

31 July 2023

Local Government Board

[lgboard@dpac.tas.gov.au](mailto:lgboard@dpac.tas.gov.au)

Dear Local Government Board

## **SUBMISSION TO THE FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD**

### **A new Western Tasmanian Community of Interest**

The West Coast Council strongly believes that a new Council should be formed to reflect a distinct community of interest in Western Tasmania, with boundaries approximately aligned with appendix A. This Council should include the majority of mining areas of Western Tasmania, as well as those associated with the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and remote communities that border it. This should include the townships of: Queenstown, Zeehan, Rosebery, Strahan, Waratah, Derwent Bridge, Tullah, Savage River, Cradle Mountain, and Corinna.

This would represent a distinct community of interest, forged by a shared history, and remote wilderness tourism, which would support cohesion within the new local government area. Importantly this would allow the new Council to develop expertise in and provide effective services in unique circumstances. These communities face challenges related to highly cyclical industries, non-residential workers, remoteness, and supporting large projects. Additionally, all these communities require advocacy and decision making in relation to balancing development and wilderness areas. Importantly the new Council would develop significant expertise in planning and service delivery in remote wilderness areas. Further, the new Council could leverage the experience of the West Coast Council in economic diversification to support tourism in these areas by, for example, expanding the current West Coast Brand. This would also represent a union of communities of similar size and heritage, allowing all to have an equal say and representation in the new Council.

### **The Importance of a Strong North-West Coast**

All remote communities rely on large urban centers for effective services. While not in our catchment, the future of the cradle coast area is vital to us if we are to have access to appropriate services. For this reason, West Coast Council strongly supports the options that have Burnie, Ulverstone and Devonport in a single LGA. We believe that this will support strategic planning for the future of the North-West, reduce the waste of inefficient competition in service provision and ensure a better level of service in areas such as health, education, and recreation for West Coasters.

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## **The Balance of State and Local Government Services**

West Coast Council strongly believes that a more effective balance between State and Local Government will improve services in remote areas. For example, we would welcome the merging of customer services functions and we believe in remote areas Councils are well positioned to provide the services currently available at Service Tasmania, in a one stop government shop. We would also welcome regulators like CBOS taking the role of regulation from Council's as those organisations set the rules and have the expertise needed to regulate highly technical industries. We would also be open to TasWater taking over responsibility for Stormwater to enable a more cohesive State-Wide response to increasing flood risks. Finally, we believe there could be closer engagement between Parks & Wildlife Services Tasmania and Council staff in NRM and land management services, perhaps with these organisations sharing Staff, or Councils providing services to PWS on a contract basis. We would welcome discussions on this issue.

## **Sharing Services**

We strongly believe that a robust mandatory share services framework is needed to ensure that local government remains effective. We have long established experience in sharing services and believe the following are best placed to be shared:

- Planning
- Building and Plumbing Compliance
- EHO/Health Compliance
- Engineering
- Asset Management
- IT support/planning
- Internal Audit
- Risk Management
- Project Management
- Human Resources
- Payroll and financial management

West Coast Council believes that any sharing should be mandated to ensure that it has appropriate scale and that neither the party providing the service, nor receiving the service can opt out. Ideally, we believe this is best done through new joint authorities or corporations at the appropriate level. In our case we certainly believe that the above could be appropriately shared at either a regional level, or among all remote/rural Councils.

## **Governance Models**

West Coast Council agrees with the board that there are problems with the coordination between local, state and federal governments. For that reason, we strongly support the creation of a regional coordinator for remote areas with a model similar to that used on Kangaroo Island. We believe that this role should be at least

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partially based in the community they are coordinating for and be at the Deputy Secretary/Executive Director Level.

## **Funding**

In our view the Board has not provided enough guidance on the financial sustainability of future Councils. It is clear that the concerns about remote Councils not providing the infrastructure communities want, is based wholly on a lack of financial resources. It costs more to provide infrastructure in remote areas and there is less ability to raise money from remote disadvantaged communities. Unless the board wishes intergenerational disadvantage to continue in remote areas like the West Coast, a new more equitable way of funding must be found. The West Coast is one of the wealthiest places in Tasmania, providing hundreds of millions of dollars in direct revenue to the State Government, providing jobs to the region and a large chunk of the State's exports, yet it remains the most disadvantaged LGA in Tasmania. Without a new arrangement, continued reliance on income based on property values will perpetuate disadvantage in the poorest areas of Tasmania. We ask the board to recommend:

1. That 30% of direct revenue from industry (royalties, hydro dividends, aquaculture fees etc.) go back to the community where the revenue is generated to ensure that the productive parts of Tasmania remain livable. This could be returned either to Council's or a sustainability fund.
2. Alternatively, the board should consider removing the unfair exemption from rates for Hydro Tasmania which unfairly impacts the remote renewable energy communities in Tasmania and holds back future renewable energy growth.
3. The formulation of the financial assistance grant should be modified to ensure a greater proportion of the grant going to the most disadvantaged communities.
4. Further the board should consider the need for a new infrastructure grant for remotes/small Council's to improve the level of infrastructure in the communities and support their livability. This should be a grant provided to remote Council's each year to be spent on infrastructure renewal. The level of grant should be at 3%-5% of the value of infrastructure held by the Council.

If nothing is done to provide fair financial support to remote communities' local government reform will not lead to better outcomes for these communities and they will continue to be the most disadvantaged in Tasmania.

Yours Sincerely



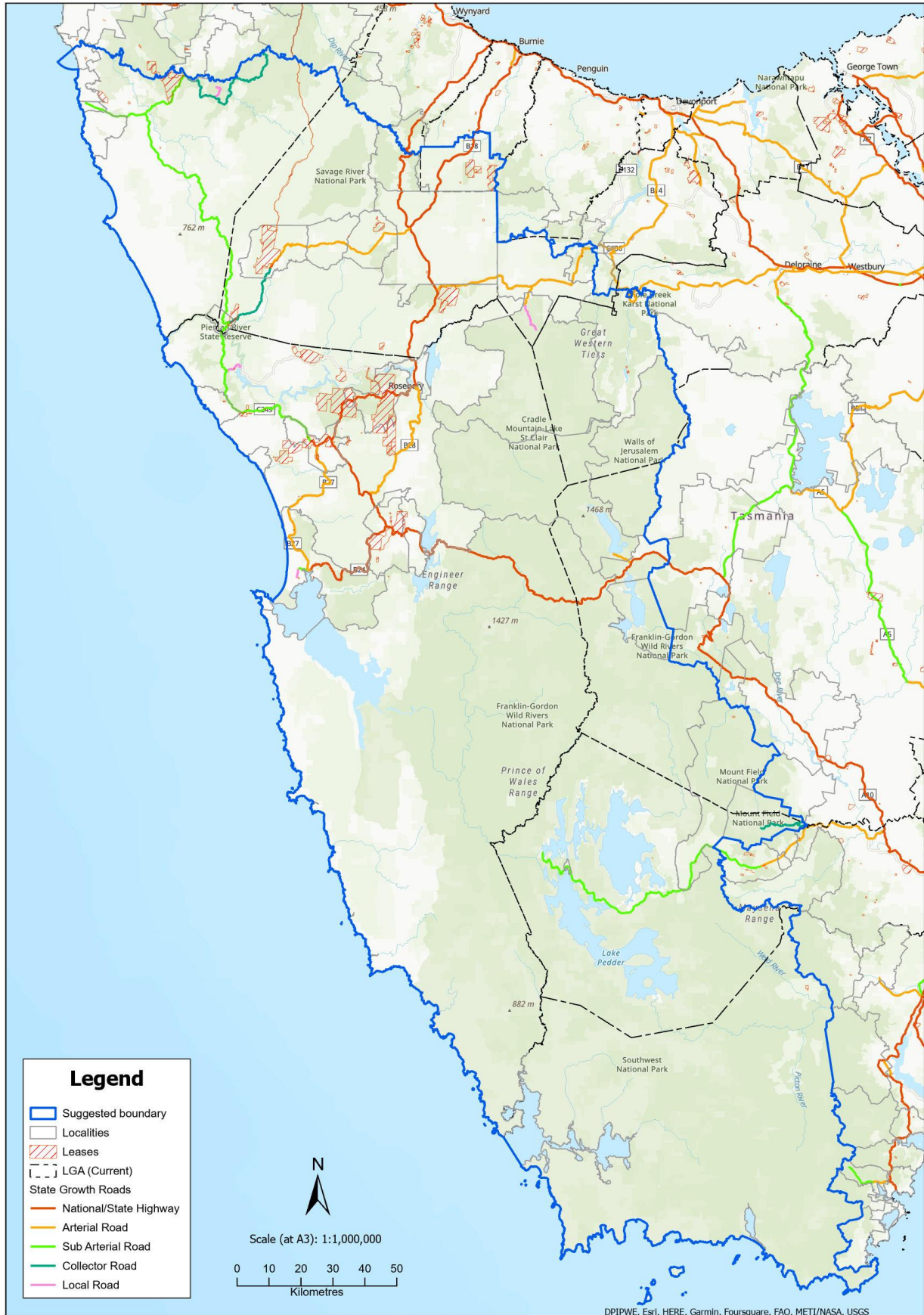
Shane Pitt

**MAYOR**

*Appendix A – Proposed West Coast Boundary Map*

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