

From: [Yon Kikkert](#)
To: [Submissions LGBoard](#)
Subject: Yon Kikkert My response to South East and North East Scenarios
Date: Wednesday, 12 July 2023 6:18:35 AM

Dear Board,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in response to your South East and North East scenarios.

I'll first set out what I accept as givens that inform my line of argument down page.

My submission is based on accepting at face value without prejudice the following common sense logic:

1 - A common objection to council consolidation is perceived loss of local representation and voice. This anxiety is a major driver of opposition to council amalgamations. But this issue can be resolved by getting creative.

2 - Consolidating 3 bureaucracies into 1 is a more efficient use of resources - if only because it avoids duplication, or in this case, triplication. This then produces an 'efficiency dividend' that can be utilised to increase council capacity in various ways;

3 - Small councils in Tasmania are 'broken' because they simply do not have the capacity to deliver services at a level consistent with community expectations and statutory requirements.

4 - Wealth begets more wealth, conversely, small councils are caught in a poverty trap. Inter Alia, they lack the capacity to sufficiently engage and harness community voluntary resources for self help. Models that devolve some powers to local community panels can help overcome this;

5 - It is an axiom beyond doubt that councils are reluctant to vote themselves out of existence. So GSBC submission should not be based on for example "Oh Break O'Day will never agree to this or that or Dorset will never agree to X proposal or Sorell to Y proposal. GSBC should proceed with their submission that suits them best regardless, with the assumption there will be at some point a level of statutory coercion. The sky will not fall in.

In the discussion that follows I take heed of the Review Board's encouragement to get creative.

I do not agree with any of the scenarios proposed by the Local Government Review Board.

That is, the Local Government Review Board has both North East and South East Catchment proposals. However, Bicheno and Coles Bay have strong communities of interest that overlap into both North East and South East Catchments. All scenarios have Coles Bay in the South East council scenarios. Coles Bay and Bicheno should stay together. In fact, I'm aware of strong community sentiment in both towns that should be

the case. And also strong sentiment that they'd like to align with a North East municipality rather than a South East one. That said, losing the rate payer base of Coles Bay makes the South East municipality scenario less viable in terms of scale. I note that the Board of Review often emphasises that the scenarios are not hard and fast and are open for input. In that context, I propose that the scenarios are by far not ambitious enough. To walk things back a step, the entire East Coast shares a "community of interest". That is, a deep commonality in terms of: tourism dominated economies; growing coastal living communities; rural; ageing population; large numbers of shacks and characterised by a continuum of interconnected close-knit small towns from Buckland to St Helens and Derby. So, in my view, a Greater East Coast Regional Council that includes all of Glamorgan Spring Bay, Break-o-Day and the eastern half of Dorset municipalities would more efficiently capture our commonalities at scale. It may also include Tasman especially if Wielangta Road is upgraded. These scales are possible especially if local democratic mechanisms for individual town empowerment are put in place as the board proposes on page 4 here: https://hdp-au-prod-app-tas-yourvoice-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/6416/8531/0610/Supporting_Paper_-_Supporting_Strong_and_Empowered_Local_Communities.pdf?fbclid=IwAR36g6c4Mliq0l-ZVjmVly717BifEdqYIwuxQEHWiObCrsv4Zc2y_16o0Q And also mechanisms are put in place that explicitly aim to overcome the tyranny of distance.

To be bold is fine but the above proposal leads to two major issues:

- 1 - Mechanisms to overcome the tyranny of distance
- 2 - Democratic mechanisms for individual town empowerment

The Tyranny of Distance

The tyranny of distance already applies to our rural municipality. This is particularly the case for the northern end of GSBC and yet we all choose to live in remote and regional areas. It is a reality of life that we are already prepared to live with. Local Government Reform can lead to ways that radically improve on the status-quo in terms of living with distance. If this is the case, then the objection about geographical size of councils is less relevant. Councils can become "Great" and "Regional" because we have introduced mechanisms that make distance less relevant.

To that end, I'm in favour of local Service Tasmania 'hubs' in each centre (Bicheno, Swansea) with staff that overlap between council and state. Each hub would also have zoom facilities where admin staff can help locals 'meet' with remote council staff they need to talk to, such as planners. The Local Government Review Board has already put ideas around Service Tasmania that include local government hubs forward. But they have to be in each centre to overcome the tyranny of distance.

For example, Swansea could have a Service Tasmania centre in the old Court House that incorporates a State Library, Online Access Centre that includes private zoom facilities, Council and State Government service desk (Service Tasmania).

The Review Board has introduced discussions about Service Tasmania shopfronts in each town so this simply builds on what the Review Board is exploring anyway.

Democratic Mechanism for Individual town Empowerment and Voice

Consolidation of Administrations into larger geographical areas must be balanced by a concomitant devolution of power back to local districts. For example, devolution of some powers and democratic mechanisms back to the scale of the Old Glamorgan into town districts of Swansea and Bicheno. What follows is an in depth exploration of this idea since the maintenance of local Voice and Representation is a key driver of opposition to amalgamations.

I will target my comments generally within the framework of the following excerpt extracted from page 15 of the Stage 2 Interim Report:

"Our criteria place primacy on community cohesion and connectedness, with operational capability and financial sustainability framed as 'supporting' considerations. We want these maps to act as a catalyst for conversations with and between councils and communities about how we potentially reorganise our local government boundaries at a larger scale to deliver stronger capability, while simultaneously supporting and enhancing community cohesion, voice, and identity."

And to zero in even further, I will target my discussion specifically about "***simultaneously supporting and enhancing community cohesion, voice, and identity.***"

I have lived in a rural locality at Swansea/Dolphin Sands for the last 10 years and have been deeply involved with the local community in that time. I also attended the Local Government Review Bicheno workshop in February.

After extensive reading and thought I have summarised that into the following:

This submission considers place in relation to the towns and surrounds of rural and regional Tasmania.

1 I argue that we can have our cake and eat it too. That is, we can simultaneously support and enhance community cohesion, voice, and identity, while at the same time, enjoy the efficiencies garnered from administrative consolidation.

2 This submission proposes that structural reform of Local Government must be in two directions in terms of geographical scale: Outward - into the broader regional scale and; Inward - back to the scale of the immediate proximity of individual towns and surrounding districts. One will balance the other. Without one the other will fail. How so?

3 The proposed broad-scale consolidation of council administrations into Greater Regional Councils makes sense in terms of efficiencies and increasing local government capacity. They are to be commended. However, consolidated administrations are further away - in terms of scale - from the towns they are meant to serve. That risks geographical isolation from decision-making and feelings of disempowerment and resentment in local communities. There would be a profound feeling of lack of a local voice and local representation. That is if there is NOT a concomitant reform at local scale.

4 Reform at local scale where the central importance of place, place-shaping and town identity are put at the centre of local governance, is crucial to the broader acceptance of local government restructuring and will help bestow on them a form of political legitimacy.

5 Therefore, part of the reform and rationalisation process should require statutory devolution of some decision-making power back to towns and their surroundings. Towns

would be more autonomous, self-determining, and empowered by local participatory democracy frameworks set up through instruments of delegation enabled by the Local Government Act. Enhancing the frameworks established in the current Section 24 of the Local Government Act 1993 would be an example of where and how this could be done.

6 Each town district could have an elected voluntary District Citizens Committee who represent the local town and district. The committee members would be on a voluntary basis. At the same time as local government elections for mayors and councillors, there would be a 'down ballot' election for each individual District Citizens Committee. For example, in what is at the moment Glamorgan Spring Bay municipality, there could be an elected District Citizens Committee representing each of the following: Coles Bay district, Bicheno district, Swansea district, Triabunna district, Orford district.

7 District Citizens Committees would be compelled to hold periodic town hall meetings. Where motions can be brought and voted on and/or citizen representations can be presented and discussed.

8 Local government decisions that affect an individual town district would be a collaboration between the town district community and the council and not a top down decision only. In fact, decisions would be a combination of both bottom-up and top-down inputs. Such decisions would then be regarded as carrying legitimacy by the community affected by them because they would have been involved and empowered by deep forms of collaboration with the Greater Regional Council..

9 Moreover, the empowerment of individual towns and communities in such a way harnesses the incredible (at the moment largely latent) community capacity of towns in terms of voluntary time, skills, resources, networks, infrastructure etc. which in turn increases the capacity of local government to deliver community wellbeing. Town agency and empowerment through autonomy and self-determination builds community morale. Community morale in turn builds well-being, cohesion, and resilience - all attributes that will be sorely needed as we head into the challenges of the 21st century.

10 As it stands at the moment in local government in Tasmania, this tier of voluntary community capacity is largely untapped. This is most likely due to the lack of capacity of many councils to enable community initiatives at self empowerment.

11 The efficiencies gained by consolidation of local government administrations into Greater Regional councils will deliver an 'efficiency dividend'.

12 The 'efficiency dividend' could enable deeper collaboration between councils and town districts.

Kind Regards,

Yon Kikkert

