

Subject: Council boundary changes
Date: Wednesday, 14 June 2023 12:23:44 PM

Dear Ms Smith and Mr Street,

My first preference is for the Northern Midlands Council to stay as it is, currently being an efficient, not too top heavy bureaucratic administration with easy access and quick response turnarounds.

What are we missing out on in our current format? I would suggest that the intimate, easy access, and responsive relationships ratepayers have with the councillors and the professional relationships we have with the council employees where they often go beyond what most public servants provide by way of service will only turn into a council that becomes too big and then has a disconnect with the ratepayers as "chinese walls" prevail.

Let me give 2 examples of the above as in my profession as a Valuer and Real Estate Agent as well as being a now past member of the Launceston City Council Heritage Advisory committee for over 10 years.

Example 1

Before the previous amalgamation in Launceston we could phone the engineering, building or Planning departments and mention what we were interested in and when we arrived at our designated appointment time the file would be available at their office and photocopies made and if necessary a brief search of other files. Time taken by the council employee and myself being no more than 10 minutes with an excellent result.

Now - We phone now for an appointment which normally takes a return call possibly that day if you are lucky. The appointment time is then set for some time in the future. At the prescribed appointment time you go to the main reception on time here more often than not there is a queue of other general enquiries and payments. Once you have reached the counter the council person is then contacted who is in a different building.

This person then arrives from their building after a period of time and the request for the relevant information is then made. The employee then goes back to their building to find the right file and then returns. In most instances more information is required and the employee then journeys back to their building to retrieve. I can go on but hopefully you get the gist.

These time delays lower the productivity of not just council but the wheels of Industry.

I suspect that according to any council efficiency audits everything is going well with no time delays but this is only because most developers now go to the smaller user friendly councils as I have done.

Example 2

As a member of the initial Launceston City Heritage Advisory Committee we started out with a cross section of members from developers, consultants, planners, agents, heritage advisors and the City architect and chaired by a councillor from memory.

When I resigned about 4-5 years ago the council planners, the university historian and others had decided to create Heritage precincts in many parts of Launceston despite the State Heritage Council now controlling properties under the Heritage Act.

At the time of my departure the group had risen in numbers and was filled by council, State government, and university employees. Not one owned a heritage property and I was the only one not employed by the above entities.

In my opinion over the 10 plus year period the efforts should have been action and priorities for the derelict C H Smith building and the Boland Street terrace houses. However this was usually at the bottom of the agenda if I could maintain it on the agenda. Meeting seemed more important than the results.

The difference between this committee and the proactive committee of the NMBA (Northern Midlands Business Association) where the members are business owners and ratepayers and developers as well as the small in number but knowledgeable council employees is a typical example of a medium sized council being there for the benefit of the ratepayers and not the bureaucrats.

One only needs to look at the TRANSLink Industrial Hub at Western Junction compared to the lack of planning for industrial land in Launceston. The obvious question is why do businesses want to be at Translink in the Northern Midlands rather than Launceston? The answer is obvious.

In summary we do not want to become part of the Launceston City Council. It is bureaucratic, not representative of its wider area and inefficient and is a classic case of the "Cost of Congestion" where everyone is busy ticking boxes but not making decisions. If a decision is made there is accountability however if it is deferred then there is no work or responsibility.

I understand the theory of the bigger the organisation and the benefits of "Economies of Scale" however I would suggest that there is an optimum size for economies of scale depending on the type of business or organisation.

In this instance NMC appears to be near optimum size with a related level of management which has synergy with the public. I do feel improvements to the council can be improved by controlled and well managed consultants being contracted for specific periods and also resource sharing by "like structured" community minded municipalities such as Meander Valley and Northern Midlands.

Yours faithfully,

Robert Harrison

[Redacted signature]