

**A precis of comments made by Flinders Councillors on the Local Government Review
(22/02/2023)**

This document is submitted following meetings of the Flinders Council with The Honorable Sue Smith AM, Chair of the Future of Local Government Review Board and others on the 14th and 22nd of February 2023.

The Bass Strait islands are very different to the majority of the Tasmanian mainland councils in that:

- We have natural Local Government Area borders provided by the seas that surround us. King Islands Council's boundary is fairly simple. The Flinders Council area takes in the majority of the islands on the eastern side of Bass Strait to the Victorian border including the Furneaux Group and the Deal Island National Park, Flinders Island being the most populous. The Flinders Council area has two islands with settlements on them Flinders and Cape Barren Island.
- The islands are reliant on air travel for the majority of people access and Councils' own and operate airports to cater for regular passenger transport (RPT) and charter operations to CASA standards
- The islands are reliant on sea transport for the majority of freight movements including general cargo and livestock movements that underpin the success of the islands' agricultural activity. Both islands contribute hugely to the Tasmanian agricultural sector, with Flinders having roughly 20% of the state's beef herd
- Around 17% of residents in the Flinders municipality identify as indigenous. There are three aboriginal entities active in the municipality and their aims do not always align. This is understood and respected by the Council. i.e local knowledge.
- Being islands, Council machinery cannot easily or quickly be moved between council areas. Machinery is required on the islands at all times to assist in times of emergency eg fires, flooding and storm damage.
- Both islands have a lot of off island property owners who spend only part of the year on the islands.
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In general:

- The back ground information given at the zoom meeting on the 14th of Feb appeared to be put together using input from major population areas. There is a strong need to consider rural and remote, especially the Islands as having different needs to mainland Tasmania.
- It takes living on a remote island to understand how it works. Council is the go to point for fixing things and filling gaps.

Reasons for Flinders Councils to remain local

- Generational Islanders knowledge and voices will be lost if amalgamated with a mainland council.
- If Flinders Council was to be amalgamated the islands would still need representation, the cost of flights and accommodation for full representation and staff operations would be prohibitive. Travel cost would cancel out much of the cost benefit that might be envisaged. 1 x return airfare to Launceston is currently \$460

- The economic and social well being of the Islands' is fragile. In the case of Flinders, both the Airlines and Shipping being operated by small private companies and it needs a local Council that is aware of the intricacies of their operations when things go wrong.
- Local knowledge in planning is imperative and not easily gained by consultants who visit the islands on an ad hoc basis. Do not take the planning off us, it is imperative there is local input and knowledge.
- Taking employees from a small Council out of the community takes money out of the community. Lots of people do several roles within the Council and on Island in other positions. It would be detrimental to our community as a whole if even 10 people needed to find work. It would likely result in families leaving the island.
- Flinders population is growing, 16% between 2011-2016 it was stable between 2016-2021. It did not drop. (anecdotally some houses did not get census delivered to them, though they may have registered online anyway) School numbers are still up (currently 102), not dropping.
- The population is now listed as having grown further since the census, but it is being held back by lack of housing and childcare. There is work available and being advertised but lack of housing limits the scope of applicants applying.
- Flinders Council is not afraid to take on projects that it believes will support community and growth e.g the Telstra upgrade which was a four way partnership between Council, Telstra, State and Federal Governments and has enabled people to work remotely whilst living on the island. We are investigating a four-way partnership again to deal with sewerage issues.
- Flinders Council and other entities working on the island, such as Hydro, work at sharing visiting services and training opportunities.

Things that could assist the Bass Strait Island Councils:

- Airports are island "highways" and expenditure of Council funds on airport runways should be able to be included in some way as Councils "own funds expenditure" in the Roads to Recovery (RTR) formula to enable Councils to meet RTR "own funds expenditure" requirements to gain the full benefit of RTR funding allocations.
- Recognition of the extra cost of doing business on the Island is between 30 to 40%. Funding eg RTR could have a different formula to address this need.
- Be mindful when implementing new processes, requirements and legislation on councils, that smaller councils do not have the necessary staff or funding to be able to absorb into their current operational plans. If new work is being forced upon councils, funding should be made available to assist this. Some recent examples are :
 - A register of road and other signs in the Council area that needs to be updated annually
 - A child safety officer
 - Cat Management legislation requiring someone to enforce such
- Stop cost shifting, if a council/councils are required or agree to undertake a project/role that should be state of federal responsibility, recompense them properly. Councils, particularly in small areas could take on roles for other governments but only if recompensed appropriately.
- The current training modules for prospective Councillors are a great start, but there needs to be something more in-depth, such as an accredited course for elected members that deal with issues like meeting procedure, reading financial statements, governance, media and communication skills, ethics etc. (perhaps facilitated by TAFE). QLD and WA offer Cert III and

IV in Local Government (Elected Members). This would be beneficial in ensuring that all Councillors have the same base knowledge.

- Skills shortages in work areas for Councils, navigate a way to engage more employees with the required skills.

Any mandated shared services should on a State wide level not with individual councils as these are prone to being short lived due to capacity and personalities.

Suggest

- IT Services/platforms
- Insurances
- Buying power for common used items
- A “library” resource similar to Sharepoint for sharing information between councils rather than each council reinventing the wheel. For example, our Council applied for a grant to obtain funding for an upgrade to our Telstra infrastructure. This document was then used as the basis for King Island Council to apply for funding to upgrade their infrastructure. Some other suggestions are:
 - Grants
 - Policies
 - Strategic Plans, Asset Management Strategies etc.
 - Bench-marking
 - Consultant reports
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Additional comments:

- For all councils, develop a relevant framework for staff to follow in the delivery of services and implement an internal audit of service of processes.

Thank you for listening.