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Subject: Re: Democratic Desert in the Northern Midlands
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Kim Peart

Re: Democratic Desert in the Northern Midlands Future of Local Government Review - Stage 2 Options Paper

Is it of concern to you that there is a democratic desert in the Northern Midlands?

A story on the outcome of the election in the Northern Midlands Courier observed "Representation from towns outside of Longford is minimal, and no councillors come from the Ross or Campbell Town area" and that one of the Councillors lives in Sandy Bay. (story included below)

When I add up the population of the towns, I find that 85 percent of voters in the Northern Midlands live in a small pocket of the municipality in the north near Launceston, around Longford, while 15 percent of the voters are found in the remainder of the Council area, which is rural. (see map below)

The outcome of the election reflects this stark population disparity, with near all Councillors living near Launceston, and virtually no Councillors located south of Longford.

The one Councillor resident south of Longford, The Mayor, uses a postal address in Longford, and I wonder if Councillor Knowles is now living in Longford.

The reality of this outcome is a Council filled with people who spend more time in Launceston, than they would in Campbell Town. This means that urban based Councillors are making decisions for farmers and country towns.

When the next election rolls around in 4 years, 90 percent of the voters, or more, may be living around Longford,

who will vote for a local candidate.

Will anyone living south of Longford bother running in the next Council election for the Northern Midlands, when they see that they have little to no chance of being elected, no matter how much money they spend on placards, petrol and fliers, and no matter how many doors they knock on, when they see that the voter numbers are stacked against them, and they stand little to no chance of winning a seat on the Council.

It is much tougher to campaign in a rural area, than it is in an urban area, where farm doors cannot be reached, and most country people no longer have letterboxes

Is this democratic disparity in the Northern Midlands fair, or acceptable?

The rural area of the Northern Midlands, south of Longford, is larger in area than the Southern Midlands municipality, but it has become a democratic desert because of a concentration of voters in the north voting for local candidates.

The population growth in the Northern Midlands is set to continue, and even skyrocket, with hundreds of housing lots on the horizon in the north around Longford.

The Launceston City Council looked at the situation, and saw that so many residents of the north of the Northern Midlands worked, shopped, and visited the city for cafes, parks, restaurants, art galleries, museums and theatres in Launceston, that they wondered if the area should be part of Launceston, in a Metropolitan Council Model.

When I look at the situation, I wonder if there needs to be a Country Council Model for rural areas in Tasmania, with a planning scheme that reflects the rural environment and community.

At present the City of Devonport looks like absorbing Kentish, but I wonder if this is democracy heading in the wrong direction, as the rural areas of Devonport could end up become a democratic desert, simply due to voters in the urban areas voting for locals candidates.

While State and Federal electoral boundaries are determined by population, this is not the case with municipal boundaries. The reality on the ground is smaller land areas, as in Hobart and Launceston, have higher populations than larger land areas, as in the Southern Midlands and the rural lands of the Northern Midlands.

We wait to see if the Launceston proposal for a Metropolitan Council Model is accepted. If that happens, what will be the democratic future of the rural areas of the Northern Midlands?

It is fine to have compulsory voting, and it is a good move to have a polling day for Council voters, but unless a way is found to give Council representation back to the rural areas of the Northern Midlands, the fact of a democratic desert will continue and become further entrenched, as voters vote for local candidates in the rapidly growing urban area in the north of the Northern Midlands.

Potential candidates for Councillor in the rural areas of the Northern Midlands, no matter how good they would be as a Councillor, may not bother standing in the next election, when they wake up to the fact that the numbers are stacked against them.

In another context, this disparity in voter numbers in an electorate would be called a gerrymander. In this case, it is a democratic gerrymander, and it is growing, as the urban population in the north of the Northern Midlands skyrockets as a suburban overflow from Launceston.

I hope you will have this democratic disparity in the Northern Midlands thoroughly examined, and identify working solutions that will return democracy to the county people.

If the amalgamation of small Councils like Ross into the Northern Midlands was intended to be fair, it has failed. Ross had more democratic representation with the old Ross Council, compared to what it has now, with zero Councillors.

Northern Midlands Courier, 10 November 2022

New council aims for 'stability'

NORTHERN Midlands mayor Mary Knowles said teamwork will be key and she's looking forward to moving on with a positive attitude as she gets set to lead a new-look council following the recent Local Government elections.

Some members of the community are dubious about the ability of key council figures to form an amicable working relationship, following a long-running stoush involving Mayor Knowles, general manager Des Jennings and new councillor Andrew McCullagh.

However all parties say they will strive for stability and work as a team – the first test coming at the next council meeting on Monday, November 28.

Representation from towns outside of Longford is minimal, and no councillors come from the Ross or Campbell Town area, so the ability to be able to be a voice for those communities will be all important.

Cr Knowles was comfortably re-elected as a councillor for the fifth time from five campaigns

with 1007 votes, or 11.37 per cent of the votes and she was elected as mayor for a second consecutive term.

In the mayoral contest Cr Knowles received 4055 first preference votes followed by fellow candidates Andrew McCullagh with 2989 and Kim Peart on 1704.

Janet Lambert was voted in as deputy mayor out of six candidates with 2300 first preference votes followed by Richard Goss with 1936.

The council now consists of (in order of election): Mary Knowles, Richard Archer, Janet Lambert, Dick Adams, Richard Goss, Andrew McCullagh, Matthew Brooks, Alison Andrews and Paul Terrett.

The new faces are Richard Archer, a Longford farmer and tourism operator; property developer Andrew McCullagh, who lives at Sandy Bay; former Northern Midlands Courier editor Alison Andrews of Longford and Paul Terrett of Devon Hills, who

Yours sincerely,

Kim Peart

