

Personal Submission in respect of the Local Government Review

The future of local government review: Community Update

I have read the Community Update and the 'Three Potential Pathways included in the Update.

I firmly believe of the Three Pathways Pathway Two should be adopted for the following reasons:-

SUPPORT FOR AMALGAMATION:

'We've also heard we should explore some major council reforms - from more sharing of services between councils through to creating fewer, larger councils.'

(The Examiner advert 21 Jan)

My view is 29 councils for a minuscule population of some 570,000 people is absolutely ludicrous!

Devonport City Council support Amalgamation recommending, in a media release, a merger with Kentish, Latrobe, Devonport and the eastern part of Central Coast.

For many years I have advocated for a single Tamar Valley Council consisting of Launceston, West Tamar, George Town and portions of, or all of, Meander Valley and Dorset Local Government Areas.

I stood for West Tamar Council in the last local government elections on the amalgamation platform and, while not elected, I did obtain a very respectable number of votes encouraging me to believe there are a significant number of ratepayers in the West Tamar Municipality who agree with amalgamation.

In 2018 Consultants KPMG conducted a 'Tamar Valley Council Feasibility Study' survey on behalf of West Tamar and George Town Councils to assess the benefits, if any, of a merger between the two councils.

The survey concluded, amongst other things, that if such a merger were to occur it would result in 'annual' savings of **\$1.3 million!**

In a 'Letter to the Editor' published in The Examiner on 26th January Dick James suggested 'We need no more than seven regional councils, two in the north-west, two in the north and three down south'.

Northern Midlands Councillor Andrew McCullagh recently asked fellow councillors 'to consider establishing a working group made of councillors and chaired by himself to initiate discussion with Meander Valley, Break O'day, and Glamorgan Spring Bay regarding possible amalgamation.'

Councillor McCullagh's motion was unsuccessful as the majority of his fellow Councillors thought it was 'premature' nevertheless the very fact that it was presented highlights the feeling on Amalgamation in the community and some of the thoughts (fears) about it in some of the smaller Councils. (The Examiner, 2 Feb.)

Former Local Government Minister and Launceston City Councillor Jim Cox believes "Tasmania won't get council mergers unless the state government forces them" (The Examiner, 6 January)

I agree with Mr Cox and have been saying so for many years.

Minister for Local Government Nic Street said in The Examiner on 17th February, amongst other things, that "...they don't have the rate base within their current municipalities to generate the rates income to meet the legislative requirements and what communities expect other local government."

KING & FLINDERS ISLAND:

Due to their unique geographical locations these two Council's status should remain as is but due to their low rate base they should receive additional funding from the State Government to compensate for this deficiency.

FINANCIAL INABILITY:

Some of Tasmania's current Councils have such a minute ratepayer base it is absolutely impossible that they will ever be financially self sufficient and will constantly need financial support from state and federal government.

It is very obvious, confirmed by the 2018 KPMG study in to the possible merger of George Town and West Tamar Councils, that 'significant' savings can be achieved through merger of a number of Councils.

EXPERIENCES IN OTHER STATES:

I understand that there has been negative outcomes arise in a small number of cases through Council amalgamation in other states.

These experiences should not detract from Tasmania proceeding with Council Amalgamation but lessons should be studied, learnt from them and taken into account when formulating Council Amalgamation within Tasmania

RECOMMENDATION:

The State Government should initiate, further to this Review, a study into the minimum amount of local councils Tasmania requires.

This should be followed by community consultation and input and a timetable for adoption.

ROLE OF COUNCIL IN PLANNING?

Reform Options

5.1 Deconflict the role of councillors and the the role of planning authorities.

Option 5.1a Refer complex planing development application to independent assessment panels appointed by the Tasmanian Government

I do **NOT** agree with the above option.

Experiences in NSW has shown such independent panels tend to favour developers and undermine democratic accountability.

Some development applications can be very contentious, in one case a friend had neighbours wanting to build a brick wall right up to her boundary blocking off her access to daily sunlight;

...in another more personal situation a young couple are building a brand new two storey home virtually right up to my immediate neighbours fence compromising the privacy of at least three nearby residences; while no appeal has been lodged in this particular case and there is no doubt construction of the new home falls within the appropriate guidelines 'if' an appeal had been lodged it would have stood a greater chance of success, and a sympathetic hearing, with a local Council than with a so called independent Panel.

Development Applications should always be considered by Elected Representatives on Local Councils the final decision being based on advice provided by their appropriate Planning Department and Representations received from the Community.

It is accepted that occasionally mistakes may be made with this system however the right of Appeal to the Tasmanian Planning Commission should always remain in respect of any decision made.

This, although cumbersome and expensive for an appellant, 'normally' results in a fair outcome in regard to most disputes in planning matters.

RECOMMENDATION:

The role of Councils as a Planning Authority should remain as is with increased funding from the State Government to enable them to access expert advice when necessary.

THANK YOU for providing me with the opportunity to air my views in this very important subject; ...I would like to have made a more detailed submission but lack of time and other pressures have prevented me from doing so.

Submitted by:

Jim Collier,

Date 19th February 2023