



19 February 2023

Local Government Board
GPO Box 123
Hobart TAS 7001
Via email: submissions.LGBoard@dpac.tas.gov.au

Dear Local Government Board

Re: The Future of Local Government Review: comment on the Options Paper and Appendix

The East Coast Alliance Inc. appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Future of Local Government Review [Options Paper Review Stage 2](#) (December 2022) and [Options Paper: Appendix Review Stage 2](#) (December 2022).

The East Coast Alliance Inc. (ECA) is a community organisation that supports sustainable planning and development initiatives that protect and enhance the irreplaceable social, cultural, environmental and economic characteristics of the East Coast and communities across Tasmania.

The ECA has serious concerns, outlined below, regarding both the apparent intent of the Review, the major reforms proposed for consideration, and the ineffective consultation process undertaken to date.

Retention of the role of the Council Planning Authority

The ECA believes Councils must retain their role as a Planning Authority to ensure local representation and appeal rights remain with their community. Local communities must be heard and have the right to comment on planning issues and developments proposed for their local government area.

We strongly disagree with the replacement of Planning Authorities with overarching independent development assessment panels. Significant negative interstate experience of such panels is now well-documented: currently in NSW, for example, Councillors of all political persuasion have joined to criticise the NSW planning system, stating their own and their community's frustrations at being effectively locked out of planning decisions that impact their local area.

We urge the Review Board to acknowledge and take into consideration interstate experience as it formulates an outcome from the Review.

Forced Amalgamations

The ECA appreciates the need to consider the number of local government areas in Tasmania, their effectiveness and financial stability. We understand neighbouring Councils may agree to voluntarily amalgamate after extensive community consultation and detailed analysis of the costs and benefits that would arise from such a move.

The ECA does not support forced amalgamations. As with the removal of Councils as Planning Authority, interstate experience demonstrates that forced amalgamations can lead to very poor financial outcomes alongside the loss of local representation, decline in core local services and resources, and disenfranchisement of some sections of the community.

The Review Board would be aware of moves in NSW and Victoria for unsuccessfully amalgamated Councils to de-amalgamate.

Lack of transparency

The Local Government Review began in 2018. The current round of consultations has focused only on the three potential pathways of amalgamations and resource sharing. Other more contentious issues - such as removing Councils as Planning Authority - are not easily accessible within the documents and, in most sessions, are not being discussed in an open and transparent manner.

Review Board Consultation process

The ECA believes the Review Board's consultation process to date has been disappointing, exclusive (sessions have been held in only 8 of 29 local government areas), and poor communication strategies have resulted in very small numbers of community attendees. In short, given the significant changes proposed to local government in Tasmania, and the potential impact of these changes on local communities, we believe the Review Board has failed to reach and inform adequate numbers of the Tasmanian community.

The ECA joins with other organisations and individuals seeking a three-month extension to the Tasmanian Government's consultation process to allow more communities to have the benefit of discussion, information and feedback to the Review Board. Major changes are being proposed - the Tasmanian community deserves an opportunity to be better informed and able to comment and provide feedback.

Kind regards



Anne Held
President
M: 0417 946 585