

Submission on The Future of Local Government

After a cursory look at the future of local government review, I wish to make some comments that might be considered on the possible future for local government.

Councillor Code of Conduct

There has been discussion in the review papers in regard to the poor performance of some Councillors towards fellow councillor/alderman (Person) and staff.

It is not seen as a good look and it suggest poor performance on the entire local government entity and local government.

The Councillor code of conduct is clearly a total waste of time and resources and until it is reviewed and provides the necessary powers to control errant councillors it should cease to operate.

If that cannot occur then the fees for lodging a complaint must be increased substantially to say \$500. I also feel the time given to lodge a complaint should be reduced to two months.

I also feel that it should not be the responsibility of the General Manager to see if the complaint complies it should be a person independent to Council or the Chair of Councils Audit Panel.

The fee mentioned above should not be refundable if found to be frivolous, or vexatious.

Mayor and Councillor Elections

I suggest that there should be two statutory positions Mayor and Deputy Mayor. Those interested in those roles stand for election to these positions. If they are not successful they do not have a role on council.

The net part is the election to elect the appropriate number of councillors they stand and if successful then become the councillors for the local government authority.

How many times have we seen a disgruntled candidate for Mayor or Deputy Mayor continue in the role of councillor and attempt to disrupt the operation of council in some way. Not a good look for local government.

Finances

For some small councils they rely heavily on grants. Most parts of the distribution of these funds have been reviewed over the years but one has been quarantined. It is past time that the per capita allocation was reviewed by lowering the 30% cap.

By reducing this marginally to 20% will make little difference to the cities and provide more funding to those areas that need it. Changing from the reverse Robin Hood allocation method to the Robin Hood allocation method

Another area needing review is the allocation of dividends from TasWater. The current method is flawed in the written down value of assets transferred is used for distribution. The flaw in this calculation is that it did not consider historical federal and state grants provided to the councils.

Some Councils funded this infrastructure by loans and other funds of Council. Others did the same but received large state and federal grants to help.

Previous Reviews and Transfer of Services

The Southern Tasmania Council Authority many years ago undertook a review of the structure of Local Government in Southern Tasmania and provided several options which were not progressed. I was wondering if this has been made available to the board.

There has been some comment in the discussion papers of TasWater, has there been an investigation in regard to how successful this model has been and if a similar entity could be utilised in other functions of local government.

I understand that tendering for local government is done by each council and also by the Local Government Association of Tasmania. Has there been any assessment on if this has achieved savings to Councils that can be quantified.

Mergers and Resource Sharing

Lastly, I note that the board has considered resource sharing and amalgamations.

I am not totally opposed to amalgamations but the social implications for small councils needs to seriously be assessed.

In small communities the removal of one, if not the largest employer could see the demise of that community.

It is difficult enough for the small towns to survive and if local government was reduced or removed it would be devastating.

Those currently employed would need to find employment elsewhere and in the end move. The difficulty then would be selling their family home, moving away from other family members and this then leading to the downfall of the small town.

Resource sharing has been considered before and can work in some areas if each entity is able to participate in the purchase and supply side.

I feel there is a variation possibly to your mergers and hybrid model that being what I will call the stay of execution model. That is Councils are informed that the amalgamation model suggest they merge with x councils. We give you three years to be able to provide a recourse sharing model with the council's proposed to produce sustainable savings if not the proposed merger will take place.

Other Matters

I feel that in the case of voting at council meetings there needs to be one small change, and that is by deleting the option to abstain from voting. If you haven't got the intestinal fortitude, or can't take the time to research a matter fully to vote for or against decisions of council don't put your hand up to be a councillor.

I have kept the comments above brief but can elaborate if there is any interest in the points raised.

Mr Stephen Mackey

