

RDA TASMANIA SUBMISSION: FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

19 February 2023



Introduction

Regional Development Australia Tasmania (RDA Tasmania) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission for the Future of Local Government Reform. RDA Tasmania are pleased to assist the Tasmania Government explore options that focus on the strength of local solutions.

The Regional Development Australia program is an Australian Government initiative established to encourage partnership between all levels of government to enhance the growth and development of Australia's regional communities. RDA committees operate under a national RDA Charter and report to the Australian Government on key outcomes. A national network of 48 RDA committees cover the nation and RDA Tasmania represents the entire state of Tasmania.

It is exciting to see the Tasmanian Government tackle such an important issue and it is evident that so much research, consultation, and learnings have already taken place. As noted in the research from the University of Tasmania:

- Local government is rooted in the need for *local decision making*.
- The Board is to be congratulated in learning from the past and allowing for extensive consultation.
- There has been a local government shift from *services to property* to *services to people*.
- Financial stability and the need for efficiency continue to feature in most reform agendas.

Key Points

The key points to consider when structuring reform:

- Consolidation for financial efficiencies.
- The preservation of *local decision making*.

How do we ensure that remote communities can deliver the same quality of service as larger service centres? What resources can be pooled to make this possible? Through reading the material available on the Local Government Reform website, this issue seems to be well understood by the Board.

The boundary for *local* will need to be driven by local needs. A simple *rule of thumb* way to measure local could be a mix of the following:

- Where is your local pool?
- Where is your local sporting club?
- Where is your local theatre?
- Where is your local market?



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In the words of the Board; this mix is worthwhile considering if the Board were to 'redraw' the council boundaries and would be a way to manage the very different needs and circumstances of rural and urban communities. Therefore, different solutions will be required for different parts of the state.

It is agreed that that Tasmania's current council boundaries do not necessarily reflect how contemporary Tasmanians live, work, and connect.

It is expected that additional Tasmanian government support would be required for smaller councils in the form of back office and professional services as well as additional financial support.

How big is big enough to be effective? How small is small enough to care?

RDA Tasmania supports an outcome that retains *local decision making* and consolidates other functions as appropriate.

Historically, the state is divided into 3 regions; the north west, north and south. However, this division is not always practical. Economically, it is important for regions to be large enough to allow big picture, impactful strategies to be actioned, but small enough to understand local leadership and business ecosystems. Good quality planning and decision making also requires quality data. It is essential all Tasmanian councils have access to good quality data and we hope the Tasmanian government continues to support councils in this way.

Local services such a health and childcare services would ideally be provided by the private sector, and State and Australian government. Currently, may small, rural councils subsidise these services that are considered commercially unviable by the private sector. This increases the inequity between urban and rural councils and their communities.

Therefore, we agree that there are *functions and services councils deliver now that they shouldn't*. It is however important for councils to have the capability to *step up* in the event of local unmet needs or strong community demand.

We are pleased to see the Board frequently mention *well-being* and place importance on *well-being*. Well-being is important for cohesive communities and to allow all Tasmanian's to fulfill their potential. Well-being of community is an essential economic enabler.

The Tasmanian Governments Regional Strategic Partnerships are an important piece of the puzzle that can create economic opportunities that may compliment the objectives of the Local Government Reform process.

RDA Tasmania sees the importance of the Tasmanian Government having an Economic Development Co-ordinator based in the south of the state to compliment the footprint in the north and north west.

Which of the three broad reform pathways do you think has the best chance of delivering what the community needs from local government?

RDA Tasmania notes that the *hybrid model* is the option most likely to meet the varied needs of our communities. As noted, *local decision making*, financial efficiencies and quality service delivery across the state are important outcomes.

For further information and to expand on any of the points raised in this submission, please contact:

Jen Newman
Acting CEO and Director of
Regional Development
Regional Development
Australia – Tasmania