

To: Future of Local Government Review
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Dear The Future of Local Government Review

Please see below my thoughts on the Local Government Review.

1. Potential cost savings

I agree that there are too many councils and that there is room for cost savings by amalgamations. In the West Tamar, some 50% of rate payer revenue is spent on employees. However, reading through the various documents and opinions around the local government review it appears that there may be little in the way of reduction in employees (local workforces will be retained and there may be other opportunities available for staff). It may mean that fewer general managers are needed, and perhaps some senior staff, but larger councils may also mean more "deputies" are appointed to cover the larger catchments.

Reducing the number of Councillors will not lead to much in the way of cost savings.

I expect there maybe cost savings by centralising some functions across all Councils, for example, payroll, accounting systems, IT, human resources, fleet management, policies, etc. Is it possible that a single service entity could provide these services to all Councils?

Perhaps rationalise the services provided by Councils or more clearly define them? It seems to me that there is a fair amount of duplication or grey areas between what Councils are responsible for and what the State Government is – for example, in health, education, environment, etc. Perhaps also consider abolishing the Northern Tasmania Development Corporation and the Cradle Coast Authority, or incorporating these activities in the relevant new Council areas or to State Government.

2. Reduction in representation

If the West Tamar Council is merged with the Launceston City Council, I feel that representation of my views will be reduced. My vote will be overwhelmed by the sheer number of voters in the Launceston area.

Currently, there are a number of WTC Councillors who live in the area near me, who participate in local events and make themselves available for local community groups. Without a form of ward system, I expect that the sheer number of residents in the heavily urbanised areas around Launceston will mean that these local Councillors will be unable to afford to canvas votes over the entire area. Local community groups benefit from Councillors participating in them, so with less locally based Councillors and fewer Councillors overall, local views may be less likely to be heard.

The “Supporting Strong and Empowered Local Communities” paper suggests that wards are unnecessary, but in my view, “protecting and enhancing voice” is a strong reason to have a ward system of representation.

I question the view that ward elections may result in NIMBY influences over development application assessments. Perhaps Councillors are not properly aware of their responsibilities under the planning regulations? I think that all potential Councillors should be required to complete some sort of training or familiarisation with the responsibilities of Councillors before their nomination is accepted.

It is possible that larger Councils may lead to them being dominated by political parties rather than street wise savvy local representation.

3. New Council boundaries

I question whether commuting statistics is the obvious tool to define catchments. It appears to me that “community” is based around where people live, and similarly, services provided by Council to residents is more based around where residents live. I feel connected to the local area around where I live, to the areas in the West Tamar further north, and northern areas of the East Tamar – and less to Launceston.

There has been some suggestion that focussing boundaries around the Tamar Estuary may improve the health of the river. Is it possible that the massively overloaded sewerage plants in the Tamar have been a contributing factor to poor river health, however this is the responsibility of TasWater not local Councils?

It is my view it makes more sense to carve out the heavily urbanised area of West Tamar (Riverside to Legana) and merge this with Launceston. The remaining area of the West Tamar to merge with the East Tamar areas of George Town and the less urbanised areas currently part of Launceston, such as the Lilydale area.

Yours sincerely

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