

Subject: Council amalgamation
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There are several logical reasons why the number of councils in Tasmania should be reduced by amalgamation . I can only speak regarding my council (Circular Head) and adjacent councils here in north west Tasmania but I believe many of my comments apply equally to the other councils in Tasmania.

My reasons for a reduction in the number of councils

1, Votes should carry equal weight

The West Coast , Circular Head and Wynyard councils had about 3500,6500 and 10500 electors respectively at the last council election with 9,9,8 councillors elected respectively.

Clearly the principle of votes carrying the same value is absent when comparing these three councils.

2 ,Duplication of management costs , lack of specialist staff.

Each council has a well remunerated upper and middle management. At least a good proportion of these staff would not be required given amalgamation .

In addition, because of these existing costs and the low rate base in each council area there is insufficient funds to employ well qualified and experienced specialist staff. For example, to actively promote tourism development , business development, sustainability solutions etc

3. Lack of expertise and vision.

Elected councillors often reflect and promote the industries and special interests within their council area. This can lead to misallocation of resources and a lack of foresight in realising new opportunities .

A classic example is the new Smithton “wellbeing”centre being saddled with a wood burning boiler system to heat the pool.

When it recently broke down(again) technicians had to be flown over from New Zealand to fix the problems.

This in a state with 100% renewable energy!

4. Lack of diversity and representation.

Circular Head has only two women councillors out of nine. It was the same with the previous council.

The majority of councillors are conservative older white men .

Circular Head has the highest number of people claiming aboriginal ancestry in the state. There is no indigenous person that I am aware of who has been elected to council now or previously.

Should councils with sizeable populations of aboriginal people be made to have a councillor position reserved for a representative of their people?

5. Inability to recognise, plan and fund transformative projects

Tasmania is still losing people(overall) migrating to other places in search of opportunity.

Transformative projects are needed to keep young people (especially) here otherwise we will gradually turn into one large nursing home.

Farming , forestry and aquaculture are highly mechanised and only employ a comparatively small number of people. Same with renewable energy.

Opportunities abound in tourism and I believe there are at least three potentially transformative opportunities that a larger council with greater human and financial resources could undertake in the North West:

A. Rail trails

The north west of Tasmania has a network of old disused or rarely used rail lines. These railway networks are world famous for their innovative engineering .

They also run through some of the most beautiful country that “Sustainable” Timber Tasmania has not yet managed to clear fell. On the mainland similiar disused rail lines have been converted for use as bicycle trails with great success bringing tourists to previously struggling rural towns.

Imagine how popular a rail trail from Wynyard to Stanley would be or Strahan to Zeehan?

B. Stanley

Practically nearly every tourist that comes to north west Tasmania visits Stanley.

They are met by empty shops and a lack of opportunities to sightsee some of the best coastal areas and wildlife available in Tasmania and spend money!

The local council is funding a study to improve the "streetscape" at Stanley.

While this is welcome it does not really get to the issues of why Stanley is not a dynamic, innovative tourist hub.

Why not make Stanley come alive and turn it into a Sovereign Hill(at Ballarat in Victoria) type tourist "experience"? Stanley was a major port in the early history of Tasmania .

Why not recreate the town in this image with shops filled with artisans, people in costume etc

Sure it will cost money but a discussion with the Ballarat council will show what the potential returns could be not just for Stanley but the whole of the north west and Tasmania.

C .Wildlife Sanctuary

There has been a lot of adverse publicity regarding Circular Head council's reticence to lower speed limits at Woolnorth to help reduce roadkill especially given one of the last colonies of uninfected Tasmanian Devils resides there.

Fortunately sanity prevailed after an outcry from conservation groups Australia wide and minor changes to speed limits have now been sought by council.

Anyone who has been to this area recognises that it abounds in things tourists love such as an incredibly beautiful, rugged coastline, unique wildlife , a fascinating history, one of a few scientific outposts at Cape Grimm monitoring the world's atmosphere and graceful wind farms(I like them!) . . .

There is presently one person doing three hour tours of the area in a small van.

There is a great opportunity to set up a tourist "experience" centred on setting up a sanctuary for the Tasmanian Devils and other wildlife.

There would have to be negotiations with the present private owner of the area but when one considers that this area has never been Australian owned perhaps it is a reasonable ask for a small area be reserved to preserve unique wildlife and provide employment opportunities for Australians. .

These three projects could be linked up to provide a novel and popular tourist experience which could be attractive to tourists worldwide.

6. Sustainability

This issue was addressed by several candidates at a pre election "meet the candidates" meeting. Much was made of their concern and determination to address the issue.

I have endeavoured to raise sustainability issues with the councillors via emails over the past several months.

Issues raised were roadkill on council roads, overuse of chemicals by council especially around children's' playgrounds, and improving rubbish collection with an extra bin for collection of organic wastes which could be recycled into valuable compost.

I have received no feedback from any councillor on any of these issues, apart from a request from the mayor for an apology when I pressed him on when speed limits at Woolnorth would be implemented.

A larger, more representative and progressive council with more human and financial resources should be able to address and implement urgently needed sustainability programs.

Finally councils are the most important form of government because they more than any other layer of government directly affect peoples' lives and they need to operate as efficiently and effectively as possible. I believe amalgamation will assist improving councils' effectiveness and efficiency hence improving citizens' lives.

Regards

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Bruce Sent from my iPad