

Submission to the Future of Local Government Review

Central and Midlands Community Catchment Pack

The following submission is submitted by a ratepayer with a family shack in the Central Highlands at Brady's Lake for around twenty years and is also a ratepayer of the Meander Valley Council with a property at Prospect Vale for the past twelve years.

Eccleston, Johnson & Hyslop suggest in their history of Local Government in Tasmania that reform over the last 150 years has been interesting, however the 'Modernisation Process' in the 1990's that used broad-based community and stakeholder collaboration achieved positive results.

Since the early nineties when an agreement was reached between State and Local Governments to undertake a modernisation program, change and reform have continued at a rapid pace, which included:

- Local Government modernisation program;
- Financial reporting;
- National competition policy;
- Roles and responsibilities review;
- Competitive tendering and contracting; and
- Co-operative arrangements between councils.

The modernisation program made four major changes to the framework of local government in Tasmania:

- Restructuring of councils took place and the numbers of councils were reduced from 46 to 29. New Councils were proclaimed in 1993 as part of this process;
- The enactment of the Local Government Act 1993 provided greater flexibility to councils while also strengthening their accountability to their electors;
- The implementation of contemporary management, administration and operating procedures; and
- Comprehensive review of the roles and responsibilities of State and Local Government, and of the financial arrangements between the two.

As the 29 Councils grow from the ashes of the 1993 modernisation program the outcomes that councils achieved included providing better value for money, higher quality services focused on their communities, foster stronger local leadership and are more accountable to their communities.

Since the failed attempt to restructure local government in 1997 and the introduction of competitive tendering, Councils are now forming legal agreements with other neighbouring Councils to provide policy and operational services. Some Councils are forming joint authorities to share all resources; they are amalgamating their administration and work activities, leaving only the Councillors as separate entities.

There is no doubt that in the 21-century change is important in the local government sector as communities are developing and progressing faster than before due to population growth in outer urban

areas on the fringes of our current cities. Hill, Cumpston and Vigiola state that the growth rates of some of Australia's capital cities are some of the highest in the developed world and these have placed growing pressure on the urban environment to expand either upwards (in terms of urban density) or outwards (in terms of urban sprawl). Most growth (76%) in the past decade has occurred in Australia's 18 largest cities, with Hobart increasing by 13% by 2031 and the rest of Tasmania only increasing by 3%.

Eccleston, Johnson & Hyslop state that *"while change is often necessary it is also inevitably contested and should not be pursued for 'change's sake' – in some cases, stability is important too."*

If Eccleston, Johnson & Hyslop are right by identifying five trends that are likely to shape local government in the future:

- Centralisation;
- New services and expanding functions;
- Collaboration and intergovernmental initiatives;
- Climate change adaptation, conservation and environmental stewardship; and
- Social, technological, and demographic change.

Then additional modernisation of local government is required to ensure all communities across the state benefit from these identified areas within the Eccleston, Johnson & Hyslop report. Currently most smaller municipalities have limited resources to achieve these additional focus areas outside their day-to-day focus on service delivery. Hence may be this is the ideal time to consider another modernisation program as proposed in the four scenarios within the Central and Midlands Community Catchment Pack so communities can benefit in the long term.

My priority of the scenarios in the Central and Midlands Community Catchment Pack:

1. Scenario 5 – Establishing a single Central and Midlands Council with no change to the current 5 municipality boundaries;
2. Scenario 2 – Establishing a single Central and Midlands Council;
3. Scenario 1 – Establishing two separate councils to the north and south;
4. Scenario 3 – Establishing three councils – a northern council encompassing the Meander Valley and Northern Midlands, a southern council encompassing Brighton and the Southern Midlands, and a western council encompassing the Derwent Valley and Central Highlands; and
5. Scenario 4 – Establishing three councils: a northern council capturing the Meander Valley, Northern Midlands and the northern Central Plateau region; a south-western council incorporating the Derwent Valley and south-west of the Central Highlands; and a south-eastern council reaching into the Central Highlands

Reference

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