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19<sup>th</sup> February 2023

Ms S Smith  
Chairperson  
Local Government Board  
LGBoard@dpac.tas.gov.au

Dear Madam,

### **FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW – STAGE 2 OPTIONS REPORT FEEDBACK**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Board's Stage 2 Options Report.

The position of the prior Council to the Stage 1 Interim Report was provided in August 2022 noting there was fundamental support to the proposed role statement, capability and outcome aspirations, review themes and future visions as a basis for local government in Tasmania.

The current Council similarly provide their in principle support to the eight reform outcomes identified in the Stage 2 Report. Council strongly endorse the need for genuine reform through systemic redesign as the status quo will not achieve these outcomes consistently nor in a financially sustainable manner.

In response to the three reform pathways, Council supports a hybrid model to provide improved regional economic and community wellbeing outcomes through fewer councils with scale and more efficient application of resources. Council further notes the following:

- Boundary reform must be determined at a regional 'catchment' level taking into account:
  - socio-economic, demographic, investment and visitation profiles and forecasts;
  - the sustainable and equitable distribution of population, assets, land use and required rate revenue generation;
  - economic activity by industry / land value category;
  - economic structures and inter-relationships between residential growth, investment in the rural sector, intrastate/interstate/international visitation, employment and education location with associated movement patterns and, availability of and access to services.

Council supports the redesign of council boundaries to better align with regionalised communities, improve economies of scale, capacity to advocate and to retain and develop skilled people.

- Service consolidation could be delivered through the redesign of sensible regional or state-wide systems for appropriate council functions:
  - a seconded professional staff model adopting a matrix relationship combining functional expertise with the varying needs of local councils would maximise expertise

and economies of scale whilst providing seconded staffing and just in time services to client councils who manage local strategy and priorities - a best of both worlds structure that centralises much of the HR, finance, audit, asset management and other back office systems while each local council accesses the services according to essential KPI's and local priorities.

- Council supports the position that a service consolidation model be mandated.
  - A challenge with any mandated service consolidation model is limiting the administrative duplication, governance and procurement costs. Broadening the purpose and function of the LGAT may be an option to avoid replicating Tasmanian and interstate examples that have not delivered cost efficient or timely services.
  - If boundary reform is done correctly, the extent and range of required service consolidation may lessen.
- Reviewing State and Federal Government agency roles, operating focus, KPI compliance, engagement and coordination with local government is also required for the reform program to succeed.
  - Additionally, and consistent with boundary reform based on regional catchments, is that of the need for electoral boundary reform.
  - In response to reform outcome 5, Council recognises the need to, and benefits from, de-conflicting the role of councillors when acting as planning authorities for DA matters. We do not have a unanimous position on the three nominated options with regard to where DA thresholds are established for councillor involvement to cease. However, it was unanimous that councillors must retain responsibility for the strategic elements of the planning system, to be represented, be able to contribute their 'community voice' to the process and relevantly, that the role and approach of the TPC and SPO needs careful review (consistent with the dot point above).

Sorell Council is in the unique position of having participated in shared services and actively explored boundary reform for several years, only to see neighbouring councils withdraw one by one. The conflicts of interest demonstrated in the amalgamation attempts in recent years confirm that some kind of mandated change is necessary to counter this.

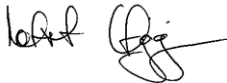
On the matter of differing needs and circumstances between rural and urban communities, implementing a ward system with localised advisory groups would strengthen local representation across newly created larger municipal areas. Council reiterates support for maintaining genuine local representation and community voice in the way future councillors are elected. Rural and regional communities do place a higher value on access to local representation, however, we submit that irrespective of where communities are located, the eight reform outcomes appropriately and consistently address their needs and circumstances.

Council supports improvements to councillor remuneration and professional development so that elected members have more capacity to work with their community and other stakeholders, contribute to policy more effectively and be respected for their strategic advocacy.

Council commends the LG Board on their thorough research, options and consultation opportunities to date. Council has also supported and encouraged elected members to make individual submissions to the Board given the wide ranging matters under consideration.

If you have any further enquiries regarding this matter please contact me on 📞 0400 123 933 or via email [robert.higgins@sorell.tas.gov.au](mailto:robert.higgins@sorell.tas.gov.au)

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Higgins', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Robert Higgins**  
**GENERAL MANAGER**