

Submission to Local Government Review 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this stage of the Local Government Review and I make the following comments, in relation only to the region in which I live, having done so for most of my adult life, and because I have some understanding of how it functions.

General Comments (some relating to the whole report)

I apologise for making some negative comments about what is suggested. I am not against what you propose per se but all issues/concerns need to be raised .

Tasmanians are a little quirky and insular by nature and we are parochial. I don't see a problem. It is what makes us what we are. Some have difficulty with it, most don't.

I do not believe reducing the number of councils will lead to any cost saving to ordinary ratepayers. There will be some obvious cuts such as less elected members and a few less General / Senior Managers but those that remain will have large increases in their remuneration packages due to the increased size of what they manage. There will need to be an increase in the workforce I believe, especially in the middle management area as senior staff will need more support to keep on top of much larger areas to oversee. The obvious comparison is when the State Government reduced its size some time ago and the subsequent burgeoning of the public service.

This may well be acceptable if there was to be an obvious increase in service levels but I doubt that as well.

Many of the reforms are behind the scene issues such as aligning asset management and accounting processes that are meaningless to most and will mean little to improved service delivery to the community.

We are supposed to be operating under a state planning scheme anyway, so some tinkering at the edges to align whatever differences may exist between joining councils will be neither here nor there to most. Developers will complain no matter what.

I am bemused by the weight given to people living and working in the same LGA creates a community of interest. Logically it seems, one local government area would address this issue, problem solved.

Given this won't happen, there must be limits on how far this concept is taken and I make my own subjective opinion on some of the options put forward as I do not agree that people prefer to live in the LG area in which they work. I said in an earlier submission I doubt if most know when they cross from one to municipality to another in their day to day travels.

People make their own choice about where they want to live and work. These are lifestyle and affordability driven and perhaps not by which LG area they may be in. There is a cost in not living close to work for sure but altering an LGA boundary will not change that. I suspect in many if not most cases people choose to live where they can achieve their lifestyle aims, wherever it is. I really doubt these choices are made on which council area they will live.

Re the graphs you use to indicate the proportion of people working away from where they live, whilst I don't doubt the numbers shown I have no idea how they were arrived at and could not make any mathematical sense of the figures shown. I can only assume there are some behind the scenes calculations done and some figures are not shown. This is OK but not clear if someone like me is interested enough to do a quick check to figure out how the numbers were achieved. It would be nice to be able to look at that data and say add/subtract this and that, divide/multiply by 100 and you get the percentage shown. I am happy to be proven wrong, I often am.

A strong part of me still thinks that there is nothing wrong with keeping the status quo in the Tamar Valley. All the councils perform well enough to be left alone. As a state we have some councils that may be too small to function effectively, but I do not necessarily think that is the case in the Tamar Valley.

Sounds like the NIMBY principle I know, but there you go.

So, having vented my negative thoughts and given the status quo is not an option to consider, I make the following comments on the suggested possible Tamar Valley alternatives.

If I was to have a vote on the 4 options you have put forward I would support **Option 1**. It just seems logical to me. The council would be big enough to fend for itself and meet all the criteria set by the state government.

It includes the urban areas of Riverside, Prospect and Blackstone Heights that are obviously suburbs of Launceston City. The West Tamar has townships dotted along the river but I believe the whole area has close community of interest with urban Launceston. I see no reason to extend the TVLGA past the current Prospect area, (except maybe to Hadspen).

I believe it is important to have as much of the Tamar River catchment as possible in this region controlled by a single body. Any help that can be given to the river to improve its health should be encouraged and this outcome would be a positive in my view. For that reason alone Georgetown should be included in a Tamar Valley LGA. Similarly the area south and east of St Leonards (Nunmara, Mt Barrow, Blessington areas) whilst perhaps having little in common with urban Launceston are all part of the North and South Esk River catchments and a such should remain in the Tamar Valley LG area.

Because of the above, I do not prefer **Option 2** as it excludes Georgetown from the TVLGA and this makes little sense to me.

If it is being kept out to ensure a North Eastern LGA can use it as an income and population base, I suggest the Lilydale and Nunamara areas currently in the LCC LGA should be excised as well as they are more aligned to the more rural focused North Eastern area.

I do not prefer **Option 3**. Bringing in all these satellite towns (with the possible exception of Hadspen) to the TVLGA is unnecessary to me. Excising them from any resultant Midlands/ Cradle Coast LGA would have detrimental effects on those areas as they will lose population centres that would make significant contributions to the new areas. I also do not believe, Carrick, Longford, Perth or Evandale have a community of interest with the Tamar Valley.

Whilst the distances aren't great, they are separated from the urban fringes of Launceston by large tracts of rural land that act as a natural buffer between urban and rural lifestyles. I believe these tracts of land should remain rural in nature to keep this buffer in place.

Option 4 is my least preferred. It is really just an extension on option 3 and including Deloraine and Westbury as part of a TVLGA makes no sense to me.

As in option 3, excising them from any resultant Midlands/ Cradle Coast LGA would have detrimental effects on those areas as they will lose population centres that would make significant contributions to the new areas. I also do not believe, Carrick, Longford, Perth or Evandale, Westbury or Deloraine and surrounding areas have a community of interest with the Tamar Valley.

Finally I would like to reiterate some comments I made in a previous submission.

I do not know if this is in your remit, but please do not recommend any suggested Tamar Valley LGA be called the Launceston City Council or have Launceston mentioned in any way. It would be like Collingwood merging with any team and it having to be called Collingwood. The message would be loud and clear.

Should any of the options you suggest come to fruition, Launceston will be the largest council by far and whether people like to say it or not there will be a tendency for them to want to "take it over " with their management systems and people. They are an OK council but not the be all and end all by any means.

The other councils will have a lot to offer and if past history is anything to go by, there is a real risk of the smaller council's processes and procedures being at best given token acknowledgement and at worst ignored and staff being absorbed but not given meaningful or senior roles. Calling the new entity the LCC will simply reinforce in the minds of many that it is really just an expanded Launceston.

I note you suggest local area committees be formed to ensure more remote areas have formal access to council. I preferred, and still do, a ward system be put in place. Local area committees are fine I suppose but their effectiveness can only be a function of its representation. If there is not a local or sympathetic council representative on the committee it runs the risk of being marginalized. As well, people in the more distant communities would probably feel more connected dealing with someone from their local area.

I look forward to your final report and recommendations and how the current state government deals with this issue. It has traditionally been fraught with downside for any who have tried to undertake changes to this sector.

Talking the talk is fine, walking the talk is what will be required if any change is to occur.

A currently unpopular and tiring government taking such a risk?

An opposition with a policy to not enforce what you are suggesting?

The hackles of many of those councils apparently threatened with extinction already rising.

Interesting times ahead.

David Gibbins

████████████████████

████████████████████