

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

Worldwide, progressive philosophies recognise that resilience is gained through localising rather than centralising.

We live in a society, not an economy and much in the reports and described scenarios in The Future of Local Government Review focuses on economic imperatives rather than considering the real social detriment of social homogenisation. Diversity is a strength, not a weakness. Diversity is advantaged by maintaining small agile centres rather than “streamlining” services.

I live in Lorinna, at the periphery of the Kentish municipality. I have interests in the Meander Valley area, the Launceston area, and the Devonport area. I frequently travel to these other municipalities to work, attend meetings and engage in personal interests. However, I have no doubt to which community I have affinity and allegiance.

I am unconvinced by the report which describes “Communities of Interest” to include the crossing of municipal boundaries for employment. In my opinion, “Commuting Zones” are irrelevant and have been described in a bid to find justification for centralising.

Money cannot buy community connection. Changing boundaries to satisfy economic modelling will not build community connection, even if it allows for super-councils to employ professionals to engage in community consultation. Maybe that would work in the cities, but in rural Tasmania it is vital that we see our locals filling the potholes, emptying the street-side bins and mowing the parks. We can engage with our locally elected representatives in the street or at community events and we are nourished in the understanding that the voices around the council table are reflective of the people for whom decisions are being made.

I spent thirteen years on Kentish Council. Being a council area with such a lot of gravel roads and forests, rubbish dumping was a recurrent issue. Council determined the cost of maintaining the disposal of rubbish at the Waste Transfer Station and shared that cost with the community via a surcharge included in the rates. This meant that locals were no longer required to pay for each visit to the Tip, and the incidence of illegal dumping in the bush declined dramatically. People of Kentish consider themselves fortunate to not have to pay for taking their rubbish to the tip, even though they are aware that the cost has already been exercised. The problems of illegal dumping make us all happier that our bush is not being rubbished to the same degree. This policy may or may not work in other municipalities and I'm clear that centralising policies across both Kentish and Latrobe may not work either. But it works in Kentish because it's a policy that is specifically relevant to local conditions.

It is important to keep planning localised. Local people have a direct understanding of local conditions and local needs. Centralised decision-making by a distant planning authority cannot be nimble enough to respond to real on-the-ground opportunities, issues, or concerns.

Whatever happens in this forced amalgamation process, representation must also remain local so that decisions of Council are relevant to the communities it serves and local people can still be employed servicing their own communities.

I hesitatingly support the fourth scenario, with the Kentish-Latrobe municipality intact, with Kentish administration and services maintained locally and locally-elected representation (or increased with an expanded ward system) so that decisions of Council are relevant to their communities and local people can continue to engage in a meaningful manner.

The broad-brush approach to local government currently being undertaken may result in expensive retraction later. The Permaculture Principle #9: Small and Slow Solutions directs us to proceed with delicacy. The proverb “the bigger they are the harder they fall” reminds us of the disadvantages of excessive size and growth while “slow and steady wins the race” encourages patience while reflecting on a common truth in nature and society.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Annie Willock

