Honour the outcome of the vote

Forced amalgamations

There must be no forced amalgamations. There are examples from Interstate to show that they can result in reduced efficiency, increased costs and resulting increase in rates. There have also been instances of amalgamations going so badly wrong that local people wanted to deamalgamate.

Councils' role in planning assessments

Options Paper p.26/Appendix Option 5.1a: *Refer complex planning development applications to independent assessment panels appointed by the Tasmanian Government.*

This is a red flag. How can the public be certain of the independence of such a panel? Many of us were alarmed in 2022 in the case of appointments to TASCAT, when the relevant Minister overruled the independent assessment panel and replaced some candidates with 'Minister's picks'. How can we have confidence that this panel will be independent?

Councillors are elected by their communities and are answerable to them. This is very important if the public is to trust the planning processes. A Government-appointed panel would have no accountability.

Options Paper p.26/Appendix Option 5.1b: *Removing councillors' responsibility for determining development applications.*

This is another red flag. Councillors have local knowledge and they have expert staff to advise them. It is crucial that planning decisions are made by people who know their local environments and communities and are in touch with what their communities want.

If councillors feel out of their depth in making complex planning decisions they need expert advice – and the Tasmanian Government needs to support them in this rather than overriding them.

Catharine Errey