

## **Personal submission: Future of Local Government Review Options Paper Stage 2**

**by Huon Valley Resident and Councillor, Cathy Temby**

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The Options Paper rightly points out that the “status quo” is not optimal or sustainable given the growing demands, complexity, and sustainability challenges for local government. Reform is needed to achieve capability and capacity levels to deliver critical functions.

The Board has said it is open to “big ideas” even if they are hard to implement.

One “big idea” which would make a “big difference” is to change the way we fund local government.

In my opinion, the biggest challenge for some councils is financial sustainability. Cost transfers make it difficult to fund core council services. In rural and remote locations, councils have felt compelled to act as the service ‘provider of last resort’ when state or federal governments, or private markets fail to meet community needs.

The current grants-based system is clearly regarded as being based on politics rather than on community need or strategic importance to the state or nation. The outcomes are questionable, and the method of servicing grant applications is cumbersome and inefficient.

Large geographic areas such as the Huon Valley Municipality are expensive to maintain. The aquaculture, agriculture, forestry and tourism industries rely heavily on our road network and use large areas of land. This means we have less ratepayers’ funds to maintain roads per km than an urban area yet often bring a higher level of economic benefit to State and Commonwealth.

It makes strategic economic and common sense for State and Local Government to work together on an **Integrated Road Management Plan** to support a safe and efficient road network for the future.

However, the prevailing attitude by some politicians, is that if you live in some parts of rural Tasmania you need to accept that you will receive sub-standard level of road safety and efficiency.

The community generally understand we cannot have sealed roads everywhere however it is totally reasonable to expect a road network which is maintained to a safe, efficient standard.

Water quality and supply is another area of strategic importance to community and industry. An **Integrated Catchment Management Plan** supported by the State and Commonwealth Government would provide some strategic guidance and protection for the future.

Accessing adequate and affordable healthcare is becoming a growing challenge in many rural communities. Direct health and aged care are the responsibilities of State and Commonwealth Governments, councils should not feel compelled to address this challenge, particularly in rural communities with a high proportion of elderly and lower-income residents.

### **Which of the four core roles of councils needs more emphasis in the future? Why?**

Answer: Facilitator or partner. I agree with the following statements from the Stage 2 Options Paper:

1. “Given State and Commonwealth Government responsibilities for health, local government’s most important and complementary focus should be in the areas of preventive health and wellbeing promotion. This encompasses councils’ direct responsibilities for planning, urban design, liveability, and environmental health, as well as partnering with others to provide health programs, and social and community services”

and

2. "Climate change is a global issue and arguably the greatest challenge facing humanity, but its effects are felt by communities at the local level... strong, capable, and adaptive local governments are required to tackle climate change proactively at a community level, highlighting the need to build capability and coordination across councils."

**• Do you agree that there is general community support for councils continuing to deliver their current range of functions and services? Are there any functions and services councils deliver now that they shouldn't? Why?**

Answer: The general community have been left in a position of uncertainty regarding the delivery of Medical Services by Councils where it is the responsibility of State and Commonwealth Governments. Ratepayers are left funding services, often on top of paying the Medicare levy.

There are also financial, litigious and reputational risks to Council.

**• Assuming they have access to the right resources and capability, are there services or functions you think councils could be more involved in? Why?**

Answer: Building community capacity and preparedness for effective responses to impacts of Climate Change and other emergencies.

Because (see above quote # 2) and local knowledge and:

"As the closest level of government to the community, councils are uniquely positioned to help citizens navigate the challenges of climate change and to highlight the impacts of climate emergencies at the local level."

**• Where do councils currently make the biggest contribution to community wellbeing? What wellbeing functions and services should they provide in the future, how can they be supported?**

Answer: Advocating, raising funds, facilitating and service provision: Improving access, mobility and other outcomes. Planning, urban design, liveability, and environmental health, as well as partnering with others to provide health programs, and social and community services.

Council should be supported (resourced) to facilitate greater access to active transport; more youth focused activities and innovative youth engagement mechanisms.

And Council should be supported (resourced) to facilitate Emergency Preparedness and Management on a community level (eg Community Outreach Groups – "COGS" which discuss and agree to solutions on a micro local level with support for training and agreed response protocols)

Council needs support with structural sustainability, capacity, and capability.

"Councils will also need the capability to support communities through emergencies and unexpected crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and extreme weather events. These challenges will likely be felt most acutely in our more regional and remote communities, many of which have councils with the lowest levels of structural sustainability, capacity, and capability."

"Health and Wellbeing Plan, which sets priorities councils need to consider, such as tackling the health impacts of climate change, increasing healthy eating, increasing active living, and reducing tobacco-related harm."

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**Do you agree with the Board’s assessment that Tasmania’s current council boundaries do not necessarily reflect how contemporary Tasmanians live, work, and connect?**

Yes

**• We have heard that councils need to be “big enough to be effective and small enough to care”. How big is big enough to be effective? How small is small enough to care? What factors determine that? How do we strike the balance between these factors?**

I believe “boundary design should carefully consider how and at what scale councils provide services and whether their activities correspond clearly to factors such as established communities of interest or functional economic areas”

It would be worthwhile to explore the communities of interest with regards the Greater Hobart Plan. The Huon Valley is well positioned to be a “food bowl and recreational local tourism destination” for the anticipated population growth outlined in the plan. The Greater Hobart plan should also consider the projections for transportation of products from the Huon Valley and tourism links to our significant natural assets.

“It is anticipated that Greater Hobart will experience continued population growth with an additional 60 000 people over the next 30 years and that we will require approximately 30 000 new homes to support this growth... Kingborough – primarily infill in and around the Kingston CBD, greenfield at Huntingfield, and a mix of infill and greenfield in already identified future growth areas at Margate and Snug.” <https://yoursay.hobartcity.com.au/77207/widgets/371049/documents/231780>

As stated in the Community Update: It is hard especially for smaller, rural councils to meet all the community’s needs and expectations. Larger councils can create economies of scale, improve access to a skilled workforce and strategic capability however effective community engagement strategies need to be implemented to retain local representation.

**• Thinking about Tasmania now, and how it might change over the next 50 years, what are the most important things to consider if we were to ‘redraw’ our council boundaries?**

Our Huon Valley road and stormwater network was not designed or historically maintained for the volume, type or frequency of current traffic or extreme weather events.

A redraw of our council boundary would need to consider funding for road and stormwater upgrades to accommodate the anticipated, projected needs of the next 50 years.

“A more equitable, needs-based distribution of resources between wealthier and poorer areas within municipalities should occur. In this regard, larger and more diverse council areas and more consistent service provision may be a positive outcome of boundary consolidation”

“Further, our research suggests that service consolidation will be most effective where equitable distributions of cost and risk are maintained, and councils are equipped with streamlined and compatible ICT, back office, and HR systems to enable a smooth transition to sharing”

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**Which of the three broad reform pathways do you think has the best chance of delivering what the community needs from local government? Why?**

Pathway 2 builds scale and scope but to deliver community needs, it will need effective community engagement strategies... or

Pathway 3 would need to include reforms to revenue and funding models to promote equity and sustainability across the system.

“The design and effectiveness of Tasmania’s system of funding local government (rates, user charges, and grants) should be assessed to ensure that it is consistent with contemporary tax design and public finance principles and will meet the future needs of councils and their communities”

• **What would be your biggest concerns about changing the current system? How could these be addressed?**

My biggest concern is the **slow pace of reform**. The Huon Valley Council would benefit from exploring options to undertake **early pilot reforms** which can inform future implementation such as in bold below:

“Evidence shows that where communities are engaged in the decision-making process, they are more likely to trust and accept council decisions. These decisions are therefore more likely to deliver good public value, as they will better reflect the community’s needs and priorities

A **Community Impact Assessment** (CIA) would help councils to assess the case for providing particular services in response to community need and/or demand that is not otherwise planned for. Preparing the assessment should also help councils in their advocacy to other spheres of government, when they are considering filling a ‘service gap’ by providing a service another entity or sphere of government normally provides (e.g., primary healthcare).”

“Integration of workforce planning and training strategies: Implement a shared State and local government **workforce development strategy** • Target key skills shortages, such as planners, in a sector-wide or shared State/local government workforce plan • Establish ‘virtual’ regional teams of regulatory staff to provide a shared regulatory capability; embracing flexible modes of working, internships, apprenticeships, secondments and cadetships, connecting with TAFE, universities, and secondary schools to help students understand the value proposition and potential career pathways local government can offer. • It requires a collaborative, sector-wide approach. • Training local people in regional communities has been shown to enable people to stay in regions. • Smaller and remote councils need greater assistance in this area. • Local government career pathways need better articulation, framing and a positive narrative.”

“An increasingly common approach to supporting engagement and representation is through implementing comprehensive engagement plans and systems supported by technology and professional engagement staff. **Community engagement planning** is mandated for councils in NSW, WA, Victoria, and South Australia.”

Further co-location of State and local government shopfronts and shared online **customer service systems** have the potential to provide a more seamless and customer-centred service experience, improve operational ‘cross-pollination’ between local and State Government, and save on commercial rents

• **In any structural reform process, how do we manage the very different needs and circumstances of rural and urban communities?**

Answer: Look for common areas of interest, facilitated negotiation.

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