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FINAL

The Local Government Board
Future of Local Government Review
GPO Box 123,
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The Future of Local Government Review
By Email Submissions.LGBoard@dpac.tas.gov.au

The Future of Local Government Review - in Tasmania

Thank you for the opportunity to make comment about the Tasmanian State process, run by the Local Government Board, titled 'The Future of Local Government Review.

I wish to start by expressing consternation over this process.

Currently there is a review, into The Future of Local Government being conducted by the Office of Local Government and the Local Government Board (LGB) within the Dept. of Premier and Cabinet. Their current comment period originally finished on the 21st June 2023 but then, almost certainly because not all their own papers (outlining specific but limited and prescriptive and potentially compulsory amalgamation) had not been released so it was extended to the 2nd August 2023. It would seem the LGB cannot even run a consultation process properly or a decent website for that matter! The Future of Local Government Review: <https://www.futurelocal.tas.gov.au/>

I am writing this submission supporting my Local Government Council, firstly and foremostly as a local ratepayer of the local municipality since 1991, that is since prior to the previous amalgamation of the Deloraine and Westbury municipalities in 1993 and having recently attended the Meander Valley Council public meeting regarding the Future Of Local Government in Tasmania Consultation on Tuesday evening, the 11 July 2023, at the Deloraine Community Complex. Council's neutrality and its position to wait for the ratepayers' and residents' response was noted and appreciated and I confirm our new Acting General Manager's neutral approach.

I agree entirely with Meander Valley Council's approach of allowing the residents and community to express their view, as the primary determinant. I provide some specific information about the meeting which I attended, towards the end of this representation.

The writer has been involved in local government reform for a very long time, since 1990, having moved to Tasmania from Sydney in 1988. Prior to the previous 1990s State Government process: 'The Modernisation of Local Government in Tasmania', and whilst living in Launceston, I had initiated a community group, MINITS, which advocated for the "*review, reform and rationalisation of local government in Tasmania*". I understand that the effect of our lobbying (and some media frenzy) caused the Field Labor, Tasmanian Government to initiate massive and durable reforms to the 1962 Local Government Act.

Since that time my focus on local government matters has primarily had a focus on land use planning and environmental issues. I have always had a non-political non-partisan approach, indeed have never been a member of a political party and always worked in a volunteer capacity and for not for profit community organisations which held public interest objectives.

The Modernisation of Local Government in Tasmania, in 1993, effectively reduced the number of local governments from 46 to 29. Many far reaching reforms were incorporated in 1993, including the creation of the Resource Management Planning System of Tasmania, a suite of legislation which sadly has never realised its promise.

This suite of RMPS legislation contained Objectives which aimed to achieve ecologically sustainable development. Sadly to this day the objectives continue to be overlooked, ignored and avoided including by the Tasmanian Planning Commission. This failure requires an effective solution. This inability by the Tasmanian Government and its so called independent agencies to take note and support those RMPS Schedule 1 Objectives is noted and strongly criticised. Indeed those Objectives were they utilised properly and consistently would make a vast difference to Local Government.

In 1990 MINITS stated that the 1988 population levels of local government were as follows:

“There are 46 local government divisions in Tasmania. 22 of the 46 councils have resident populations of less than 4000 people.”

Local Government Areas Tasmania¹:

<i>Population:</i>	<i>Municipalities:</i>
<i>less than 1000</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>1001 to 4000</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>4001 to 8000</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>8001 to 16000</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>16001 to 32000</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>32000 and over</i>	<i>4</i>

In 2017 the State of Tasmania set a number of principles for the process of local government shared services study in 2017. I consider these principles to be invaluable in deciphering the current Terms of Reference, which have amazingly been amended as the process unravelled.

The Tasmanian State Government, in 2017, had established that the following principles must be applied when considering all options as they relate to local government reform:

- Be in the best interests of ratepayers*
- Improve the level of services for communities*
- Preserve and maintain local representation, and*
- Ensure that the financial status of the entities is strengthened.*

I likely will be referring to these principles in making this submission because it seems somehow that in just a few short years they may have been lost or discarded by the State of Tasmania. Perhaps an inconvenient truth! I am prepared to agree to and support the application of all these principles although I have one quibble with the definition of “financial status” and “entities” in the last principle. I note the “must be applied” and the fact that it was made by the same Liberal Government with many of the same cabinet members as today. NB:

¹ Source: Population Statistics, Tasmania. 1988 ABS Cat No.3204.6

These are not my principles, perhaps I would have written different ones, but let's try and work with them. I am not opposed to these I would just add some others. Later I expect to explain what these principles mean to me and what matters under them relate to the public interest.

I wish to make sure everyone understands, Meander Valley Council is a Local Government Council administering a Local Government Area (LGA) under the Local Government Act. These are all "Local" centric. I wonder what "local" might mean? Has the Local Government Board considered that somewhere?

Note: The public comment period provided by the Office of Local Government (LGB) will in my view be too short for our local government (Meander Valley) to conduct any fully adequate systematic polling of views of the rate payers and local residents or to fully analyse and consider these views. In my view the Office of Local Government and the LGB knew that when designing the process for the Minister.

Only very recently have we the ratepayers, found out the exact position of our Municipal Council, Meander Valley, or of its Councillors, some of whom are Liberals, I might add. There has not been sufficient time for Councils or the community. Some Councils have been faster than others. Some have done nothing, such as Launceston City Council.

I urged MVC Councillors to poll ratepayers in a systematic way to find out the overriding community sentiment on this important issue but they do not have the time, as you know.

It is a shame the State Government is running a process so completely short on time for consultation that it makes it very, very difficult for Local Councils to do their job in a reasonable manner.

The LGB website suggests:

"The objective of the Review is to create a more robust and capable system of local government, for the benefit of all Tasmanians."

If one looks at the 29 local governments in Tasmania one can see that as a whole the elected representatives and those employed staff, both senior staff in key positions and the rest of the staff provide longevity consistency and loyalty that the state government could only dream of achieving. Ask yourselves how many ministers have there been in the last 10 years handling the local government portfolio?

What I'm saying is that right now it is completely evident that local government is more robust than the state government with one exception. That exception is that the state government has the power to unravel and harm and destroy local government.

My first recommendation is to change the local government act so that the state government no longer has the power to take unilateral actions such as forced amalgamations where in essence a very few people some of whom are not elected at all get to make decisions both over many that is hundreds of elected Councillors and the many loyal staff working for our 29 local governments in Tasmania.

Local government will be more robust when you amend the legislation to remove the State Government capacity to force amalgamations.

The Liberal State Government has stated it intends to both force amalgamations and remove local land-use planning from local government. I am simply opposed to both these propositions emphatically and in the strongest terms. I am describing both ideas as completely and utterly ludicrous.

I acknowledge there are some very small local government Councils (under 10,000 pop.) but these often and generally cover very large areas of Tasmania, are sparsely populated or have a confronting set of problems which would probably only be severely exacerbated by amalgamation, such as those two Councils which manage King Island and the Furneaux group of Islands in the middle of Bass Strait. Certainly the island Councils as I call them strongly deserve to remain intact and independent for many reasons. They represent their communities and understand their communities, as no one else possibly can.

This 'The Future of Local Government Review' process has a strong potential to disadvantage such rural and remote parts of Tasmania, causing rural decline and hardship. Anything which causes Rural Decline in Tasmania is completely opposed by the writer and should be a substantial concern for any rural based local government council including my local government, Meander Valley Council.

I am highly sympathetic to those sparsely populated and remote municipalities, which in my view simply deserve to exist for the well-being of their local communities. Time constraints have limited my commentary on this important subject. It is clear from mainland experience that following forced amalgamations a disdain and derision are sentiments strongly expressed by those in rural areas.

Bear in mind, Tasmania is the smallest State of Australia. The most decentralised state, the poorest state, the one with the poorest education outcomes and lowest literacy and shortest life expectancy. Why do something such as this simplistic set of local government amalgamation propositions, which fails to rectify the real issues of concern in Tasmania? Why would the boundary and number of Councils become the focus of this 'The Future of Local Government Review' when over and over people across Tasmania have suggested they seek to retain their local governments? **Note: Over and over!**

This Review actually fails process-wise to be sufficiently fair for rural people to carefully consider the long term ramifications and complexities. Why would the State of Tasmania do something which almost inevitably will damage Tasmanian rural communities long into the future?

If our mid-sized Council (Meander Valley), which incidentally also covers quite a big rural area, was amalgamated with Launceston City Council (to use an example) as has basically been proposed, one could expect that:

A/. Our rates would substantially increase. I estimate it may be at least a 30% to 40% increase. I am sure the published data will support this assertion.

B/. Both our representation and our voice into Local Government affairs would all vary substantially decrease, as might the basic services which we receive, would also almost certainly decrease.

C/. Little attention would be paid to the rural area of our current Municipality and over time rural decline would become apparent and become hard to reverse, against the public interest.

D/. The residents living in the rural parts of the municipality would be regarded as second-class citizens and treated with a lack of respect. I can say that with complete confidence from talking to some of the officers of Launceston City Council.

We already know the Liberal State Government's preferred outcome, which has been stated in the Future of Local Government Review Interim report, is for a reduction from 29 Local Governments down to only "NINE" Local Government Areas. That is it is unambiguous that the State Liberal government and the local government Minister has in essence made up its mind, a classic case of bias.

In such a scenario where 29 councils are gobbled up into only nine, in that situation Meander Valley Council would almost certainly be gobbled up and spat out. I am strongly, indeed vehemently opposed to our Meander Valley Council being gobbled up.

I am not suggesting that our local Meander Valley Council is a very good performer in all areas, sadly there are a plethora of deficiencies in certain important areas in my view, but what I am suggesting is that under an expanded Launceston City Council (LCC) things would absolutely be worse in many additional ways (both foreseeable and unforeseeable) including where our existing Council is quite a good performer.

That is, to be absolutely clear Meander Valley Council is in many ways a better performer than Launceston City Council. But there are however some significant shortcomings in urgent need of rectification. Simply because that there are some shortcomings with our Council, that is not a reason and should never become a reason for gobbling it up.

In this absurd process, Our Municipality may actually get carved up and the whole notion of Meander Valley would get lost for all time. The rural parts of our municipality especially would suffer.

It is without dispute Launceston has long considered itself simply a City Council and it absolutely considers residents who live rurally to be somewhat problematical and of lower status in every way. It sneers at them, as far as I can see, in my view. Who would wish to be a part of such a Council which holds rural residents, their ratepayers in disdain or contempt? Not the writer. To be clear I refuse to be administered by Launceston City Council, ever.

LCC is already Tasmania's largest Council and it is a City Council. Launceston is a place where you have to be mindful when parking that your parking meter has been stuffed with sufficient cash that you don't get a parking ticket. Launceston is full of traffic lights at many intersections and has an increasing traffic congestion problem, possibly because it is yet to buy sufficient right hand turn arrows or otherwise because it has an absence of ability to design for the rate of growth which is currently being experienced.

LCC has homeless people living on the streets, in parks and so forth, a city problem it seems. Meander Valley Council doesn't have the sorts of problems and speaking as a resident of our MV Council, I don't want to become a resident within a Council area that seemingly cannot adequately manage such fundamental problems.

When undertaking new developments, Launceston City Council seemingly cannot even get the traffic lights worked out and the traffic flow adequately designed as part of the planning application so that things go smoothly. A good example is the new Bunnings, Officeworks JB Hi-Fi, collection of Big Box stores on the old Gunn's site at Lindsay Street in Inveresk. There's not even a right-hand turn arrow for the significant amount of traffic exiting this relatively new development in Lindsay Street and so we have mini chaos traffic situation. They (LCC) are hopeless, top heavy and have great difficulty understanding that Launceston City is more than a City Council, it is a Regional Centre but not our Municipality. It's annoying and it is rejected! Part of the problem with Launceston City Council is that it does not have an adequate understanding of how to become a Regional Centre of excellence.

Meander Valley Municipality doesn't have traffic lights, doesn't have parking meters, doesn't have traffic congestion, and as far as I am aware does not have people living in parks, under bridges and so forth, so why would it be a good thing to allow Launceston City Council the ability to gobble up Meander Valley Municipality and West Tamar Municipality as well? I would be surprised if the West came our municipality had the sort of problems that Launceston City Council has yet the government thinks that getting rid of the West Tamar municipality is a good idea too. In short this amalgamation proposition by the Local Government Board is not a good idea, in fact it is a bad idea.

I am opposed to all of the 8 amalgamation proposals which potentially affect or rather would destroy MVC Municipality which have been set out in various documents by the Local Government Board, and unelected government bureaucracy that has never functioned in a very satisfactory manner, from my perspective.

I am saying again more clearly that I am implacably opposed to Launceston City Council gobbling up any part of Meander Valley Municipality.

It is becoming very clear the State Liberal Government actually also wishes to remove Land-Use Planning from Local Government completely. I am implacably opposed to the State of Tasmania taking control of local land-use planning. That would be the end of local land-use planning in Tasmania and that is an unwise proposition is opposed.

I think it would be a very bad idea to have the state doing local land use planning. This submission provides some of my local reasons as well as dealing with some of my local concerns for my vehement opposition.

There are some specific areas of land use planning which are operated at the state level and in general those captive bureaucracies and the systems they operate do not gain a social license, are often administering industries beleaguered by community conflict. The State government's track record thus when it comes to land use planning, is that it would not be in the public interest to attempt to perform more land use planning.

Currently each of the 29 Tasmanian Local Governments is a Planning Authority and most have a planning section with professional staff, who are there to help you with your development or assist with information regarding your objection and who write public reports on Discretionary Developments to the elected Councillors for their collective decision or where it is not contentious proceed under Delegated Authority. It is a pro-development system, which in Meander Valley inadequately considers matters of a public interest nature and this is strongly criticised.

A few especially the small Councils out of the 29 LGAs it is understood do not have adequate planning staff but have existing arrangements. I have a solution for that problem later on in this carefully considered submission. Councils have been Local Government Planning Authorities for a very long time, prior to the RMPS in fact and prior to the 1993 Local Government Act. The changes that are needed to improve the public interest aspects of local government planning would not include its conversion to a state expert panel, or the further removal of discretionary approvals, or the operation of local planning by way of a state department.

This current local government operated land-use planning process means contentious (Discretionary) planning decisions are made by many people in the 29 LGAs across Tasmania, including some 264 elected local government councillors with local knowledge. That is a very poorly appreciated strength. That strength is always worth understanding and respecting. That strength is local and it is the high number of elected representatives, admittedly with varying views but working together (usually) or disagreeing where necessary. Indeed the variety of views, termed in modern times a diversity of opinion is considered wise and a strength, rather than a weakness.

Mostly these 264 or so Councillors are elected people, not selected ministerial picks. These elected and sometimes part time councillors are fully supported by a range of professional staff. The large workforce which is spread across 29 local government Planning Authorities, combined with the 264 elected Councillors in 29 local governments provides a stability, a carefully considered set of decisions, whereby in the event of a faulty decision or a rogue councillor, or an incompetent planner or a deficient planning consultant, the outcome of such a problem simply becomes merely a minor issue or problem because of the robust design of

the system, the numbers of people involved and the resilience which is created through the Resource Management Planning System (RMPS) of Tasmania. These simple facts are of crucial importance to the wellbeing of land-use planning in Tasmania. There is no doubt in my mind that the approach of the State government of Tasmania which is currently in power has sought to diminish the RMPS, not strengthen it. Everybody should be mindful that Premier Hodgeman, with an executive selection, placed the property Council's Mary Massina into the driver's seat of land-use planning reform and those reforms were expensive and somewhat chaotic.

The Liberal Minister for Planning is currently Deputy Premier, Michael Ferguson. He has not been long in the role, but nonetheless has made it quite clear he has made up his mind and is seeking a development at any cost approach for land-use planning and thus stupidly wishes to reduce the rights of citizens to object and appeal land-use plans which may impact them. Minister Ferguson is biased. Apart from that fact this approach is not consistent with the RMPS Objectives of the planning system, its law and those Schedule 1 Objectives specifically.

"1. The objectives of the resource management and planning system of Tasmania are

–

*(c) to encourage public involvement in resource management and planning;
and
(e) to promote the sharing of responsibility for resource management and planning between the different spheres of Government, the community and industry in the State."*

It is also against the 2017 resource sharing principles discussed above.

Minister Fergusson also wishes to reduce the rights of local governments to defend their local planning schemes and local amenity. Fergusson wishes to have decisions made by a vastly smaller number of people and those people would not be elected representatives. Not only is such a set of right wing, fascist proposals not supported, it will be vehemently opposed both by the community and by this writer and ratepayer.

The Liberal State Government has been on this 'development at any cost', path for quite a while, almost certainly, I allege, at the behest of the Property Council of Tasmania.

The Liberal State Government has even attempted to create the illusion that Tasmania has a State-wide Planning Scheme, when all we have is a set of State Planning Provisions and soon, the 29 Local Government Local Planning Schedules will be completed and operational, albeit at considerable expense.

The 29 Local Government Local Planning Schedules are in fact the heart of the 29 local planning schemes which remain, despite the Tasmanian Planning Scheme (TPS) term, which is basically a complicated State deception.

Anyone who has an understanding of the Local Government planning system realises the reality that the 29 local planning authorities still have 29 individual planning schemes. This important fact should be acknowledged by all of our local councils and by the State of Tasmania.

Currently and in a late change to the TOR of this review the Government attempted to muddy the waters over local government land use planning. This was an immensely silly idea. The ("draft amended") TOR now, for some arcane reason, states:

(Scope of Review for specific planning matters.)

(The Review will not consider potential changes to the the (sic) current role and function of Tasmanian councils in assessing development applications under the Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993. The Minister for Planning will separately consider and consult on this matter in the context of the Tasmanian Government's broader planning reform agenda.

Reforms to support and strengthen councils' critical, broader roles and functions within the planning system, including strategic land use planning and the development of Local Provision Schedules, are within scope for the Review.)

Has anyone asked the Local Government Board: What does "Draft Amended" actually mean?

This Tasmanian Planning Commission (TPC) process of creating Local Provisions Schedules for the 29 LGAs is ongoing, and not yet completed. This lengthy ideologically driven Liberal process actually artificially and expensively truncated the previous Labor Interim Scheme process, at considerable expense. Why? How incompetent was that? How much did it cost Meander Valley Council and other Councils which had to redo their scheme because of some incompetent?

So now is obviously not the time to make further changes to LGA municipal boundaries but rather to see whether the Liberals somewhat weird land use planning scheme idea actually works in a way, which does not aggravate local conflict. Making new local government boundaries would obviously cause substantial additional work in the planning area.

Thus it would be vastly expensive to redraw the municipal boundaries in the middle of the planning scheme reforms. Indeed such boundary adjustments or amalgamations would be shockingly gormless and incompetent in economic terms and in terms of the disruption it would cause.

When the head of the Tasmanian Planning Commission shared his professional opinion of such things as how to do such reforms economically, some years ago, he had suggested better ways cheaper ways of more efficient ways but what happened? He ended up getting rowed out into Bass Strait, to serve out his term as the General Manager of King Island Council. In Tasmania it seems we have State politicians who do not listen to their trusted departmental advisors. Why would we want a planning system like that? It would almost certainly be disastrous!

Before the Tasmanian Planning Scheme process started, our local Reedy Marsh area had an Environmental Living Zone, it was welcomed and supported locally. The Liberals with virtually no consultation, but due to a hatred of the word environmental, duly abolished this type of Zone completely out of the State Key Elements Template, unilaterally trying to impose another zone of their construction, when it became the State Planning Provisions. This new zone may have suited Kingborough. This Zoning abolition was totally a philosophical opposition by the State, to the community's environmental care and respect. So stupid.

However during the development of the Local Provisions Schedule the Meander Valley Council's Senior Strategic Planner took exception to that proposed executive style removal of the previous Environmental Living Zone and created (in consultation with affected residents) the creation of a Zone designed to replace our soon to be lost Environmental Living Zone. This good quality work was appreciated and the new zone was supported by the Tasmanian Planning Commission, even after it had been criticised.

I had been informed (more than once and from multiple sources) the Liberal Government holds an irrational hatred for the "Environmental" word and that it was never ever to be used.

This new Meander Valley Local Provisions Schedule's Particular Purpose Zone took a lot of (otherwise unnecessary) work (both by Council and the local community) and is termed:

‘Particular Purpose Zone – Natural Living Larcombes Road’. A lot of work, our resources are valued by ourselves and our community but were abused by the Liberal State Government. Why on earth would we want the Liberal state government to take over land use planning?

Without a local, Local Government, that is the Meander Valley Council, had it been forced to amalgamate with Launceston City Council, hypothetically we would likely have had no chance to achieve such an important protection of our local amenity, which we value.

Indeed what does Local mean? This is a crucial matter, the definition of Local. What does the Act say? Is it perhaps silent? I would argue the 1993 Act ipso facto defines Local in the Tasmanian context as being the presence of 29 Local Government Areas. Of course that is the truth of the matter that local is defined by the 29 local government areas which have existed in Tasmania since 1993.

That is a different Local to that occurring on the mainland, that is the big degraded island. My recommendation is that the Local Government Act be amended to insert in Section 3 (Interpretation) a definition of the term Local, because clearly the State Government does not know what ‘local’ means. In land-use planning terms local means the people who live in the area. It does not mean that this area includes the sources of all the products they consume or the location of work that they perform, because such far-reaching areas in a globalised world could be almost anywhere on the planet. So local should mean the local area in which people live. That will almost inevitably be their local community, their local amenity. What we do know about the current state government is that it has a poor understanding of the importance of local amenity. This deficiency would mean that state-based planning would not be robust, would not meet the objectives of the RMPS, and would likely fail the public interest test.

Back to Reedy Marsh: Indeed in the process of considering the MV local provisions schedule in the TPS hearings local residents actually managed to increase the size of our Particular Purpose Zone in Larcombes Road because one resident, conserved some additional land by purchasing it from his neighbour in the adjoining Rural Zone. This land contained Critically Endangered forest communities but was at the time under a Private Timber Reserve, making conservation almost impossible and it was headed towards being in the Rural Zone even though it contained critically endangered forest communities and even though such an outcome was against the guidelines but luckily we averted that outcome. This is just one example of the sort of reason we do not want to become a part of a Mega Launceston City Council.

Now, The State Liberal Govt. wish to kill off en-mass local governments across Tasmania by removing 66% of them, threatening them offensively with forced amalgamation (up until mid-July 2023) and more importantly perhaps, by intending also to strip them of their long held land-use Planning Authority function. That is obviously still what they are doing. This would be a complete disaster and should be opposed by the Local Government Board.

I wish to make it completely and utterly clear that I am totally opposed to the concept and practice of forced amalgamations and I update this having seen the News (mid-July) which suggests the state government is now listening and claims it is not going to do Forced Amalgamations. Trust them at your peril I say! So much for the independent Local Government Board and its recommendations. What a joke!

Such things as Land Use Planning and Local Governments are completely connected because one of the most valuable local functions of Local Government in Tasmania is the local government land-use planning scheme function and the local Planning Authority decision-making function of local government councils. **I strongly favour the retention of local planning authorities in the hands of local government.**

I have a number of suggestions around how the planning function could be better organised but I am clear that the most economical solution is definitely to retain, mostly as is, the local planning authorities with the current municipal boundaries. I am not an economic expert but this is obvious, especially when you look at the longer term, including the growth trajectory of Tasmania. Indeed it is simply incredible that during a period of growth the State government wants to reduce the number of local governments, reduce the number of professional staff and so forth who are all engaged to support their local communities which are otherwise growing. It makes no logical sense whatsoever.

Over and over past Tasmanian State Government interventions in land-use planning are not accepted by the people of Tasmania and they mostly fail often with significant discord and conflict. That is in a catastrophic way. This is neither robust nor resilient. Consider some examples which quickly came to mind:

- The Mount Wellington Cable Car proposal.
- Gunns Pulp-mill proposal at Longreach.
- Ralph's Bay canal development proposal.
- Wesley Vale Pulp-mill proposal.
- The recent Northern Correctional Facility proposal at Westbury (twice).
- Macquarie Point Corporation and AFL Stadium proposal.
- The Basslink cable.
- The Marinus Link proposal.
- The Robbins Island Wind Farm.
- The MMG Tailings Dam (at Roseberry).
- PWS Reserves Expressions of Interest process for new Developments inside public conservation reserves, such as the Lake Malbina proposal.
- The Franklin below Gordon Dam proposal.
- The 2015 Tasmanian Population Growth Strategy and its replacement.

Some of these State Government interventions have been engineered with specific enabling legislation and this zealous State legislation was almost always motivated by and intended to reduce the rights of appeal of the people of Tasmania. Such motivation would never be a public interest outcome.

We are now seeing a deliberate, covert Liberal attempt to kill local government's existing, reasonable and very long established, legislated control of land-use planning and virtually at the end of the consultation time in which the Liberal government had intended to force Council amalgamations. This is a shambles.

This is being attempted by the Minister for Planning, the Deputy Premier, Michael Ferguson. You can see this in the modified Terms of Reference for The Future of Local Government Review. This heavy handed attempt should be closed down.

However although it has been flagged that Mr Ferguson will run a separate consultation out of the Minister's office presumably, it would seem that this is happening after the local government review, thus casting an ugly shadow over this local government consultation. I cannot understand the logic of that faulty state government decision.

Additionally I wish to remind the local government board that there are a number of State based Legislations which have created captive sectoral favouring bureaucracies for specific favoured industries in Tasmania.

These legislations and their captive bureaucracies virtually all have significant deep social license problems, which have caused division and conflict and in some cases harmed the fabric of Tasmanian society over decades. These State based land-use favouritisms are not supported.

Why the State government sees merit to have more consistent planning rules and then it has this illogical collection of favouring State legislation for the chosen, favoured industries. Some wonderful examples which come to mind:

- Hydro Electric Dams. Hydro-Electric Commission Act 1944.
- Intensive Salmon Fish Farming Leases and Cages. Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995 and Marine Farming Planning Act 1995.
- Private Timber Reserves. Forest Practices Act 1985.
- The Forest Practices Authority. Forest Practices Act 1985.
- Native Forest Logging under Sustainable Timbers Tasmania. A Tasmanian Government Business Enterprise responsible under State legislation. The Forestry Act 1920.
- Tas Water. Water and Sewerage Corporation Act 2012 (Tas).
- Tasmanian Irrigation Pty Ltd (A State Owned Company) and its Schemes.

The above areas of State controlled land-use have often achieved a very limited social license because of the unjust provisions, coupled in many instances with a deeply unsatisfactory environmental performance, or simply a lack of transparency and a lack of local scale and local understanding and almost always with vast fully reduced or non-existent rights of appeal. As such the above enabling legislation is regularly criticised, could never be regarded as sustainable.

For example the Forest Practices Authority (FPA) ostensibly manages the state land clearance rules, (without any land clearance legislation), which is not adequately enforced and where on ground clearance is not monitored. This is an example where self-regulation becomes no regulation at all. Where consultants especially gain the opportunity to rot their mis-identification of threatened vegetation. This is a widely practised but stupid game to destroy critical environmental assets. It is conceded that Local Government allows this sort of thing to occur as well and it is criticised. The State of Tasmania should enact responsible and ecologically sustainable land clearance legislation, which provides laws which are impervious to the predation and degradation of the Minister and which ensures that consultants do not have the capacity to undermine the true identification of threatened ecological values. Such laws are necessary to prevent the extinction of species, a public interest issue for all levels of government.

The ongoing problem of the land-use planning system in Tasmania has always been the erosion of the public's rights of appeal, which generally are relied upon by rate payers and residents to protect their local amenity, coupled with the failure to achieve ecologically sustainable development. Rights of appeal area public interest aspect of the RMPS.

The reduction of rights of appeal has been a feature of the Liberals' new round of planning schemes, which are much more open-slayer, pro-development centric and which have been designed to achieve a vastly higher density of intensified suburbia, such as even in the local town of Westbury for example. In Tasmania we should be designing and reforming the land use planning system to provide greater rights of objection and appeal, not less and we should be taking genuine heed of the Objects within the schedule one of LUPAA and the RMPS without delay.

I advocate that such substantial but not well publicised or understood problems would almost certainly be made disastrously worse by a having a state planning system, perhaps at the behest of the Minister, rather than the current 29 planning authorities, which are in the hands of 29 Local Governments and the over 260 elected local government Councillors across the State.

This vast treasure trove of a wealth of local government Councillor experience of human capital, should be respected and regarded by the State of Tasmania as an asset not a liability. It represents a robustness and resilience which the state government can only dream about. Were the Liberal State Government to cut the Tasmanian Local Govt Councils by two thirds, then obviously that would cut our elected representatives by a similar margin. This offensive proposition is explicitly opposed by the writer.

The State Government should at any stage not have the power to abolish Local Governments. Indeed the only people who should have such power are the citizens and ratepayers. I therefore assert the Local Government Board is not the appropriate body to be conducting a review such as this one, where I allege, it has been told of the State Government's preferred set of outcomes and would appear to obediently be proceeding to deliver.

The current process, The Future of Local Government Review, has attempted to avoid dealing with planning matters but there is no other process presently to discuss such germane issues. The Review Panel is the Local Government Board and is very small, in fact it is unbelievable, with six hand-picked ministerial selections. This aspect is unsatisfactory.

Current LUPAA Planning Objectives are laudable and remain but they are generally overlooked as previously stated.

There is no State Planning Department, as per most other States of Australia, yet Tasmania would benefit from a fully-fledged State planning Department, dealing properly with policy and strategic issues in a more open and transparent manner. If it was not so intensely sad it might be amusing. Rather in Tasmania we have a small collection of staff, a State Planning Office in the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

If the state government was serious about proper land-use planning in all its complexities there would already be a State department of Land Use Planning. But no, this The Future of Local Government Review is simply a wrecking ball aiming to scuttle and gobble up 66% of our Municipalities. Could we trust the State Government with Local Land Use Planning? Do I trust it? No!

Lastly, a planning system which had at its head the Minister, likely with additional ministerial powers, simply politicises land-use planning, where as Local Government is the most politics free space of all levels of government. I advocate we all should treasure that aspect of our current system of local government.

I would forecast that despite the attempt to avoid the local government land use planning subject, the issues of the mooted destruction of local government operated land-use planning will gain substantial opposition from many quarters of the public in the current 'The Future of Local Government Review'.

The Local Government Board is running the Future of Local Government Review. This of itself is amazing. Let me explain. I requested the membership details of The Local Government Board:

"As per your request, I am pleased to provide you with the names of the members of the Local Government Board. They are as follows: - The Hon Sue Smith (the chair), - Ric De Santi, - Paul West, - Pam Allan, - Kym Goods, and - Mathew Healey."

What is most significant about this process? We, as Tasmanians collectively have elected some 264 or so Local Government Councillors at an election run by the Electoral Commission, and yet the fate of these 264 or elected people is in the hands of the above 6 installed (and thus unelected) people.

These 264 elected Local Government Councillors were elected through local government elections run by the Tasmanian electoral commission and yet it seems they can be recommended to be grubbed out or decimated by a group of 6 hand chosen people who currently form The Local Government Board? That in my view is patently ridiculous and offensive and entirely unjust. It surely deserves a complaint to the Integrity Commission.

I would much rather get rid of The Local Government Board (LGB) than most of our 29 Local Governments. When one makes a complaint to the LGB, almost nothing ever happens. I argue that the local government board has long had a bias against small local government councils. I would describe such a bias as patently improper.

I suggest the Local Government Act 1993 be amended, that The Local Government Board be abolished and these functions be handled by reformed and improved Integrity and Complaints Units in the State.

I cannot see how such a process as The Future of Local Government (which seemingly gets changed as they go along), could possibly acquire a single shred of justice or fairness.

It appears to me The Future of Local Government Review is nothing more than a State Government purge of local government representation in Tasmania. I repeat, a wrecking ball.

So then, when the Local Government Board gives its report to The Minister for Local Government, he gets to listen to those 6 members of the LGB and basically he then decides the fate of our 29 Local Government areas, their 264 elected local government Councillors too and even their long held functions it seems. The Minister potentially only does this by amending the Local Government Act 1993. Therefore the Tasmanian parliament could abolish local government as we know it in Tasmania.

Many people do not realise the history associated with local government in Tasmania which has been here longer than the State Government. However Local Government under the current laws in Tasmania is very vulnerable to the whims of this Liberal Government and its Property Council influencers. May be even Font PR!

One elected person in the Government (The Minister) in essence ultimately decides the fate of 264 elected persons. How is that fair? I reiterate: That proposition is ridiculous and offensive.

I claim The Local Government Board is the hand selected tool of the Liberal State Government. This board will be trying to get each Local Government Council to voluntarily immolate that is to amalgamate or as I prefer to describe it, to voluntarily submit to being gobbled up.

I wish to point out to the Local Government Board that the elected Councillors at no stage came to power with the right to abolish their local government area. That applies to all 29 LGAs in Tasmania and as far as I am aware to all of the 264 Councillors.

By the way, I am not suggesting our Local Governments are necessarily very good, or do not have flaws, they almost all do. But this The Future of Local Government Review process is not designed to improve or remedy those flaws, nor is it designed to improve the residents' and rate payers' representative voice but rather the exact opposite. I will say it over and over: It is simply a Liberal wrecking ball. A long term power grab, achieved by way of a diminution of Local Government representation in Tasmania. I argue that this diminishes the power of every citizen of the state.

Why are they doing this? I argue that by having a smaller and weaker Local Government sector, the State Government naturally becomes more powerful, especially if some of the

functions of the 29 Councils are also transferred to the State. It is a classic process driven by unbridled self-interest. I have to be honest with you, this simply revolts me.

I am sure many people have not thought much about the justice aspects of The Future of Local Government Review process. The simple fact is there is no justice to it.

I do not know what the various opposition State Government parties and cross bench think, except Labor's statement of not supporting "compulsory amalgamations" made by the leader of the opposition Rebecca White. Good on them I say.

Getting rid of local governments, I would acknowledge, is a mainland trend but the amalgamations have not been popular after the result and consequences becomes experienced. I have had contact with several friends on the mainland and no one is impressed with amalgamations. Undoing the removal of our long standing Tasmanian local governments would be hard and time consuming and expensive.

At a minimum there should surely be a poll of electors of each municipality over this amalgamation issue and for the proposed land use planning changes as well. That is, an official voting process run by the Electoral Commission.

Whether Councillors like it or not, elected Councillors were elected, not to deal with amalgamation agendas but rather to look after the wellbeing and safety of their municipalities and residents. Such matters are set out in the Local Government Act 1993.

I must say to you, I have very little faith in the Local Government Board's probity. I wish to give you a stark example of the sort of thing I would rely on to support my lack of confidence. When one looks at the Tasman/ Sorell poll (circa 2018/9) where the LGB claims on its website a shallow majority decision by Tasman residents against amalgamation but one rather finds, when one looks at the vote, that about two thirds of Tasman electors did not want amalgamation with Sorell. A two thirds majority could never be described with any probity as a shallow majority decision. Long ago the Liberals embarked upon a campaign to viciously amalgamate and destroy local governments. This campaign has been embarked upon at the same time that the population of Tasmania is growing. At the same time there is an increased need for local administration. This is a vastly stupid idea of no strategic merit.

Were we (MVC) amalgamated with Launceston City Council, as has been proposed by the LGB, the degree of influence over our own affairs would massively dwindle along with the amount of representation from this area. Such an amalgamation would render us less resilient.

I will keep saying it, this review, the Local Government Board's Review: The Future of local Government in Tasmania, is a wrecking ball of a process.

I am aware the last MVC General Manager, Mr Jordan has recently left MVC. Thank goodness! But the timing is not good. MVC urgently needs a high quality replacement. Local government occasionally has hiccups, our last general manager was not well regarded by the community and it is terrific to see him gone. But let's look at this in context, one municipality has won unsatisfactory General Manager. One out of 29. It's not the end of the world because the system of local government is a relatively slow moving, conservative and robust system.

Although I had hoped to retire from this sort of advocacy this issue demands some attention. I have been working on local government (LG) issues in Tasmania since 1989, and originally formed a community group (MINITS) to advocate the reform of LG, resulted in a state process, the Modernisation of LG in Tasmania, resulting in the 46 Councils being reduced to 29 (termed Rationalisation by MINITS) and the creation of the RMPS and LUPAA. But still the conversion is incomplete. There is a long list of things which should be done. So historically I am on the record having advocated for a rationalisation and reform of local

government in the early 1990s. That rationalisation and reform resulted in some very worthwhile improvements to local government and I argue should be respected by the current state government.

Now in 2023, I personally do not think Tasmania needs or would benefit from another round of the rationalisation and amalgamation of Councils and hence less representation, especially for the more isolated Council areas, rural areas, but might benefit rather from more ways of more structured collaboration, especially in regards to land use planning which taxes the resources of small LGAs. It's interesting that we have a society which seems to support and encourage growth. Yet when it comes to things such as hour-long established institutions the proposition is to shrink and not grow. It makes no sense. There is no logic to it. Somebody must have dreamt up a biodegradable packet of mantra, then stuffed it down the rhetorical gullet of the growth monster and came up with a proposal to shrink and not grow. When you think about it in terms of the sanctity of growth, it makes no sense.

My position now generally in relation to all the 264 or so LG Councillors, who ostensibly (and in many cases who actually do) represent their constituents and who do genuinely care about the wellbeing of their respective local government areas, they were never elected to advocate the demise of their LGA. If you are a Councillor reading this, please note, this is an integrity issue.

Additionally regarding the incumbent 264 Councillors, the voters in the 29 local government areas did not vote for those Councillors to undertake amalgamations and did not even consider the demise of LGAs, almost certainly. I believe in this position very strongly, that it is not the role of the local government councillors to consider the detail of the inane propositions being put up by the LGB. I understand Councillors may do this but it is an invidious situation, isn't it?

It is also clear the only real issue in the Future of Local Government process would appear to be the amalgamation agenda, yet there are many other matters to be addressed.

Thus the trouble for me is the fairness and justice issues, which to me indicate retention of the 29 LGAs where as, say in the case of MVC, there is a long list of inadequacies which could well be prosecuted in the process.

The LGB's review suggests the people of Westbury are in essence a part of Launceston, with the reason being given in terms of their work habits. But the real question to be answered is: Do the people of Westbury think of themselves as a part of LCC? Why do they live in Westbury and not Launceston?

I wish to encourage all local government areas to hold a residents poll, perhaps something like the Northern Midlands?

The future of local government in Tasmania should be strengthened and assured. Local government in Tasmania should not be decimated in a puerile process which reduces local government from 29 municipalities down to 9 municipalities.

I wish to make the point Tasmania's population is growing quite quickly all across the state, so logically and obviously, now is not the time to reduce local government function or representation in any way. This growth of population is beyond sustainability limits, however this problem is not the fault of local government. Local government is not the sector which is encouraging more and more emigration.

So in September 2022 the Housing Strategy Discussion Paper by Communities Tasmania states:

“Over the past decade, Tasmania’s population has grown by 11.4 per cent from the June quarter 2012 to the December quarter 2021 (from 511 724 to 569 827 people).”

This extraordinary and I might add completely unsustainable population growth has created and caused a significant unaffordability problem for low income families and vulnerable single people in Tasmania. It has also caused and or exacerbated growing homelessness and worsened the housing stress problem in Tasmania.

This 2015 Tasmanian Population Growth Strategy should now be significantly reduced and curtailed without delay.

A steady state population in Tasmania would be a far more sensible ambition which protects Tasmania and which would give those on a lower income and those who are more disadvantaged a better opportunity to gain secure affordable housing and to avoid homelessness and gives us a far better chance of reducing our carbon emissions. This is a crucial goal for Tasmania, as it is around the globe.

Currently local government in Tasmania is at the whim of the Minister for Local Government and his unelected Local Government Board who are managing the process termed The Future of Local Government in Tasmania. This arrangement is not supported and considered inadequate in several ways.

All 29 Local Governments are enshrined in the Local Government Act 1993. The mapped area of the 29 Local Government municipal areas are also enshrined in the Local Government Act 1993, as is the number of elected Councillors which sit on those Councils.

The Local Government Board has indicated that if necessary it will force amalgamations. This is nothing more nor less than a bald faced threat. Bully boy tactics! This is evidence that The Local Government Board has already made up its mind over the need to decapitate a majority of the existing Local Governments in Tasmania. I would prefer The Local Government Board be abolished.

There is a suggestion by The Local Government Board that nine ‘local government areas’ (LGAs) across Tasmania would be a more satisfactory solution rather than the 29, which currently exist. This is strongly disputed. The 29 LGAs have existed since the review only 30 years ago (The Modernisation of Local Government in Tasmania), which completed in 1993. That ground-breaking review reduced LGAs in Tasmania from 46 to 29. Some of those 46 Councils were minute. The Municipality of Ross for example had a population of about 550 residents.

There are no sound reasons given by The Local Government Board for a diminution of the number of Councils now in 2023, where a substantial majority of the existing 29 Council areas would be gutted and gobbled up, aiming for a preordained number of LGAs of only nine (9). This is nothing more than a State Government wrecking ball.

The simple facts are:

- Tasmania is the smallest state of the Commonwealth of Australia.
- The State of Tasmania is at an end of the inhabited world. This is rarely recognised and little understood.
- The State of Tasmania is not even a single island but rather 335 islands. This is very important when considering some of the geographical reasons for some of the 29 LGAs. The geography of the place and of course of those 335 islands, some are fully reserved, some are inhabited to only a very minor degree or even intermittently and some support significant populations and communities and two groups of Bass Strait islands have dedicated LGAs, with long established

freight and passenger connections with other States, yet marginal recognition of the bio security pathways and threat. The need for dedicated local government in Bass Strait is immensely obvious.

- The State of Tasmania is indisputably, geographically remote with all of its 335 islands separated from the mainland (known as the big degraded island) by Bass Strait and other bodies of water and all of which can only be accessed by boat or plane. Tasmania is a very different circumstance to the mainland.
- Tasmania is geographically complex, where places look as if they are connected but where the topography and the geography separates communities, even with a more modern main highway. Once you leave the highway you're back to the 19th century road design and structure, meaning that making our rural municipalities larger will not work.
- Tasmania is the most decentralised State in the Commonwealth of Australia. That is the percentage of rural population compared with the capital city is greater in Tasmania than in any other state. This is an important characteristic of the Tasmanian community which shouldn't be destroyed.
- Tasmania in rural terms is a parochial, locally oriented set of communities, barely making a cohesive society. This particular social circumstance is noteworthy and should be respected.
- Tasmania does not, up to this point in time have any significant rural population decline but seemingly it is being forecast and encouraged rather than solved. Moving Tasmania from 29 local governments to 9 local governments would almost certainly cause rural decline, though admittedly it would take a few years to really take hold. A process which causes, or likely causes rural decline cannot be claimed to be resilient and robust.
- Tasmania is the most financially disadvantaged state of the Commonwealth of Australia.
- Tasmanians are the poorest populace in the Commonwealth of Australia.
- Tasmania is the poorest state of Australia.
- Tasmania has the smallest share of GST revenue.
- Tasmania has the poorest health system of any state of the Commonwealth of Australia.
- Tasmania has the longest hospital waiting list of any state of the Commonwealth of Australia.
- Tasmanians have the lowest life expectancy of any populace in the Commonwealth of Australia.
- Tasmania has the poorest literacy rate of any populace in the Commonwealth of Australia.
- Tasmanians have the lowest education standard of any populace in the Commonwealth of Australia.
- Tasmania has a convict past.
- In the past Tasmanians deliberately and knowingly killed off the Thylacine. They do not necessarily know right from wrong.
- Tasmania attempted a genocide of the first nations people whom it can be shown lived here for over 40,000 years.

In many ways these appalling realities are all connected. These problems are not caused in the main by the 29 local governments but by some other government which is ostensibly managing Tasmania. It would be easy to blame local government but even if local government was to blame for some of the above situations and statistics, getting rid of local government is unlikely to be the answer.

But importantly Tasmanians with a thriving local government sector and 29 local government areas definitely do have a reasonably good level of local government representation. It is one of the important things we do have and I argue it should be retained.

In the context of the above realities the localness of local government is considered important and relevant to the welfare of Tasmanians especially those who reside outside of the major cities.

I wish to sound a warning: The fact is Tasmanians and its state government might only find out how incredibly important these 29 local government were once they have been lost.

Are the 29 local Governments responsible for the above list of realities and deficiencies? Are some of the above inevitable or unsolvable? Which ones could be solved by a competent State Government? How does spending over \$700 million on an AFL stadium solve the above problems? Was it local government that decided to spend over \$700 million on a stadium?

There is a range of local government services across the 29 municipalities and not all provide a full range but all 29 do all provide representation and have a unique high quality understanding of the needs of the community.

Tasmania is on the cusp of massive change caused by Climate Change and under The Future of Local Government Review process, should the range of local government services across the 29 municipalities be contracted and shifted to State Government control, many issues may fall out of local control and cause irreparable harm to local communities in a period of great change.

The ability of the local community to prevent undesirable developments may easily be very seriously reduced by culling LGAs from 29 to 9. Instead of calling the process 'The Future of Local Government in Tasmania', perhaps it should have been more accurately called 'The Destruction of Local Communities, their Local Way of Life in Tasmania and the death of their Local Amenity'.

The potential to destroy that existing local representation in this process by way of proposing to move from 29 municipalities to a mere 9 municipalities across Tasmania is considered to be either highly likely or inevitable but would almost certainly cause an unreasonable diminution of the local services which have been provided over a long timeframe to rate payers like myself.

Such a gobbling up and amalgamation in the proposals put forward in The Local Government Board's The Future of Local Government in Tasmania process in 2023 and The Local Government Board's papers advocating Amalgamation and its deliberate avoiding of the retention of the status quo is more than an indicative proof of a gross bias. Such an amalgamation however is most unlikely to result in any short term or long term financial benefit to any rate-payer. Indeed I claim the reverse would be true.

Remember when the State of Tasmania took over the water and sewerage? What happened? Fees substantially increased. The fees and charges on no account and in no instances decreased. The fee issue is highly relevant to the people of Tasmania, a poor socio economic society.

If Meander Valley was gobbled up by the Launceston City Council, the property annual rates would almost certainly significantly increase sharply. That inevitability has not been made clear by Launceston, who is playing possum, nor has it been explicitly stated by the Local Government Board. This lack of transparency is a disgrace. Every Tasmanian should be warned of such likely consequences and problems.

It is especially true that city based municipalities across Tasmania have limited interest in rural issues and rural communities and it is unsurprising they see their role as the welfare of the city entity with a limited understanding of rural sensibilities and welfare. It would be very hard to address such ingrained attitudinal problems and the parochial ignorance of country life were our rural councils to be gobbled up.

We do not, under The Future of Local Government in Tasmania, even have a process which might be termed a rationalisation of Local Government areas and Councils. In terms of the notion that what we have confronting us in this process under The Future of Local Government Review, is suggested by the Local Government Board to be a “forced amalgamation” of Local Government areas and Councils, that is not strictly correct.

What Tasmanian residents and ratepayers are undoubtedly facing under this LGB review is an indiscriminate gobbling up of smaller Local Councils to make bigger ones. Simple as that. The local government board is clearly talking about an indiscriminate destruction of a majority of the elected local representatives of Local communities across Tasmania. Has the Local Government Board understood the extent of the disaster which is being advocated?

The State Government’s plan is obviously that those bigger (more populated) Councils would get to gobble up the smaller ones, hence ensuring the cities would control the country parts of Tasmania and the country parts of Tasmania would suffer rural decline. How else could this process be perceived? But a gobbling, the bigger fish eating the smaller ones. This amalgamation driven reform under The Future of Local Government in Tasmania process would not be a public interest outcome but arguably it may be perceived as a function of globalisation where the word local has come to be disrespected. Such disrespect deserves in response disdain and derision, especially likely to be expressed at the next election.

This gobbling up (termed a forced amalgamation) is not being done to better care for local and rural communities but rather for some geo-political power based set of goals, where the mantra of a reduction in Council numbers would in reality, reduce the power of local government and increase the power of State Ministers. This sort of self-servicing politics is disgusting and unacceptable and should be investigated by a Royal Commission of Inquiry. No mindless mantra can hide the disgustingly abhorrent reality of this process.

I have little doubt that when one starts investigating and gets close to the bottom of this campaign one will find (behind all this) the Property Council and their institutional investors. The State Liberals have long had a close and incestuous association with the Property Council.

The Future of Local Government in Tasmania is actually also a State Government push to get rid of the power of local communities to defend their local amenity. Local communities are being termed NIMBY’S by the bigoted Local Government Board.

What will happen if the proposals put forward in The Future of Local Government in Tasmania process will be that Tasmania becomes a poorly financed pawn, to be purchased and manipulated for development profit, whether it be subdivisions, wind farms, massive transmission lines or other industrial purposes with diminished Local Government oversight and diminished local community rights. It is a simple but unacceptable recipe.

What is not sufficiently on the radar of people interested in local government issues is the issue of the accelerating disaster which is upon us, that of a runaway climate changed climate. This severe problem is likely to cause greater attempted migration to Tasmania, perceived as a sanctuary from the worst of climate change, for which we in both Australia and in Tasmania unfortunately have no adequate strategy or response. This severe and rapidly worsening climate instability problem is not receiving sufficient focus, yet time is rapidly running out.

Why is climate change an issue for local government, because local government is and should remain the means for development control in Tasmania? In this regard there is no State Policy to deal with the imperative and magnitude of this crucial issue for Local Government. It's the State Government that creates state policies for the benefit of the whole community and local government. The avoidance of a state policy over climate change is criticised here. The current state strategy is unlikely to be a very much use, beyond saying that we have a state strategy.

Tasmania continues to fail to reduce emissions and amazingly cannot even manage to encourage sufficiently and strategize a move to electric vehicles (EV). Tasmania will not need Marinus Link but rather more generating capacity for EV dominated private transport, because it has no truly satisfactory public transport system. This is because there is negligible government operated public transport in Tasmania. Wake Up!

I would forecast a massive escalation of attempted migration to Tasmania in the coming decades and observe there is no strategy for its control. In such a scenario there remains a need for the resilience and consistency provided by the 29 Local Governments.

Tasmania has the enormous privilege of a benign and safe climate and a low carbon drawdown because of our forests and our hydro and wind power. But we are still operating a carbon liquidation economy based on growth. The simple fact is Growth makes it far harder to meet emissions reductions targets. Everybody uses the word growth but few understand that the current concept of growth in our economic system relates to exponential growth. Instead of trying to get rid of local governments, perhaps the State of Tasmania could consider redesigning its economy to operate in the absence of growth.

The 2014 Greater Launceston City Plan forecasts that enlarged city to grow by 20% between 2014 and 2030. That is massive exponential growth which will clog this regional city and cause the sort of growing pains which Hobart currently displays.

The dire and undesirable consequences of this irrational and rabid growth ambition may not be fully understood by the local community or by some Local Government Councils. One of the ways to facilitate rabid Exponential Growth is by destroying especially the smaller local governments across Tasmania.

Virtually all political parties foolishly support exponential growth, (usually referred to simply as growth) even if they do not use the full term. But I claim it is a massively stupid idea, especially in this age of the Anthropocene where we have runaway climate change to somehow manage.

It is known that meeting our climate change targets will be about 40% harder under a population growth scenario, a scenario of exponential growth. The planet has either reached (to be kind) or rather exceeded (to be more accurate) the Limits to Growth.

List of Deficits Regarding Meander Valley Council.

I mentioned earlier that simply because our local government had deficiencies was not a reason for amalgamating it with another local government. I stand by that position however the invidious problem of this review is to make sure that it is understood that an opposition to amalgamation does not mean that no reform should occur. I am providing the local example below of the significant deficits and problems of my local government area, highlighting the urgent need for reform.

The following is a brief list of issues and facts, which I term deficits, in relation to Meander Valley Council, which are important matters which may be characterised honestly but pejoratively when measured in relation to the various legislation governing its activities.

In short this LGA in several ways is a primitive and backward Municipal Council, which needs reform.

The significant problems which should without delay be rectified through various reforms should, unless the recalcitrance continues, must not be regarded as reasons for the removal of Meander Valley Council, and especially its planning authority function. I repeat, the presence of such avoidance, problems, and deficits is not a reason for amalgamating Meander Valley Council but rather for attending to the matters listed below.

It can be claimed that Meander Valley Council has:

1. No Historic Heritage Officer position and no officer employed with any heritage expertise: This is despite the fact that there are over 600 heritage properties (including about 350 on the local list) and several heritage precincts within the Meander Valley Council Municipal area identified by one of Australia's foremost experts, . The Council initiated report by Davies was never actioned by Council, despite Council spending a considerable amount of money seeking his expert advice. Heritage protection would be in the best interests of ratepayers. This is an issue that has studiously been avoided by a process of weaselling organised and professionally accomplished by the Tasmanian planning commission. These sorts of problems are not merely local government ones but rather their reform and resolution is systematically resisted through what I allege could only be described as a cabal.
2. No Local Historic Heritage protection and Local Heritage List within the Meander Valley Local Provisions Schedule of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme: Heritage protection would be in the best interests of ratepayers.
3. No Historic Heritage Precinct recognition by Council despite the expert advice received and hence no protection within the Meander Valley Local Provisions Schedule of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme: Heritage protection would be in the best interests of ratepayers.
4. No Cultural Heritage Landscape protection within the Meander Valley Local Provisions Schedule of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme: Because no cultural landscape areas have been identified by this LGA. This is obviously deliberate yet as far back as 2001, Meander Valley Council's own surveying identified the importance to residents of the municipality of the scenic qualities of the municipal area. When residents identify a strong local attachment such as this, surely a wise council would do something about it? Cultural Heritage landscape protection would be in the best interests of ratepayers yet has been avoided. It is noted that Premier Bacon had an interest in Tasmania is exceptional cultural landscapes but the fact that Tasmania is a beautiful place, in general terms is regarded as a liability and not a positive asset. This is a psychological problem for those in power.
5. Meander Valley Council abolished the natural resource management (NRM) officer position and caused the NRM officer to retire. There is thus currently no NRM officer employed by Meander Valley Council. This would be in the best interests of ratepayers.
6. Abolished its rates rebate for those ratepayers who own and maintain an in-perpetuity private conservation reserves, against the recommendation of the NRM officer and against the repeated protests of those landowners who own private conservation reserves. By comparison there are many public conservation reserves across the municipality which pay absolutely no municipal rates. This represents a disgraceful discrimination.
7. No community officer currently employed. It appears the community officer position may have been abolished. Reinstating this position would obviously be in the best interests of ratepayers.

8. No current up-to-date waste strategy for the municipality. On the important subject of waste management, MVC is nothing more than a headless chook being run out of its contractor's office, Just Waste.
9. Reduced recycling diligence and effort at the municipality's waste depots, transfer stations and tips has been observed, noted, criticised but not addressed by Council or its contractor. Rectifying this problem would be in the best interests of ratepayers.
10. No Aboriginal Heritage site protection through the avoidance of listing of specific aboriginal sites within the Meander Valley Local Provisions Schedule of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme: No consultation with indigenous peoples over this important issue despite a large number of sites present in the Municipal area. It is amazing and deeply unacceptable that we cannot acknowledge the indigenous heritage of this place. Indeed it is obviously culturally unsustainable.
11. No significant tree protection through the listing of specific significant trees within the Meander Valley Local Provisions Schedule of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme: Meander Valley has some excellent magnificent European trees as well as some spectacular ancient native specimens which all deserve recognition and protection. I am not going over the list of significant trees which have been destroyed except to say that recently when some poplars were removed from the River Park in Deloraine, a historic colonial *Arbutus unido* was also removed. That was a tree which had significance. No protection of significant heritage trees by Meander Valley Council by any other means.
12. Apart from one single area (Travelers Retreat) there is no scenic landscape protection for the very large number of highly scenic landscapes present across the municipality within the Meander Valley Local Provisions Schedule of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme. Rectifying this problem would be in the best interests of ratepayers.
14. Most roadsides have no scenic roadside protection despite many having unique vegetative surrounds which qualify as endangered habitat or ecosystems. No adequate protection of roadside treed amenity including when such trees are listed as critically endangered as a vegetation community or as habitat for critically endangered fauna such as the Swift Parrot. This sort of thing simply has to be properly regulated without delay. Rectifying this problem would be in the best interests of ratepayers.
15. No encouragement of biodiversity conservation. Indeed it has to be said that the removal of nature continues apace in the Meander Valley Council local government area. But this sort of thing is actually encouraged by the State government, against the spectre of a nationally listed threatening process.
16. Very limited protection of Priority Vegetation even when it is identified within the Meander Valley Local Provisions Schedule of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme.
17. No weeds officer and no weeds officer position currently in Meander Valley Council. Rectifying this problem would be in the best interests of ratepayers.
18. Many minor roads subject to flooding impacts but most are not being upgraded by Meander Valley Council. Rectifying this problem would be in the best interests of ratepayers.
19. No adequate flood mapping post the 2016 floods which has been incorporated into the Meander Valley Local Provisions Schedule of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme: Rectifying this problem would be in the best interests of ratepayers.

20. No adequate bushfire mapping within the Meander Valley Local Provisions Schedule of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme: Rectifying this problem would be in the best interests of ratepayers.
21. No restrictions on land use intensification within the Meander Valley Local Provisions Schedule of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme.
22. No restrictions by Meander Valley Council on the lighting of outdoor fires in towns. Rectifying this problem would be in the best interests of ratepayers.
23. No year-round Council maintained public swimming pool with disability access and facilities for those with disabilities in Meander Valley Municipality. The current process is unacceptably designed to avoid the construction of a modern year-round public aquatic facility in the municipality. If a local government area cannot afford to manage a year-round swimming facility it probably does not deserve to exist. Swimming is an incredibly important and the safest form of exercise anyone can undertake. We have many football fields cricket fields and other recreational facilities but no year round swimming facility for healthcare purposes, for rehabilitation purposes, for swimming safety education purposes, for the young, for the old, for those who want to swim for leisure, nothing. This is a massive shortcoming.
24. No meaningful land clearance controls within the Meander Valley Local Provisions Schedule of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme or contained within any other legislation:
25. Priority vegetation within the Meander Valley the subject of rorts, weaselling and fraud and deception that enables the ongoing removal of priority vegetation.
26. Attempted repeatedly to give the Westbury community a prison (termed a northern correctional facility) they did not want and failed to adequately consult in advance of making such a horrendous decision. Rectifying this problem would be in the best interests of ratepayers.
27. No adequate precautionary approach is adopted by Meander Valley Council. Reforming Council to understand the meaning of a precautionary approach is important.
28. No catchment Management Officer engaged by Meander Valley Council.
29. No system of carbon conservation advocated or implemented by Meander Valley Council. Tasmania and indeed Meander Valley Council urgently needs to adopt a comprehensive raft of measures to encourage and if necessary regulate the community to decarbonise. Attending to this as our absolute priority will benefit the economy over the Meander Valley.
30. No Strategic Land Use Planner employed by Council for well over 12 months now.
31. There are no urban growth boundaries for each of the Municipality's towns even though this was something we had in our strategy in the past. Urban Growth Boundaries should be fixed and legislated to provide protection against Exponential Growth. It is noted that when local strategies are replaced with regional strategies, and general watering down of various important local mechanisms would seem to occur.
32. Has no strategy to protect the natural environment against unfettered intensifications and exponential growth both of which are mostly vectors for unsustainability.
33. Continues to have inadequate building standards and siting standards in terms of energy conservation. Avoidance of a requirement for north facing houses, better glazing and insulation and so forth.

The question in my mind is not about whether our Meander Valley Council is satisfactory, because I am clear that in many ways it is not. The question is whether Meander Valley is willing to include the public interest protections in land use planning, which are required in order to meet modern sustainability in both cultural and environmental terms. Or rather whether or not the State of Tasmania is prepared to strengthen the requirement for public interest protections, even when a local government is recalcitrant and avoidant.

A Suggestion for Formal Regional Planning Collaborative Teams

I have one important suggestion flagged earlier but not described, it is this: Without removing the Meander Valley Planning Authority (or any other planning authority), without removing the Meander Valley LPS or any other LPS, but on a regional basis formally establish a centrally located planning office, being an amalgam of each of the 3 region's LGAs planning staff other than the planning liaison officer.

This collection of planning staff would continue to administer the various LPS. There would be access however to a wider range of specialist planning expertise and a greater opportunity to deploy or rather redeploy planning resources out of the pool within the regional office. This would especially assist the smaller councils, thinking in our region especially of Flinders and maybe Break of Day. It would also mean expertise on specialist subjects such as Heritage and Aboriginal Heritage and Landscape could be shared.

This regional planning office could more formally attend to regional land use planning in a more transparent way. Then when the planning application had been processed by the regional team their recommendation report would return to the relevant Council meeting or planning panel in the same way as currently for a Council decision.

Greater Launceston Plan

My next idea is for MVC to stop paying for involvement in the Greater Launceston Plan 2014. This has some very poor ideas in it. I can see no benefit for MVC or any of the other LG councils who have been roped into it. Indeed it includes unsustainable ideas which should be removed.

Amalgamation Opposed

The other question is, whether through this process there is any chance that we would end up with a better local government system out of The Future of Local Government review, including the proposed shift of the local planning system to State hands or whether the Liberals reforms will be the death knell of local government in Tasmania as we know it and a vast reduction in our ability to protect our amenity through the planning system? It is obviously not designed to create a better system, and it may not even create a cheaper system either

The Liberal State Government of Tasmania is trying its hardest to destroy local government and thus reduce the level of local representation in Tasmania and that is the primary issue at stake.

Closing down of the local government board

I am quite positive the Local Government Board should be removed and closed down, being replaced by an improved and strengthened ICAC or Integrity Commission.

I have long taken a genuine interest in all manner of local government issues. I firmly think we should have a State Election before this Local Government wrecking ball goes any further.

Meander Valley Council's community meeting over the LGB's amalgamation proposals

I was very pleased that our Local Council is finally doing something to find out the views of the ratepayers regarding Future of Local Government in Tasmania Consultation including the holding of advertised public meetings across the municipality.

During that meeting, which I attended and which was attended I estimate, by at least 100 Local people, the Local meeting itself running for approximately two hours rather than the one-hour advertised/intended due to the high level of Local interest from the Local community on the night.

In any case during that local meeting I did not have sufficient time to complete a questionnaire whilst listening to the meeting. Nor have I completed any other questionnaires or polls on the subject.

I noted that all of the maps with the Local Government Board's amalgamation proposals had been enlarged for the benefit of the meeting and were clearly on display and were discussed one after the other. I wish to thank Meander Valley Council for going to that trouble and for having such a fair-minded process. The intent of those maps, as far as Meander Valley Council area goes, is very clear and very troubling. But it was not presented in any way other than an even open set of options.

Especially it is noted there was no steady state option provided by the LGB for Meander Valley Council area thus suggesting our Council is fundamentally inadequate somehow. But the imputed failures have not been transparently disclosed or discussed or alleged. This is something more akin to Alice in Wonderland.

I noted the Deloraine meeting was asked the question of whether they supported the amalgamation of the Meander Valley Council and also they were asked whether they were opposed to the amalgamation of the Meander Valley Council.

These were two simple unambiguous questions. I noted that about 95% to 98% of the meeting participants without any hesitation whatsoever raised their hands in unambiguous opposition to the amalgamation of the Meander Valley Council and that only three or four people raised their hand in favour of amalgamation. I was amazed at the community turnout, given the very short notice. I noted the Council apologised for the shortness of notice but even so I felt there was a very enthusiastic turnout by the community and whilst the community was polite, I wouldn't describe them as happy with this local government review. As you might gather I was one of the people who put up my hand in opposition to amalgamation.

I also attended the Meander Valley swimming pool meeting in Deloraine on 12 July, taking me away from home for much of the day. I attended the swimming pool meeting because, as a person with a range of disabilities swimming year-round would bring significant benefits, yet Meander Valley has no adequate facility, despite repeated requests. It is my view that any decent municipality would have the foresight and the wherewithal and the resources to have a heated year-round aquatics centre. After all Oatlands, a town of some 728 people has managed to build a modern indoor aquatics centre. So it is clear that Meander Valley can manage that too. Sometimes in Tasmania we struggle with ancient perceptions of what the community needs and that remains the case even today.

Last week on Thursday, I was in Launceston and took the opportunity to informally and briefly discuss the Future of Local Government in Tasmania Consultation with Launceston City Council (LCC). It would seem from that discussion LCC have no consultation process with their rate base whatsoever. I discussed the inadequacy of the time frame for consultation with the officer from Council and was pleased that she agreed.

I wish to reiterate one thing. That Launceston City Council (LCC) is just that, a city council. I comfortably allege LCC would prefer that the rural parts of its existing municipal area barely existed, in essence a depopulated rural wasteland in social terms. I gained such a disdainful impression from talking with senior LCC planning staff in the past.

Meander Valley Council is already an amalgam of two original council areas and that amalgam has been successful in several ways. Not only that I argue it remains successful economically, notwithstanding a raft of important issues which could be improved, which I have covered above. I consider that many of the issues would not cost the Council a vast sum to implement.

Currently the Meander Valley Council process timeline for making submissions to it on this local government review was extremely short, from 4 July to 14 July. This LGB consultation period is also extraordinarily brief, indeed I would describe it as completely inadequate.

I realise that Council has been given a very short time frame and I realise too that the unbridled recalcitrance of the previous MVC general manager may have caused a hiatus in the Council processes.

I believe that the unelected panel of the local government board, some six people have set time frames in the Future of Local Government in Tasmania process which make consultation by our 29 local governments highly difficult. To be frank I consider this to be extremely unfortunate.

Conclusion

Clearly this Consultation process, the Future of Local Government in Tasmania, is simply and nothing more than a bald faced wrecking ball, seeking to substantially diminish the current 264 elected councillors representing the 29 local governments across Tasmania. I think this state government ambition and ulterior motivation is very unwise. I think it fails to achieve any of the 2017 principles:

- *Be in the best interests of ratepayers*
- *Improve the level of services for communities*
- *Preserve and maintain local representation, and*
- *Ensure that the financial status of the entities is strengthened.*

I think Meander Valley can potentially fulfil the above principles without being amalgamated, but rather being administered under a new General Manager.

Given some more time I would have an expanded range of positive suggestions for reform in the face of such an offensive process.

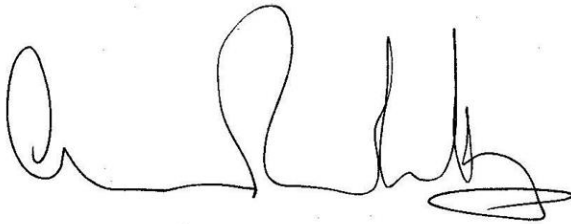
I think it essential and desirable and in the public interest to preserve and maintain local representation. I would hope the LGB would specifically agree this is undeniably in the public interest as well as being in the best interests of ratepayers.

I reiterate I would support the process regarding the Future of Local Government in Tasmania being extended beyond the next state election, legislative change to ensure a permanent removal of the ability of The Local Government Minister to abolish any Local Government in Tasmania and the process to abolish the Local Government Board and its replacement with upgraded and significantly strengthened and better funded Anti-Corruption Bodies and other standards bodies such as the Ombudsman's Office.

Clearly the current minority Tasmanian State Government should not be attempting to destroy most of the 29 local government councils across Tasmania, nor removing the majority of the 264 elected local government Councillors, nor removing the 29 planning authorities their associated local planning responsibilities.

END

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. Smith', written in a cursive style.