ABN 68 300 116 092

1 August 2023

Sue Smith
Chair
Future of Local Government Review Board

Dear Chair,

Please find below the George Town Council's submission in response to the release of the Stage two interim Report from the Future of Local Government Review Board (**Review Board**) Minute No. 125/23 Ordinary Council Meeting 25 July 2023.

The George Town municipal area is impacted by a number of scenarios presented by the Review Board in both the Tamar Valley Community Catchment Information Pack and the North-East Community Catchment Information Pack.

The Tamar Valley Community Catchment Information Pack proposes:

- Scenario 1 – Establishing one council area that incorporates West Tamar, George Town, and Launceston as well as commuting areas of Prospect Vale and Blackstone Heights.
- Scenario 2 – Establishing one council area capturing West Tamar and Launceston but not including Lebrina.
- Scenario 3 – Establishing one council area comprising the existing West Tamar, George Town, and Launceston LGAs, extended to include the commuting areas of Hadspen, Carrick, Longford, Perth, Evandale and immediate surrounds.
- Scenario 4 – Establishing one council area that incorporates West Tamar, George Town, and Launceston and extends west to Meander Valley (minus south-west SA1 around Lake Rowallan) but excludes the southern commuting towns of Evandale, Perth and Longford.

The North East Community Catchment Information Pack proposes:

- Scenario 1 – Establishing three new councils:
  A. the existing Break O'Day council area (potentially with Bicheno);
  B. a council encompassing George Town and Dorset, extending to incorporate Lebrina, and;
  C. retaining the current Flinders council.
- Scenario 2 – Establishing two new councils comprising A. the 'mainland' portion of the Community Catchment and B. retaining the current Flinders council.
- Scenario 3 – Establishing a consolidated North-East council comprising the whole North-East Community Catchment, including Flinders Island.

Interestingly, the Review Board recognised in its Community Information Pack for the Tamar Valley that while '*geographically, George Town is part of the Tamar consultation group although, owing to its distinctive economic and industrial base, is to a much smaller extent within greater Launceston's commuting zone. 1,434 people both live and work in George Town, while some 730 people, just over 26% of all employed residents, live in George Town but work in Launceston. The Board has been considering the orientation of George Town in terms of functional, commuter and communities of interest.*'

In the North East Community Catchment Information Pack, the Review Board acknowledged '*the existing Break O'Day and Dorset council areas have very similar local workforce ratios – at 76.5% and 77.5% respectively. Flinders, given its relative isolation, ranks highly at 99.5%. Both Break O'Day and Dorset have some connections to George Town and Launceston but are more connected to each other than to any other LGA.*'

These views were reinforced by George Town Council elected members and the executive team at an independently facilitated workshop held 28 June 2023. Overwhelmingly those present supported no change in the existing boundaries of the George Town municipality. It was agreed that future of George Town is prosperous with few benefits identified through any amalgamation.

However, in considering the desired outcomes for the George Town community should the reform process be implemented, elected members considered the following factors in relation to outcomes should any of the proposed scenario's be progressed.

Desired Outcome	Notes
Increased liveability	Building liveability will make George Town a place where people will choose to live and to work. Much has been done already to develop livability and this should be continued.
Security in representation and leadership	We are a small community and there is a real risk that our identity, interests and influence will be diluted or lost in a larger structure centred around the urban area of Launceston. George Towns future growth will come from the Bell Bay Industrial Precinct and maritime industry around the port. Future growth and development need local representation and support from a leadership that has experience in working with industrial and maritime interests. George Town Council has been doing this for some time now and the connection, relationships and support should not be diluted or lost.
Increased investment in community, services and facilities	Continuing investment is needed in locally available community services and facilities for George Town to grow as a liveable community. For example, George Town is moving toward becoming a regional health hub with a proposed 'wellness centre'. These achievements are the product of direct community involvement and support.
Insurance for our future – Retention of Bell Bay wealth	The Bell Bay Advanced Manufacturing and Industrial area is a key strength for George Town's future and a source of revenue that must be reinvested in the community. Council has worked hard with business and industry to grow this part of the local economy and the income and resources must be allocated to the local community and not diverted into a bigger entity.

Consideration of the various catchment areas presented by the Review Board as discussed by elected members and the executive are presented in the following table:

Possibilities	Notes
Maintain present structure	We have a bright future. A lot of work has been done achieving the Progressive, Prosperous and Proud vision and associated strategies for the municipality which must not be diluted. The drivers for reform are not clear and information inadequate.
Tamar Valley Scenarios (1), (3) & (4)	There are three scenarios that include George Town in a Tamar Valley catchment centered on Launceston. These scenarios are open for discussion if there are strict conditions to protect the future interests and strengths of the George Town Community. These conditions are set out below and include the fact that presently there is simply not enough data or information to support informed and responsible decision making. Council sees this as the responsibility of the State Government who are driving the reform.
East and West Tamar Valley (not including Launceston)	This new scenario proposes combining George Town and parts of West Tamar, North from and including Legana. It could also include the rural areas of Launceston from Lilydale to the North. It would create a rural community catchment centered around the Eastern and Western shores to the North of the Tamar Valley. The balance of West Tamar would combine with a Tamar Valley option that includes Launceston. This would create an urban focused community catchment around the Southern end of the Valley. It is recommended the Review Board undertake a business case on this option. Noting that this option has not yet been discussed with West Tamar Council.
Nort- East Catchment scenarios	There is no support for merging into future structures in the North East. There maybe areas toward the Eastern boundary of George Town that might be better placed in a North East catchment.

George Town Councils position is for the George Town Municipality to remain as is, noting its unique geographic position and distance from other service centres.

The communities west and east of the kanamaluka/Tamar River for instance are connected by way of the Batman Bridge some distance from existing service centres.

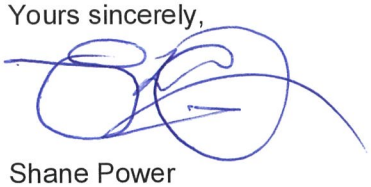
The Review Board's own papers concede that George Town is unique in that it is '*less reliant on Launceston city for employment and services as other surrounding municipalities are*'. George Town owing largely to its industrial precinct, enjoys a close commute to a large employment centre which is supported by local health and education services.

It is the view of George Town Council that any amalgamation of council areas that included the George Town municipality would result in a reduction of levels of service and local representation.

George Town Council also calls on the State Government and the Review Board to:

- Develop business cases that articulate the estimated costs for reform, the payback period for such investment, the source of funds for reform and the envisaged return on investment in economic terms as it relates to the current George Town community.
- Demonstrate through robust data and financial modelling the perceived community benefit, social and economic benefits associated with the reform.
- Develop a communications strategy in consultation with the sector.

Yours sincerely,



Shane Power
GENERAL MANAGER