

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission.

I live in the Glamorgan Spring Bay council area and am heavily involved in my local community and community organisation. I coordinate the Landcare group, apply for community grants, volunteer for numerous things, organise meetings, liaise with community members, various authorities, council etc. I can appreciate that some councils are more effective than others. But my experience in Glamorgan Spring Bay has left me with a very poor impression of local government.

My personal experiences with local government have been compounded by the chaos that's reigned in GSB since the local government elections in 2018. At these elections a set of new councillors gained control and set about making major changes. A clear 'us' and 'them' culture prevailed and meant that almost all council staff resigned, retired or were sacked. In addition to the trauma for these people, this has meant that so much corporate memory has been lost. We had 10 General Managers (or acting GMs) during this time. Staff were coming and going constantly. Service provision declined dramatically.

A smaller number of councils that were run professionally, with appropriate oversight may help to prevent situations like this in future. Another benefit of having less councils is that councillors could be paid a reasonable salary so that qualified people could be attracted to stand. There are definitely some good, qualified councillors in GSB who are paid less than \$12 000 per year for a difficult job dealing with petty bureaucrats.

A well run and functioning council would also support community organisations. My volunteer work has been made immeasurably more difficult due to the 'us' and 'them' attitude of the post-2018 Glamorgan Spring Bay council - councillors and/or staff. While there are some notable exceptions, for the most part interacting with council is vexed and unproductive. The sad truth is that we achieve more as a community by having as little to do with council as possible. This doesn't make sense to me. To my mind, council should collaborate with community groups who are working for better community outcomes. My experiences suggest two major issues with small councils – toxic personal politicking and lack of capacity – and lead me to strongly support amalgamations as a way to strengthen local government.

One of the common arguments against amalgamation is a romanticisation of small, local councils. I can confidently say that I know my councillors and council management and they know me, but this isn't necessarily a good thing and doesn't lead to productive outcomes. Rather, small councils are vulnerable to partial and personal decision-making. I've been on the receiving end of some bizarre decisions that I can only put down to malice and being in the 'out-group'.

One example: our community association received a grant of \$12 000 to do an Aboriginal Heritage Assessment and then remove Radiata pine (a declared weed) from a council easement that connects a walking track and the road. The pine trees are a fire hazard and residents have long been asking council to remove them, to no effect. We also have a long-term plan to use this easement as part of a walking/cycling track joining our community to

the one next to us. I talked to some councillors before applying for the grant and they seemed supportive.

We had the Aboriginal Heritage Assessment completed but needed landowner permission to remove the pine trees. The General Manager, who seems to delight in being obtuse, refused permission with the reasons being 1. it's not urgent and 2. council doesn't have a walking/cycling strategy. I submitted a 339E complaint based on his reply but got nowhere with that (except for my position in the 'out-group' being firmed up). Fortunately, we were able to get permission from the grant body to use the funds to deal with other environmental weeds in our area. But that's not the point. A community group was offering to deal with environmental weeds on council land at no cost to council and the GM refused for spurious reasons. So much time and energy wasted.

Another example related to this project is our attempt to apply for a grant to develop a feasibility study for the walking/cycling track. Our project met the grant criteria well. However, we needed a letter of in-principle support for our grant application from council as the landowner. Again, there was no cost to council, but the General Manager refused to provide a letter of support, despite the fact that he and various councillors were asking for more information about our proposal.

Another example: community members donated towards the purchase of 3 defibrillators for our area, registered with Ambulance Tasmania's Early Access to Defibrillators program so that locals and visitors would have access to defibrillators in an emergency. We were about \$1000 short of the total need. I applied for a small grant from council. The General Manager intervened in the small grant application and refused to allow my request to be added to the agenda for a council meeting. His reasons for refused were that installing infrastructure like defibrillators leads to people taking more risks and that therefore we'd be increasing risk to the community by installing defibrillators. Our rates pay for this contemptuous (but oh so politely-written) response. And, to be fair, if GSB had a competent General Manager, dealing with our council might be somewhat different. It'd certainly be refreshing to deal with someone who attempted to collaborate with community groups. However, my experience leads me to totally support the Board's conclusion that the current model of local government is unsustainable. Larger councils with appropriate oversight may be more likely to avoid personal/personality-based decisions that can plague smaller councils.

Another issue with small council is lack of economic sustainability. Our council regularly cites their lack of capacity in terms of their poor financial situation. For example, we've tried to get public rubbish bins in our area to deal with tourist waste. Council refused due to the cost of having someone empty them (surely this cost would be minimal). So, we suggested using household garbage bins that could be emptied on the usual weekly collection day. We offered to finance and build 'cradles' to hold the bins so that they wouldn't blow over, but council were immovable. This is our experience time and time again. There is no capacity in our council to provide even basic services, despite strong community support. What then is the point of them?

In the last few years, rates have skyrocketed. For some people, their rates have more than doubled. Yet, services are being slashed simultaneously. We now have a top-heavy

bureaucracy who seem to spend their time making social media posts or sending emails with creatively contemptuous ways of blocking any community initiatives. According to State Grants Commission figures, GSBC should spend about \$1 million on planning per year (according to state averages). The last lot of figures show that GSBC spend over \$3 million. Similarly, they spend \$2 million rather than their allocated \$1 million for administration. Instead of investigating this though, our council spend their time creating a media campaign impugning the State Grants Commission. GSBC argues that they have to put their rates up because they're not getting their fair share of needs-based grant funding from the SGC. A few locals checked out the figures for ourselves. It's quite simple to understand. Yet, we are paying for a General Manager and at least two accountants who claim to be unable to understand the SGC's methodology. Our rates are increasingly paying for a growing layer of management, while basic services continue to be cut. This isn't sustainable or sensible. If council isn't providing services, there's little point to them.

I don't have a strong preference for any particular boundary adjustments. I'd be happy with a greater East Coast Council. Perhaps from Orford to St Helens. Whatever happens, I would like Glamorgan (the oldest rural municipality in Australia) not to be cut up. Glamorgan comprises Bicheno, Coles Bay and Swansea. I'd like to see these towns remain united, which they aren't in either of the scenarios presented in the information packs. I strongly believe that amalgamations need to be accompanied by a 'ward' type system to ensure local representation and service centres in all the major towns of larger amalgamated councils.

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