

Let's use the current pandemic crisis as an opportunity to examine and rethink how Tasmania is governed. What business or organisation still operates under organisational structures established more than 200yrs ago?

Since I became a member of the State Parliament in 1979 more than 40 years ago, there has been a continual debate about the size of the Tasmanian Parliament and the need for Local Government amalgamations. Sadly, little has happened apart from the various token reductions in members of the House of Assembly (1998), local government councils from 47 to 29 (1993) and councils in the greater Launceston area (1985). The whole world has advanced and changed greatly with the advent of modern communications and management practices.

There are a number of questions that should now be asked.

What is the appropriate size of a governance structure for Tasmania with a population of roughly 500,000 people?

If we were designing a structure today what would it be?

How many levels of government should we have in Tasmania?

How many local government bodies do we need to provide community services?

I would suggest that any new form of government should have authority to develop and implement clear strategic plans and to implement them in a timely and efficient way. The present difficulty we have is that we have too many government structures with little, if any, coordination. For example, our 29 local government bodies are responsible for planning decisions, but only within their boundaries. It needs to be recognised that planning doesn't, or shouldn't, stop at the municipal boundary, it should be done recognising all the regional and state issues. Decisions to develop new housing areas need to take into account transport and traffic plans, education and health needs and other infrastructure needed for a healthy and vibrant community. Land use planning is one of the most important issues facing the state, as it impacts where we live, and the cost of delivering all of our services. We hear constant complaints about how difficult our planning system is. The State Government has promised the implementation of a new Statewide Planning Scheme to simplify and reduce the complexity of schemes but so far, little has changed and, if anything, the recent changes or their interpretation is increasing their complexity. Do we really need 29 Councils and 29 planning authorities? I would suggest we only need three regional Councils with planning authorities that can manage and coordinate the plans for each of the State's regions.

At a State Level, recent elections in the Legislative Council have seen the election of party candidates and I expect this trend will continue. This year's result sees representatives of major parties making up half the membership of the Legislative Council. The original purpose of the Legislative Council was to independently review government legislation. Party aligned members will see the Legislative Council become either a rubber stamp or a roadblock for government. Now is the time to combine both houses into a single house. This would create a parliament of 43 members, sufficient numbers to create an effective Government and opposition. As it is highly unlikely that legislative councillors would vote themselves out of a job, I suggest that upon the formation of the new parliament each of the current members of the Legislative Council be given an initial four year term. At the

following election, 35 members would be elected via the existing House of Assembly electorates, with the former 18 Legislative Council members contesting three regional electorates based on new Local Government Regions with 6 representatives for each.

This would create a single Parliament for our state comprising local and regional representation. The party forming government would need 22 members, more than sufficient numbers from which to choose a ministry, and with sufficient members to form the various standing committees and working groups of Parliament. These committees would take on the role of reviewing legislation before it is presented.

I believe this would be a more efficient use of the existing membership of both houses of parliament, would increase the pool of members for selection to ministerial positions without increasing the numbers of members of parliament. At a local government level, it would create a more efficient structure to deliver services.

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