

The Future of Local Government Review.

12 July 2023.

I am based in Oatlands – Southern Midlands Council LGA. Therefore my views are gained by my interaction and observation of this Council. I also have over 40 years of experience as an accountant and company director. I was also on a Local Council on the mainland many years ago.

It appears to me that the overall objective of this review is to ensure Local Government can be sustainable into the future. This sustainability must include Financial Resources, People & Culture, Technical Capacity and Effective Management.

My assumptions are that some Councils are Financially struggling, that some also suffer from personality clashes there range from being ineffective to toxic. I also assume that some Councils and ratepayers would welcome amalgamations, while some definitely do not.

I believe that the idea that simply changing the boundaries on a map will resolve these issues is flawed.

I also believe that the view that “economies of scale” savings will be achieved by reducing the number of councils is also a flawed argument. Certainly there will be less Councillors, and some relatively minor savings will be achieved, also a reduced number of senior management may also be achieved. However, the kilometres of roads being maintained, the number of parks being mowed, the services being provided will not change, therefore the number of frontline staff, equipment etc will not change – the only change will be the logo on their uniforms. Saving will be reduced by the cost of redundancies of senior staff, and additional travel related costs of the new councillors who must attend meetings and events over a greater geographical area. This may also preventive good effective local citizens from participating in Local Government, thus reducing the diversity of views and backgrounds.

The objectives behind this review can be achieved in a less disruptive way.

1. Support those Councils and ratepayers who wish to amalgamate or adjust their boundaries.
2. Better and mandatory training for Councillors, particular in meeting conduct, confidentiality, conflict of interests and roles and responsibilities of Councillors and staff. This training must be undertaken after an election and before the councillor undertakes their duties.
3. Create a Local Government review and support body, that is tasked with oversight of the councils, Financial, Operational and, Cultural. This body could recommend to the Minister that Councillors or even complete Councils be subject to mandatory training, suspended, or even sacked. It can be funded by a levy on all Councils based on the same criteria as the current state government funding, plus charge the relevant Council for any work / support provided. This body will be tasked with supporting and guiding Councils to meet their Financial, Cultural & strategic benchmarks.
4. Council will require increasing levels of funding, other sources need to be found. One suggestion is a developer levy similar to NSW’s Section 94. Council could also be encouraged to make better use of their facilities, and recycle assets no longer used and consider development projects or other commercial activities.

5. Further savings can be achieved by having back office and other services provided by a state wide body that can charge the Councils for providing such things as Payroll, Human Resources, Internal Audit, Administration, Planning, and Heritage etc. etc. This body may also be able to negotiate with suppliers for bulk discounts and deals in areas such as Telecoms, IT, motor vehicles, plant & equipment, Tourism etc.

I believe that these suggestions would met with a great deal of support, and will achieve the aims of this review.

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