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Submission to Local Government Board on the Future of Local Government, Stage 3

The consultation by the Board has been extensive and very valuable for the progress of local government reform in Tasmania. The complexity of any proposed changes to local government, despite the enormous amount of information that has been gathered, does not appear to have had a significant impact on the community's attitude to local government reform.

Both the Stage 2 Report of the Board (126 pages) and the SGS Economics and Planning and Certified B Corporation (138 pages) (SGS Report) provide so much information that it is difficult for non-specialists to process.

However, the information is now available to all councils and, over time, should be better understood by those interested in the future of local government, and in particular the future of their own local government area (LGA).

The SGS Report provides insights into the organisation of councils and how they may approach sharing services and potentially amalgamation with neighbouring LGA(s). Clearly a long timeframe is needed in order to enable council staff, elected members and communities to feel comfortable with the changes that will be needed to improve services etc. It is very important to keep community services such as support for an aging population within the local communities. This may also include provision of local transport to events.

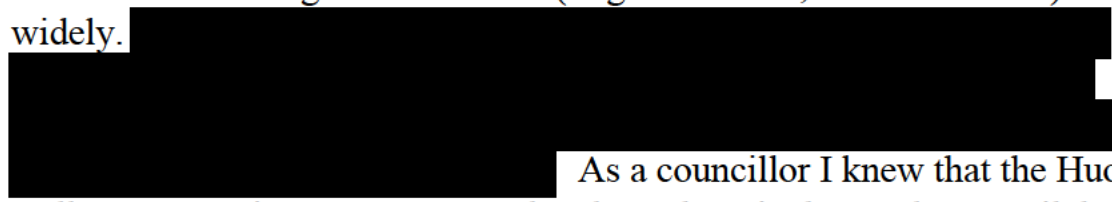
This is well summarised in Table 35 of SGS Economics and Planning: functional and capability analysis of Tasmanian local council report

TABLE 35: COUNCIL IDENTIFIED STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

- *Sharing of knowledge and skills across government areas*
- *Staff professional development opportunities and retention opportunities*
- *Potential for cost savings (e.g. sharing of plant and equipment, best practice processes and templates)*
- *Systems and processes can be shared relatively easily if procurement cycles align*
- *Councils that are located within close proximity can generally share services more easily*

- *Councils have already been undertaking strategic partnerships and sharing services across several functional areas. While this has generally only been with one or two others, it could be further scaled up if additional councils were committed to terms and arrangements*
- *Distance between councils can be a barrier especially for front-facing services, sharing of plant and equipment, and building of culture between teams requiring the ability to meet face to face from time to time*
- *Many councils current lack staff and therefore are unable to share with others. The broader workforce concerns would need to be prioritised first*
- ***Politics within each council – requires trust, collaboration, and clear roles and responsibilities to ensure staff hours and resources are being utilised fairly***
- *Not all services can be shared e.g. customer service currently works well as a local level service, as most connections can be resolved on first contact*
- *Some larger councils are reluctant to enter shared services given they can be self-sustainable*
- *While councils generally all deliver the core services, there are a range of specific community response services that councils deliver that may not need to be shared*
- *Concerns that sharing of services is the first step in amalgamation, therefore reluctant to enter shared arrangements.*

The issues discussed in the SGS Report apply across the state and it is clear that attitudes among the 29 council (large and small, rural and urban) vary widely.



As a councillor I knew that the Huon Valley rates notices were prepared and sent by Kingborough Council, but I was not aware of any more contact with the neighbouring council. I don't know how much our current Huon Valley councillors know about the level of resource-sharing between the two councils, but I think it is very important that they do know – the efficiency of both systems may be improved by resource-sharing to the point where there is no need to actually amalgamate the councils – but the community does not have that information.

Southern Shore Community Catchment

The reports on the FOLG issues of the Kingborough Council (July 17th) and the Huon Valley Council (July 27th) demonstrate that the contrast in their attitudes persists in 2023. An amendment to the recommendation to Huon

Valley Council to hold discussions with Kingborough Council was accepted, and it is to be hoped that there will be increased communication and consultation between councillors of the two councils.

The option of shared resources is much less confronting for communities, for elected members and for staff. However, it does require high levels of co-operation between councils, as well as building trust. Elected members, and especially mayors, as well as general managers, should be at the forefront of these initiatives, and collaboration between neighbouring councils appears to be the most appropriate approach to local government reform at this time.

The potential for the future organisation of local government in Tasmania has been comprehensively investigated by the University of Tasmania in their Tasmanian Policy Exchange paper <https://www.utas.edu.au/community-and-partners/tpe/flgr> which is based on a great deal of research and provides support for increased resource-sharing between councils.

My suggestion is that, having developed the “Community Catchments” as groups of LGAs with common interests, the Local Government Board, applies to the State Government for funding to assist council to develop resource and service sharing. The Local Government Division, LGAT and together with councils that already share services could promote understanding of shared services on a broader scale than is currently in place.

There is a strong need to raise awareness in the community about the roles of local government, the importance of good governance and the potential for collaboration in the sector.

Thank you for the work you have done and I look forward to ongoing discussion of reform of local government.

