

Tasmanian Active Living Coalition

activelivingcoalition@health.tas.gov.au



Local Government Board
Department of Premier and Cabinet
GPO Box 123
HOBART TAS 7001
submissions.lgboard@dpac.tas.gov.au.

To: The Local Government Board

Subject: The Future of Local Government Review Stage 2 Interim Report

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Stage 2 Interim Report of The Future of Local Government Review. On behalf of members of the Tasmanian Active Living Coalition please find our consultation submission attached in response.

The Tasmanian Active Living Coalition works together to influence and inform policies, decisions and strategies encouraging the creation of active living environments.

Yours sincerely

Associate Professor Verity Cleland
TALC Chair
verity.cleland@utas.edu.au

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Introduction

The Tasmanian Active Living Coalition (TALC) welcomes the opportunity to submit feedback on the Future of Local Government Review Stage 2 Interim Report. The Coalition acknowledges this part of the Future of Local Government Review is primarily concerned with structural reform. TALC's submission supports the report's emphasis on the community valuing strong, effective, and locally responsive councils.

The objective of TALC's submission is to emphasise the importance of local government for the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians. The environment in which people live, work, learn and recreate has a direct impact on their health outcomes. A 'health in all policies' lens on local government requires policies supporting and promoting active living, active travel and an understanding of the principles for social inclusion and the promotion of food security.

Individual TALC members have contributed to this submission and may have also made separate submissions on behalf of their organisations.

This submission has been approved by TALC's Chair and endorsed by TALC's membership.

About the Tasmanian Active Living Coalition

TALC is an independent, not-for-profit coalition made up of representatives from a broad range of non-Government and Government organisations with an interest in active living. TALC members work together to influence and inform policies, decisions and strategies that encourage the creation of active living environments.

TALC's aim is to lead, support and promote the creation of environments supporting active living, and to add value by providing a mechanism for an integrated approach and potentially drive behaviour change in relation to active living.

TALC's purpose is to:

- support the translation of evidence into policy and practice;
- build and strengthen new and existing partnerships to foster collaboration across sectors and within and across state and local government partnerships and develop new partnerships as required;
- raise the profile of active living; and
- support, advise and advocate for improvements in the policy, built and natural environments.

The principal interest of TALC is for local government to enhance (and not hinder) active living (including physical activity and active travel) for community health and wellbeing. Therefore, TALC

advocates to have *health and wellbeing* as priority outcomes for all local government areas, irrespective of how local government boundaries are drawn.

Active Living

Local government can be a key driver for applying healthy planning principles to the built environment in Tasmania to create liveable locations which promote physical activity, food security and healthy eating, and social inclusion. TALC provides the following overview of key aspects of active living which are directly related to development at the local government area.

The Built Environment

The way the environment is planned, designed, and built can directly affect the health and wellbeing of people who use and inhabit the space. A series in *The Lancet*, one of the top-ranking medical journals in the world, *Urban Design and Transport to Promote Healthy Lives* recognises the importance of the built environment for active living (Goenka and Andersen, 2016). The series recommends creating compact cities that locate shops, schools, other services, parks, and recreational facilities, as well as jobs near homes, and providing highly connective street networks making it easy for people to walk and cycle to places (Goenka and Andersen, 2016). The Heart Foundation of Australia's *Healthy Active by Design* framework (National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2017) notes planning for active living calls for a commitment to applying healthy planning principles to all levels of the planning system, at every stage of the planning process and in every planning project and policy initiative (National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2017).

There are many co-benefits of improving planning for active living including reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, improved air quality, reduced traffic congestion, sustainable infrastructure, increased economic productivity, improved social capital and liveable towns and cities (Goenka and Andersen, 2016).

Physical Activity

Physical activity is fundamental for good physical and mental health and wellbeing. Physical activity can help prevent heart disease, type two diabetes, numerous cancers, dementia, weight gain, gestational diabetes, and anxiety and depression (Bellew et al., 2020). Being physically active improves sleep and improves brain function at all ages (Bellew et al., 2020).

Despite this, almost half of all Tasmanians aged 18 and over do not do enough physical activity for good health (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Tasmania is below the national average and is ranked sixth out of the eight states and territories (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

Internationally, the World Health Organization's *Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-2030* has as one of its four key pillars a priority focus to 'create active environments' (World Health Organization, 2018). This includes strengthening the integration of urban and transport planning policies, delivering highly connected neighbourhoods to support active and public transport, improving walking, and cycling network infrastructure, accelerating implementation of policy actions to improve road and personal safety for active and public transport users, strengthening access to public and green open spaces, and strengthening policy, regulatory, and design guidelines and frameworks.

Nationally, the Heart Foundation's *Blueprint for an Active Australia* states 'reshaping the built environments in which most Australians live, work, learn and recreate can significantly increase daily physical activity levels. Community and neighbourhood design impacts on local walking, cycling and public transport use, as well as on recreational walking and physical activity' (National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2019). The *Getting Australia Active III* report identified eight policy domains for systems level action on physical activity, notably transport, the built environment, and workplaces (Bellew et. al., 2020).

Liveability

The Heart Foundation's *2020-21 What Australia Wants* survey measured community sentiment around qualities of active neighbourhoods and support for initiatives to increase infrastructure for physical activity in and around neighbourhoods (National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2020). Tasmanians expressed a desire to live close to shops and amenities, and in a safe quiet area and away from main roads. Tasmanians prioritise access to healthy food, housing diversity and a sense of place (that is, safety, community, natural elements as the most important design features) (National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2020). The report noted only 31% of Tasmanians believe their neighbourhood helps them a lot in being active (National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2020). Support for government investment in active infrastructure (67%) and public transport funding (64%) was strong, as was support for speed limit reductions in neighbourhood streets (59%) was strong (National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2020). Being close to amenities, shops and services, safety/low crime, and having fresh food close by were important considerations for Tasmanians when deciding where to live. However, the results also indicate these attributes are not always accessible to Tasmanians and local government should look for opportunities to embed this within their decision making.

In 2021, Place Score ran the Australian Liveability Census, the largest social research project in Australia which included 3,200 records gathered from community members in Tasmania (Malshe et al., 2021). The census explored what was most important in terms of neighbourhood liveability and current performance (Malshe et al., 2021). Ideas for improving local neighbourhoods were collected

and included improving walkability to local amenities and open spaces (Malshe et al., 2021). Nationally, walking/jogging/bike paths that connect housing to community amenity was selected as being most important to their ideal neighbourhood by 55 per cent of respondents, again highlighting the value placed on liveability and the built environment by communities.

Integrated Policies in Health and Wellbeing

Improving health and wellbeing by supporting Tasmanians to live active lives requires a coordinated approach across government agencies and sectors as called for in the World Health Organization's (WHO) 'Health in All Policies' approach to preventative health (World Health Organization, 2022c).

The *Tasmania Statement* supports the connection between health and wellbeing enhanced by natural open spaces. It further notes the opportunities available as Tasmania grows to plan communities to create healthy, liveable, and connected spaces (Premier's Health and Wellbeing Advisory Council, 2021). The *Tasmania Statement* creates an authorising environment for those working within the Tasmanian Government to support health and wellbeing considerations within the planning scheme.

The *Healthy Tasmania Five Year Strategic Plan 2022-26* advocates for a health in all policies approach, including an analysis of the systems outside the health sector which influence the health status of populations (Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). The plan focuses on systems and supporting active living initiatives, particularly through planning and building places that support health, wellbeing, and physical activity, and by building infrastructure that makes walking, cycling, accessibility, and public transport safe and viable alternatives to driving (Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). This builds on earlier work under Tasmania's Plan for Physical Activity 2011-2021 which aimed to 'create built and natural environments that enable and encourage physical activity (Department of Infrastructure, 2010).

The Stage 2 Interim Report

Against the above advocacy for health and wellbeing within the context of national and international best practice evidence, TALC asserts local government can make a powerful contribution to the health and wellbeing of the Tasmanian community. Other co-benefits of environments supporting physical activity include economic growth, strengthening communities, liveability, environmental sustainability/climate change mitigation, food security and safety.

TALC notes and supports the interim report's inclusive view on the importance of community wellbeing. In contrast, references to 'health' are limited to health services as discrete from the healthiness of the built environment achieved through targeted measures for active living and active travel. This view on health embraces planning, engineering and good urban design that is

transformative and best done at the local level. TALC therefore is advocating for the structural review of local government to focus on the capacity for delivering local health and wellbeing outcomes and the role for local government to lead those outcomes. Further, whilst it is noted the role of local government on permit assessment for change of use and development (development assessment) has been removed from the inquiry's remit TALC emphasises it is not only the assessment of permit applications that deliver health and wellbeing outcomes. Planning at the local level is much more than the granting of permits and this appears to be recognised in the Board's report. It also includes community development initiatives to improve service provision integration in collaboration with Primary Health Tasmania (i.e. facilitation of 'The Right Place' program through the Huon Valley and Clarence Councils); to improve access to existing services; and a range of other active living initiatives (The Right Place 2023, Live Clarence 2023, Help to Health 2023). These initiatives of local government are examples as to what can be achieved at a local level through working in partnership with the profit and for purpose sectors where State Government and private sector delivery models cannot.

Local government at one level through their roles on streets (most physical activity is undertaken on streets), parks and other public open spaces play a major role in enhancing health and wellbeing. Such outcomes can be in the form of, and be simply, walkable and safe footpaths and the provision of walking and cycling networks across the community. At another level local government can contribute, through the built environment, to social inclusion and food security. Local Government clearly has this broad remit through being bound by Acts of Parliament and statutory instruments to give effect to State Policies, regional land use strategies and the proposed Tasmanian Planning Policies that have a strong focus on health and wellbeing (specifically, through Schedule 1 of the *Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993*) as brought under the umbrella of the objectives of the Resource Management and Planning System (RMPS). Beyond giving effect to the RMPS, local government also gives effect to elements of other relevant legislation impacting upon health and wellbeing (i.e., public health, environmental health).

In essence the final form of local government must have the capacity to perform its functions for health and wellbeing as set by the respective Acts of Parliament and statutory instruments to which they are bound. Although TALC understands that since this consultation commenced, amalgamations are unlikely to be enforced, consideration has still been given to impacts upon active living, health and wellbeing should amalgamations take place in the future. In review of the Interim Summary Report (Government of Tasmania, 2023), TALC has considered both amalgamations and shared services, which are being considered by the Local Government Board (hereafter 'the Board').

The interim report states that tens of thousands of Tasmanians now commute across Council boundaries on a daily basis and this is a clear example of how current LGA's are no longer aligned with the communities in which many Tasmanians live and work. In considering parameters for both amalgamation and shared services, TALC supports investigation of measures increasing self-sufficiency given interconnectedness with liveability. This is given contrasting changes in geographic areas where growth is projected, from significant growth in the Sorell LGA due to Greenfield subdivisions (the South East geographic area) to increasing commutes to Launceston from surrounding areas, which will continue in the coming decades (such as Hadspen, Lilydale and Longford). In these areas, and other areas identified in the interim report, consideration should be given to ensuring growth occurs together with measures to support self-sufficiency, which is in the interests of active living.

In a regional context, self-sufficiency is defined as a measure of an area's potential to employ the local labour force (Southern Tasmanian Councils Authority 2011). For instance, a self-sufficiency of 80% would imply 80% of working residents can potentially live and work in the same area. Industry sectors with lower self sufficiency rates indicate residents travel out of the region to their place of work. Long distances can mean active forms of travel are not sustainable. For instance, the distance may be too great to walk or cycle (Lu and Diab, 2023). Similarly, population densities may not be of a threshold to support regular public transport routes due to increased density of built form (Mulley et al. 2016). Measures can be proposed to increase self-sufficiency. For instance, supply of appropriate housing choices in locations near where people work, study and recreate (i.e. key worker housing and affordable housing dwelling configurations). Similarly, attracting and retaining economic sectors that have higher levels of self-sufficiency through alignment with delivery of housing choices.

TALC commends the work local government already contributes to the health and wellbeing of the Tasmanian community and on behalf of the Coalition I thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on *The Future of Local Government Review Stage 2 Interim Report*.

Definitions

The following terms included in this submission are defined as:

Active living-a way of life that integrates physical activity into daily routines (Heart Foundation, 2016).

Active travel/transport - travel modes that involve physical activity such as walking and cycling and includes the use of public transport that is accessed via walking or cycling and may allow for integration of multi-modal transport in the course of a day (Heart Foundation, 2016).

Built environment - the structures and places in which we live, work, shop, learn, travel and play, including land uses, transportation systems and design features (National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2017).

Health - a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease (World Health Organization, 2022a).

Liveability - a liveable community is one that is safe, socially cohesive, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable. Highly liveable areas provide affordable housing that is well serviced by public transport, walking, and cycling infrastructure (Department of Agriculture Water and the Environment, 2021). They have good access to employment, education, shops and services, POSs, and social, cultural, and recreational facilities (Department of Agriculture Water and the Environment, 2021).

Physical activity - any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure encompassing all movement during leisure time, for transport to get to and from places, or as part of a person's work (World Health Organization, 2022b).

Social inclusion – is a term used to describe how government, community, business, services, and individuals can work together to make sure that all people have the best opportunities to enjoy life and do well in society. It is about making sure that no one is left out or forgotten in our community (Social Inclusion Unit, 2008).

Wellbeing – mental health is a state in which an individual can realise their own potential cope with normal stresses, work productively and contribute to their community (World Health Organization, 2022a).¹

¹ TALC acknowledges that Tasmania will likely develop its own definition of wellbeing as part of the development of Tasmanian Health and Wellbeing Framework.

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