

Towards improved local government in southern Tasmania - Community Feedback on Options

10th September 2011 to 19th September 2011

Please note

- This document contains the emails that have been sent to the Independent Panel.
- The emails have been edited to delete the names or other text that may identify the individual that has sent the email.
- All edits, other than the deletion of names, are marked by “xxxxxxx”.
- All emails have been formatted into a common font.

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We would support Option 2 .

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Attn: Ms. Jude Monro, Chairperson of independent panel looking at Council Amalgamations.

I would like to see a single greater Hobart Council that takes in all the major urban areas - e.g. Hobart City, Glenorchy, Clarence, including urban Sorell, Bridgewater/Brighton, Kingston and perhaps even Huonville. Then I think there should be a rural Council that takes in the regional areas from Glamorgan/Spring Bay, rural Sorell, Tasman, and those small councils south of Hobart.

Rural issues are different to urban issues, e.g. the rating system would be different.

Seeing that we have four options from which to choose I guess I would choose the fourth option although I think it is unnecessary to separate eastern and western shores. Inner Clarence is urban after all and should be within one greater Hobart Council. So I say go for four new councils - Greater Hobart and three regional areas - D'Entrecasteaux, SouthEast Coast and Central Lakes.

Thankyou for the opportunity to comment.

PORT ARTHUR,
TAS. 7182.

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Dear Panel

I think amalgamation of the metropolitan councils is a great idea providing it reduces costs and improves services to all ratepayers.

The State Government should legislate that any new amalgamated Council must reduce rates by say 10% for the next 5 years and maintain the existing level of service. This would establish the credibility of the amalgamation process and would mean that any efficiency dividend would be returned directly to ratepayers by way of reduced costs. Ratepayers can't afford another incompetent and wasteful rationalisation process as occurred with the new Water Authorities nor should ratepayers accept any robbing of savings achieved by the State Government.

Amalgamation of Councils to include the rural councils seems to be a much more complex issue. On one hand small rural councils are certainly very responsive to local concerns but they lack resources and funding. For example, the road from Campania to Native Corners carries more traffic than any 'b' road in Southern Midlands. Unfortunately it still has some 4 km of dangerous gravel surface which is narrow and substantially pot-holed. This road is used by over 300 cars and trucks per day as well as a school bus. The council was responsive in agreeing to upgrading part of this road in 2010 but has been unable to fund the bitumening to Howletts Rd which is where the school bus terminates. The question is would this outer-suburban/rural road have more chance of being completed under a 'Greater Hobart Council'?

The other concern is that road infrastructure proposals for say, the stalled Cambridge bypass and the Richmond bypass, have as much impact on Campania and Colebrook residents as they do on local residents but we are rarely consulted. The same applies to road changes in Hobart where we have no voice even though they impact on us as users quite considerably. We also have problems with public transport where the current Hobart CBD centric model makes it difficult to shop in say Sorell which is more of a hub for many residents. I suspect these problems will continue under the Council Amalgamation models presented.

I also suspect the Southern Midlands Council would find it difficult to compete with a 'greater Hobart Council' for Federal and State funding and I suspect it may be even more difficult for outer-suburban/rural residents to have their voice heard on issues such as road and water infrastructure.

At the same time it might be expected that the State Government may 'dump' more unfunded responsibilities onto local government which would mean even more problems for a small rural council.

Under these circumstances where the outcome is very unclear, many residents of outer-suburban/rural areas are unsure if amalgamation will be in any way beneficial.

Campania Tas 7026

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Hello, I think the 'Greater Hobart' plan seems the best option.

My priorities are savings in not duplicating services and rural communities retaining some control.

The 'Status Quo with Shared Services' sounded good except it stated that 'there are few examples in Aust where robust and long term shared services have been achieved'.

I think the 'Single Council' would be too big.

With the 'Separate Eastern and Western Shores...' option I don't believe the eastern and western shores of Hobart are different communities really. That option stated that there would be a significant amount of upheaval for limited cost savings.

Regards,

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After considering the 4 options we have decided on the Greater Hobart plan because It reduces the duplication of services more cohesive central administration centre better provision of services to all areas.

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Dear Sirs,

Although I agree in theory to the amalgamation of all southern councils, I am sceptical of savings gained. I am also surprised there was no mention of a Kingborough/Huon Valley Council amalgamation. If Huon Valley took over rural Kingborough, how would the council pay for infrastructure such as bridges ? Surely their rate base wouldn't cover such a huge cost. My suggestions on amalgamation would be: Hobart & Glenorchy, Huon & Kingborough, Sorell & Tasman and Brighton & Derwent Valley.

In the first instance, Hobart and Glenorchy should test the waters of public opinion, to see if any cost savings are made.
yours sincerely

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Hello Panel

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment.

I suggest there are only 2 options, 2 and 4, that should be seriously considered.

Reducing 12 to 5 Councils in Option 2 is likely to be more agreeable to the different communities represented.

Maintaining the status quo would be going backwards and counterproductive.

All the best in your considerations.

Regards

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Hi

I am writing to express my view of Option 2 in the STCA discussion process.

Tasmania is too small to have anything else than Option 2.

regards

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Dear Chairman,

Quite clearly the fewer councils we have in Tasmania the better economic sense it makes. For a State of 500,000 3 or 4 properly managed and resourced councils should be more than enough.

The duplication, waste of resources, inability to reach economies of scale let alone the high cost to both the citizens and the business community make amalgamation essential.

In the proposed amalgamation area one council with strategically located depots for plant & equipment is all that is needed. In these modern days (and hopefully when we have the new high-speed broadband network) the need to visit council chambers in person for such things as planning meetings, will be able to be done on line or via video conferencing.

I strongly urge your panel to make the brave recommendation to amalgamate all the proposed councils into one! I am sure there can be little argument from an economic point of view that this is the best option.

Sadly, I am sure the usual vested interests and political expediency will inevitably dictate that nothing is done, as usual in Tasmania!

Respectfully,

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Hi,

Firstly, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the future directions of southern Councils in Tasmania. As a former Queensland local government worker and having recently relocated to Tasmania, this is an issue that I feel quite strongly about. Before moving to Tasmania I worked for xxxxxxxx City Council in North Queensland. In 2008 xxxxxxxx and xxxxxxxx City Councils were amalgamated, and through this process I believe I have learnt a lot about Local Government structure and governance.

I strongly believe that Southern Tasmania should be governed by one single local government entity. The current structure of having 12 local government municipalities oversee a population of just 260,000 people (with Tasman Council having just 2,500 ratepayers) is laughable, and most certainly a waste of public funds. Some of the benefits of having one single Council entity govern the whole of Southern Tasmania include:

Economies of scale would undoubtedly be achieved by merging Councils. The overlap in the number of staff and elected members alone – not to mention physical resources, buildings, plant and equipment – would result in significant operating cost reductions.

Larger Local Government areas would force Councils to have a broader perspective on 'local' issues rather than getting caught up in small down politics and personal agendas. A broader perspective in the context of the wider Southern region would facilitate better planning, development and community outcomes and encourage business growth and investment.

A single Southern Tasmanian Council would provide a stronger, more credible and unified voice to the Federal Government when lobbying for funding and resources

Many would argue that the one Council for the whole of the Southern region would be "too large" for one Council to handle, and that local services would be reduced. In my experience with amalgamation in Queensland, local services can still be easily and cost effectively maintained by keeping depots in regional areas using existing Council buildings, staff and equipment – cost savings would be achieved by managing depots centrally and sharing resources rather than duplicating efforts.

This is just a quick summary of my views on the topic of reducing the number of Councils in Southern Tasmania. I would be more than happy to provide further input should it be of use to the Independent Panel.

Kind regards,

Dodges Ferry

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I would like to register my preference for a separate Eastern & Western Shores for Hobart and Regional Amalgamation.

Thank you

Bellerive 7018

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Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Wastage of Taxpayers Monies

I have relocated here from Western Australia but I am extremely concerned by the wastage of Taxpayers monies in this State.

My husband I live in Tarooma (we have bought a home here) but notice there is an awful lot of money spent on the youth in this area which I might add is continually vandalised by the same while our local roads and parks are sadly neglected.

To make matters worse we are funding 12 councils to administer 250,000 people and compare this with the Brisbane City Council that looks after 1 million ratepayers.

To say the least I am very concerned at this unnecessary expense I am witnessing.

Yours sincerely

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I wholly support the creation of a single southern tasmanian council. Frankly I consider this to be a no-brainer. The main obstacle to mergers in the past has been politics not practicalities. Aside from the economies of scale I support the idea because I believe a larger council will be more democratic. The current size of our councils makes them very low profile and as a result almost nobody knows their councilors. A larger council will allow issues to be properly presented in the local media most of which is state wide.

Call a spade a spade. Only a fool would suggest that Clarence and Glenorchy and Kingborough are not part of Hobart. Most of us live in one council and work in or travel through another.

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The fore - runner to the current Local Government Areas were established with road districts in 1906. The current LGA arrangements are hopelessly outdated. We need to have one LGA covering southern Tasmania reflecting the transport and communications arrangements for this century. We also need to deliver local services more efficiently and avoid duplication across the south of the state.

West Hobart TAS 7000
Australia

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TO: Independent Panel

I have lived in the three of the council areas involved in this assessment, and each of them had weak and strong areas of delivery of services.

I believe that one strong council, full amalgamation of all concerned councils, would deliver all those in the areas concerned a better, stronger service in all ways.

Sincerely yours

currently living in Clarence City Council area.

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Hello - having moved from Brisbane some years ago where there's of course one council providing what seems to be reasonable services, I've been consistently perplexed by the huge number of local councils in Tasmania. One single council seems to be a good idea; second option for me would be a greater Hobart council. Good opportunities for better collaboration, consistencies, economies of scale...given the population involved then anything less is indefensible. If people are concerned about lack of access then perhaps a service-sharing agreement with state government services (eg, via Service Tasmania?) could be easily arranged. Any "problems" created by amalgamation could be easily dealt with and I'm sure 5 years after the event no-one even remember what those so-called problems were.

Congratulations on starting such a good conversation.

Regards

Sandy Bay

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment as follows:

To the Independent Panel

As a ratepayer in three of the Councils mentioned on the options paper, I see no evidence that any changes to the status quo will reduce rates or improve services.

I have survived two Council amalgamations and the result was increased rates and poorer service as an outcome. What is missing in the equation is the need to impose rigour on Councils in terms of financial and service performance. It is my misfortune to observe, year by year, the Tasmanian CPI increase by a modest 2-3% annually while Council rates rise well in excess of CPI. My Hobart rates climbed 7.5% between 2010/2011 and 2011/2012, for example. I have not received improved services as a result of that increase. In the case of

private enterprise, those companies that fail to achieve appropriate outcomes suffer at the hands of their shareholders. In Federal and State Government, political parties pay the cost of poor management by losing elections. It seems that Local Government is largely immune from these risks.

It is a fact, that the 12 Councils included in the study charge a typical ratepayer, quite different rates. Some charge more, some less for an equivalent service. It follows that some Councils are more efficient in managing their resources than others or they are better placed to achieve better outcomes. Size of Council does not seem to be a determining factor. Therefore, proposals that suggest that significant financial savings will occur as a result of, say, adopting Option 2, 3 or 4, will not necessarily follow. As in the case of the Spring Bay and Glamorgan amalgamation, Spring Bay rates rose, partly due to the cost of infrastructure and motor vehicle assets required to service the larger Council area. Costs were not, apparently, offset by greater productivity in other areas.

An example of lack of financial rigour. Councils no longer manage water and sewerage assets, yet I am unaware of any of the 12 Councils reducing the number of Councillors as a result of reduced functions. Indeed, it seems that Councils are introducing other fixed charges to boost their revenue toward the position that existed pre water and sewerage obligations, times. Hobart City Council now has a specific charge for "Storm Water Services", Landfill Rehabilitation" over an above their general rate that wasn't there before the loss of the water and sewerage functions. Their "Waste Management Service Charge" has more than doubled since last year. Glamorgan Spring Bay has included a medical charge as a component of its rating system. As a person who leases a jetty site on the Prosser River, apart from the minimum vacant land rate, I am now charged a fire service levy, a waste transfer fee and a medical levy on a 2m² patch of land leased from the State. Of course this same Council would argue that their rates have not increased dramatically but in reality, they have.

Determining which option would provide the best outcome for ratepayers is beyond me to determine. I personally believe that natural selection has worked in nature and should work with Councils and that the existing Councils be made to meet certain financial and service criteria and those that fail, be required to amalgamate with those that do meet the criteria.

What I want to see is that, whatever option is determined; it comes with caveats that impose financial and service obligations on Councils as per:

Rates will be reduced by x% following the decision.

Future rate charges will not rise beyond CPI without specific authority and then any increase to be based on a demonstrated unforeseen need.

Minimum service standards to be laid down and applied.

Should amalgamation be decided upon, reintroduction of the ward system to be adopted, to ensure ratepayers can exercise some control over their local elected candidates and ultimately, have some control over what occurs in their town or region.

I would like to begin by emphasising that the following is my own personal view, not that of my employer, or groups, committees in which I participate. However it is prefaced by 36 years experience within the state and local government.

The STCA is to be commended on having the foresight in pre-empting this debate, driving rather than being reactionary to outside influences. In the past 25 years local government has been subject to forced amalgamations, intervention in planning, and the more recent water and sewer reforms. Suffice to say, there are lessons to be learned from each of these reforms.

Before commenting on the 4 proposals being presented I would offer the following. There may have been discussions/debates that we, the general public, are not privy to, which cuts to the core of any proposal. On the surface it appears that the primary driver for change is economic sustainability. But this opens the question, sustainability to do what? Or to put it more bluntly, what is local government? What services will council's deliver into the future?

It appears that post water and sewer reform, councils are faced with 2 challenges. One being economic, with the loss of this revenue stream, the second is one of identity, dealing with a transition from infrastructure service organisations, roads water and rubbish, towards community services. The loss, or take up of new services is nothing new. In the past Hobart has been responsible for a slaughter house, tramways, gas, and at one time a police force. What is clear is that local government is a continual evolving entity, driven by the needs and aspirations of its community. In essence local government is about doing. Doing what its community requires to deliver and sustain their environment.

Which brings us to one of the key points out of the community survey. The loss of identity. Irrespective of whatever model local government evolves into, if it fails to be responsive to the varying communities, then it will cease to be "Local Government". Interestingly, all of the options proposed are either a continuum of the status quo in respect to the fundamental structure, One elected body, one supporting bureaucracy. Acknowledging that option one does nothing but formalises another tier. So the question comes to mind, were other options considered? For example, shared services have been put on the table, also the single mega council option. By your own admission shared services rarely work, but what if the 12 councils remained, supported by a single bureaucracy?

Whilst on the subject of shared services, I find the paper on Asset Management interesting, particularly as it takes a service in isolation. It is undeniable that there are savings to be made in standardisation, sharing of services and expertise, having a single asset management system. But in an operational sense asset management does not run in isolation. It is dependant upon other systems,

finance, GIS, Customer requests to name 3. Similarly other council business outcomes are dependant on asset management. For example a section 337 certificate. Tracing the information requirements to answer a section 337 certificate is a worthwhile exercise as it demonstrates the inter related nature of council business processes and information systems.

Continuing on shared services, what is its definition, or context in this debate? Is it services such as pay role, HR, backbone IT, or are we entering into a shared expertise arrangement? I ask these questions as one of the key differential currently between councils is the in house capabilities. For example within the GIS sphere, it is recognised that the level of in house expertise and understanding is on a sliding scale from the larger to the smaller councils. The lowest denominator being next to nothing.

The due diligence undertaken for the for the water and sewer reform, at least the parts and I was involved in, and the information provided, focused on legal and financial aspects of the business. Not the business outcomes, processes and information requirements to deliver those outcomes. The points I'm making, when reform occurs it is backed by a clear transitional plan that provides for all aspects of the business.

Much is made of the identified savings, \$100M, but what of the transitional costs? Have they been identified for each option? How will they be financed? And let's not mince words, this will be job losses of what, 200- 250 positions. Given the economic position of the state can we afford to add this number to the dole cues? Or can you identify which sectors will pick up this resource, and in what time frames? And then the question of redundancies, and where would they be funded?

I must admit that I found almost humorous the concept that Council's would divest service provision to, or enter into partnership with the state government,, particularly given the current fiscal position of the state government, their cut and burn approach to saving, and a history of handing responsibility for services delivery to local government. I'm not saying that what is suggested wont work, just pointing out that it a complete cultural change at 2 tiers of government.

Notwithstanding the above, I am pro reform, and support a reduction in the number of councils, which is inevitable. Of the options proposed whilst I believe that long term the mega council will provide more benefits the political ramifications may be its downfall. That in the current climate either option 3 or 4 is preferable, but with a continuum and expansion of the STCA as resource and lobby group for regional issues, and as a conduit or the sharing of knowledge and resources. But the transition must be within a plan that clearly defines "Local Government" the services being provided, how and by what mechanisms. Not just legislative change and fiscal arrangements.

PS. Where does the LGAT fit, what is their role, what should be their role ?

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The Panel Members,

I am pleased to have the opportunity to give Feedback to the proposed changes of Southern Tasmania. I live in the Kingborough Council and I am dissatisfied with the present situation. It is considered by many people that too many of past and present councillors have a personal agenda being on the Council.

My preference is for the "Greater Hobart" plan which I believe would give more transparency, greater efficiency and bring us into line with other Australia-wide councils providing a much higher professional status than the present situation. We need to become much more progressive with young forward- thinking members and far less parochial which unfortunately is the norm in Tasmania.

Kind regards,

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To the Independent Panel Reviewing Local Government Boundaries

My preference is for a single southern Tasmanian regional Council and ultimately 3 Tasmanian Councils. There may be an argument for 5 Councils using the same electoral boundaries as the Commonwealth and State House of Assembly but my preference is ultimately for 3 Tasmanian Council and a single state-wide advisory body appointed from elected members of each Council.

As a transition towards the single southern Council I would suggest that, in the interim and for a period of no more than 10 years, there be separate eastern and western shores for Hobart with an amalgamation of the regions as outlined in option 4.

The reason for this submission is that there will need to be an analysis of services, assets and liabilities; a decommissioning of many buildings and an amalgamation of services, equipment and personnel. Having in essence two urban and one regional Council will enable each of the three southern Councils to progress towards a single southern Council. During this period there will be economies of scale in terms of services and theoretically improved efficiency and less duplication.

More importantly it will be an opportunity to find out what aspects of amalgamation are successful and can be adapted for the final merger into a single southern Council. It will be an opportunity for all those working in planning areas to develop plans for the transition and give effect to these. Both the knowledge and skills gained will enable informed appointments of proven applicants to be made once the transition is made to a single southern council. It will enable a thorough analysis of what services are required in the community and the personnel required to operate these services.

During the transition there will be an obligation to transfer all permanent staff to the new entities. Given the labour market in Tasmania is likely that there will be little loss of employees through natural attrition. Reliance on redundancies would be an expensive and wasteful exercise which could jeopardize community support for the amalgamation. As the role of Council changes from providing water and sewerage to community services there will need to be commensurate training programs to re-skill staff and the opportunity for staff to elect to transfer to work in newer service areas without loss of entitlements.

There was an implied criticism of the single southern Council option based on its geographic size and the distance from the "seat of power". This centralist notion needs to be abandoned. There is no reason why existing council buildings can't be decommissioned and become hubs for local communities, combining Council services and other services such as Medicare and Centrelink delivered locally along with health centres and cultural and recreational facilities.

There is an aging demographic in Tasmania and housing affordability and supply has led to a lack of access to appropriate housing and inequities in the housing market. Part of decommissioning Council buildings could involve adapting buildings for youth, for the homeless, for single people and the aged with different models of supported and serviced housing. This could be a quasi private model with tenants able to have portion of rents paid allocated to shares in a housing fund which would give them some equity in the properties held.

The fragmentation of Councils has meant that regional Councils do not have a sufficient rate payer base yet have large geographic areas with diverse industries which need roads, bridges and other infrastructure. The amalgamation of Councils would allow some cross subsidization from urban to regional areas.

I consider that the current fragmentation into some 29 Councils is wasteful and unnecessary. People do place a value of living in identifiable localities and value "local" identity but there is no reason why this cannot be preserved by having service hubs in identifiable localities but an over arching single state wide planning authority and ultimately 3 Tasmanian Councils.

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I am supportive of major amalgamations.

Hence I would support either SINGLE SOUTHERN TASMANIAN REGIONAL COUNCIL or SEPARATE EASTERN & WESTERN SHORES FOR HOBART AND REGIONAL AMALAGAMATIONS.

We must reduce the number of councils in the state significantly and seek greater efficiencies and synergies.

Battery Point, Tas, 7004

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Structural Options to Improve Local Government in Southern Tasmania

Thank you for providing the opportunity for Metro to provide feedback and comment on the review of structural options to improve local government in Southern Tasmania.

Metro Tasmania Pty Ltd

The principle objective of Metro (as defined in the Metro Tasmania Act, 1997) is to provide, road passenger transport services in Tasmania and to operate those services in a manner consistent with sound commercial practice.

Metro provides a broad range of urban passenger transport bus services and bus stop infrastructure within Hobart, Launceston and Burnie. The Company also operates a number of non-urban services delivered under individual route contracts specified within service contracts between it and the Transport Commission located in the Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources (DIER) (on behalf the State Government).

Metro currently runs urban bus services within five local authority areas within Hobart (Brighton, Glenorchy, Hobart, Kingborough and Clarence), three within the Burnie (Waratah-Wynyard, Burnie and Central Coast) and three within Launceston (Launceston, West Tamar, and Meander Valley). In addition, non-urban services within Huon Valley, Southern Midlands and Central Highlands are provided.

Structural Options

Engaging with Tasmanian Councils as key stakeholders to understand and improve relationships has been identified as a strategy in Metro's Corporate Plan. However as noted above, the Company currently has to engage with eight Councils in Southern Tasmania in regard to the provision and operation of our services. Having to deal with this number of Councils makes ideal engagement difficult and improving relationships complicated, as each Council tends to have its own strategic goals, governance structures, processes and procedures.

Consequently, Metro supports a simpler local government structure with fewer Councils. Logically only having to engage with a lesser number of Councils would be more efficient both at a strategic and operational level and easier to co-ordinate related activities such as installing new bus stops.

There would inevitably be a number of benefits and or positive operational outcomes for Metro arising from a simpler local government structure. A reduced number of Councils to work with should improve efficiency, provide a clearer system of governance, help eliminate duplication and reduce costs. However, Metro would not like to see any change in structure leading to an increase in the Council rates currently paid.

Structural Options Project
Southern Tasmanian Councils Authority GPO Box 503
HOBART 7001

14th September 2011

Submission to the Independent Expert Panel

The Property Council of Australia (Tasmania) welcomes the continued discussion on reform of Southern Tasmanian Councils as the current structure and mentality of local government cannot be allowed to remain unchallenged or reformed.

Tasmania is at a crossroad, economically and socially. It is time for Tasmania to break the shackles that tie the state into an unhealthy dependency on federal funding. It is also time for Tasmania to commit to microeconomic reform to build a healthier future for the state. The Property Council is part of the property industry, which the AEC Group Report into the Significance of the Property Industry to the Tasmanian Economy identified as the largest private sector industry in the state.

45,421 Tasmanians or 23.9 per cent of the State's total workforce are employed across the sectors that make up the Tasmanian property industry. An industry which has been dealing with the vagaries of 29 councils and 281 politicians, as well as, dealing with the increasing cost burden of local government.

Some \$587 million in 2009/10 was paid out in council fees and charges with the burden of that cost being in the greater Hobart area, equating to \$254 million or 43.3 per cent .

Yet service delivery capacity across the state, indeed the southern region has not increased, and in fact in many cases has decreased in the face of increasing rates.

It has been the long standing view of the Property Council and the industry that the structure of local government requires serious and sustained reform; reform which is not captive to the politics of local government but is squarely focused on providing increased benefits for the Tasmanian community which local government services.

It is fair to argue that unless local government reform is actualised then; reforming other economic sectors is not achievable. As the Property Council has publicly stated, the status quo of 12 Councils in the south is neither sustainable, desirable nor supported by industry.

In the recently released Property Council commissioned August 2011 Deloitte Access Economics report into Local Government Structural Reform, figures of up to 35 per cent efficiency gains or some \$110 million annual savings in the aggregate cost of administering local government across the region were identified.

In addition, characteristic of Tasmania's councils coupled with the experiences of past reforms suggest that, if well conceived and effectively managed, efficiency gains in the order of 10 – 20 per cent of operating expenses are achievable from local government structural reform in Tasmania.

These figures cannot be ignored because it means that for the Tasmanian community, the projected savings can and should lead to increased service delivery capacity i.e. better roads, better community services, better cycle ways and better public open spaces. In essence, local government would be in a position to drive and generate economic activity. Local government reform which leads to this outcome ultimately leads to an increase in productivity and capacity.

Furthermore, savings could and should also lead to either a freezing of rates or a decrease in the rate burden to the Tasmanian community and the property industry, thereby addressing in part the cost of living and the cost of doing business in this state which is the underlying cause of our lack of competitiveness.

As part of this submission the Property Council attaches the Deloitte Access Economics Report into Local Government Structural Reform for the Panel's consideration and potential economic modelling.

It is worth highlighting that as part of the Deloitte research we asked for an investigation of resource sharing as a potential reform measure. The report is unequivocal in its assessment that resource sharing alone will not bring about the efficiency gains that are required.

This supports the Property Council's position that resource sharing is aimed at cutting front line staff who are intrinsic to increased service delivery rather than tackling the governance and administrative areas where the Deloitte report reveals 30 – 40 per cent saving can be achieved.

That assessment supports the Property Council's position that Option 1, status quo with resource sharing is not desirable nor will be supported.

As for the other three options, the Property Council is of the strong opinion that clear economic modelling needs to be presented to validate each of the options.

While the Southern Tasmanian Council Authority's (STCA) Report Towards improved local government in southern Tasmania: A review of structural reform options indicates the potential social and economic benefits of the proposed models, there are no definite cost savings presented and therefore social benefits in terms of increased service delivery and equality is hard to quantify .

The Property Council's position as articulated at the Independent Panel meeting and our public position is that reform should meet the following performance indicators:

- The current structure of 12 councils, 120 councillors, 12 administrative centres and 15 extra organisations created to assist in the coordination of the 12 councils should be significantly cut;
- Structural reform should achieve a 10 – 35 per cent efficiency gain;
- With the projected efficiency gains a clear indication of the rate decreases and/or rate freeze period should be provided with each model;
- What increase in service delivery capacity could be achieved through the efficiency gains; and
- What transparency and accountability measures should be placed on the model to ensure that the consumer is front and centre in local government priorities.

The current options do not provide these empirical benchmarks as part of the justification for the models and from the Property Council's perspective without the those benchmarks being addressed decision over which model is the best for the southern Tasmanian community is difficult to ascertain.

It is assumed that the single regional model would provide, according to the Deloitte Access Economics report the efficiency gains of up to 35 per cent, however, it would be good to have the Independent Panel verify that this is the outcome of their modelling as well. In conclusion, the Property Council remains committed to working with the STCA and the Independent Panel on achieving local government reform because Tasmania and Tasmanians deserve better than our current unsustainable, inefficient local government structure.

Yours sincerely

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What is good about the current system of local government:

- 1 ratepayer funds are spent in the local area
- 2 council staff are local and accessible

Why change is needed:

- 1 there are far too many councillors for the size of the population
- 2 there are far too many council staff for the size of the population and budget
- 3 too much duplication of services and management
- 4 local government is too expensive for the services provided
- 5 regional level management is good for consistent branding, tourism, planning

What changes need to happen:

- 1 Councils need to be combined
- 2 Fewer elected councillors
- 3 Councillors still represent small areas eg boroughs
- 4 Services, offices, staff and plant and equipment are rationalised (staff reduced by natural attrition over time)

What structure would best allow those changes to occur:

- 1 Form a Greater Hobart council combining the urban/residential areas of Hobart, Glenorchy, Clarence, Brighton and Kingborough
- 2 Form a Southeast Regional council comprising the rural parts of Clarence, Sorell, Glamorgan-Spring Bay and Tasman
- 3 Form a Southern Regional council comprising the rural parts of Kingborough and Huon
- 4 Form a Derwent Regional council comprising Derwent Valley and Central Highlands
- 5 Maintain local work centres, utilising existing council infrastructure - eg in the Southeast Regional council - the main office would be located at Sorell but there would be work centres with local staff and local functions maintained at Nubeena, Triabunna/Orford, Swansea and Bicheno
- 6 Parts of Southern Midlands could be

I sincerely hope you will consider my suggestion of 4 councils even though it was not suggested by the Independent Panel - I believe it captures the the best features and the fewest disadvantages out of all the proposed models.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important discussion.

Sandy Bay

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Panel Members

Firstly thank you for giving the public the opportunity to comment on your proposals.

I have found it interesting that you have presented only three alternative to the status quo. Clearly there are other options.

BACKGROUND

About a decade ago there was a state government initiative designed to rationalise the number of councils in Tasmania. This study also looked at boundary adjustments. For example, it was proposed that the suburb of Taroona should be transfer to the Hobart City Council. This was a logical move given the demographic and physical location of the area. This argument is equally valid today and there may well be others.

The creation of the three water and sewage authorities in Tasmania was driven in the main because of the poor asset management skills of the councils and in particular the smaller councils. In addition the latter could not fund their capital works.

For councils to be effective a critical mass of well trained and skilled personnel is essential. Small rural councils do not have the capacity to support this level of professionalism and more than likely the do not have the skills to act as 'competent clients' when dealing with consultants.

The Hobart, Clarence and Kingborough councils have long histories and well established council offices and depot infrastructure. The modern Kingborough facility is less than 10 years old. To suggest amalgamation of these councils in the light of the 'water and sewage'

changes would be politically difficult. Any argument for such a change would have to be compelling and demonstrate material cost savings.

The relative 'roles and responsibilities' of councils vs federal and state governments seems to be an ever moving feast. Coupled with this are the arguments in support of either centralisation or decentralisation. Clearly there is not just one right 'mix of local government' for Tasmania. It is suggested that given the nature of Tasmanians a council model favouring decentralisation would prevail.

ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL

The following option is proposed as an alternative to those proposed by the panel. The proposal is based on the need to rationalise small local councils for the reasons outlined above and is considered to be a pragmatic option that would be accepted by the greater community.

Greater Kingborough Council

Take over the responsibility of all councils south of Kingston.

The suburb of Tarooma would be transferred to Greater Hobart.

Greater Hobart

Responsible for western shore from Tarooma to Granton.

Responsible for areas covered by the Brighton and Midlands council (Alternatively Brighton and Midlands councils could be added to the New Derwent Valley Council defined below.)

Greater Clarence

Eastern shore areas south of Brighton.

Tasman peninsular and East Coast Councils.

New Derwent Valley Council

Responsible for areas along the Derwent River north of Bridgewater Bridge and including Central Highlands Council.

Small rural communities that lose their local government status could still be represented effectively through the development and support of 'local progress associations'.

PLANNING IS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE

A statewide planning scheme that protects high value farm land and prevents ribbon development is highly desirable in Tasmania and for that matter the whole of Australia.

I trust that these comments are of use.

Kindest Regards

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To whom it may concern,

As a long term local government employee of nineteen years, I thought my view on proposed council mergers might be valued. This process is just the latest volley in a sustained attack on local government and its employees. In 1998 Tasmanian councils fought off an attempt of the then Liberal state government to force amalgamations, resulting in them losing office. The next phase was in the form of the takeover of sewer and water utilities, affectively taking a large asset base from local government. This latest attempt at mergers could be seen as a direct link to the fiscal weakening of the council's position with the creation of Southern Water.

I believe many people working in local government do so because they value employment in a community based non profit environment, often with lower rates of pay than are available in higher tiers of government or private sectors. This connection with government to the community on a local level is becoming more important in an ageing and alienated community. The council boundaries as they stand in Tasmania, a state which has some of the earliest colonial settlements have many historic and generational traditions.

On reading the 'proposed options' paper I was surprised to see there was no option to leave the councils as they are. The 'options' being pushed by this process seem to encourage a greater Hobart urban council and separate rural councils. This view seems based on a populist view that capital cities should somehow be separate entities than their broader communities. However Hobart is a small city surround by a large rural area, evidenced by the fact that Hobart residents are subject to many Federal programs only available to regional Australia. In an era that 'food miles' are becoming a serious issue and young people are leaving primary industry on mass, councils that have a both rural and urban interests should be congratulated and encouraged.

If I had to choose from the 'options' available my list would be as follows in order of preference

Option 1 – Status Quo

Option 4 – East/West

Option 3 – Greater Hobart

Option 2 – Single Council

As suggested previously I feel any changes if they are to happen should be decided by the councils themselves involving open and transparent consultation with ratepayers, staff and aldermen. The reporting of this STCA process to the media is also of some concern, the announcement of stats and sentiment of respondents before the closing of submissions is unprofessional in the extreme.

Yours Sincerely

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Lindisfarne TAS 7015

Independent Panel

Via email: independentpanel@netspace.net.au

To the Chair of the Panel,

I am not supportive of option 2 and option 3 of your paper. My preference is for option 1. Option 4 should only be considered only after a full cost benefit analysis is completed, which looks at such issues as: governance and local representation, accountability to ratepayers, efficiencies, possible transition costs and the like.

My reasons are as follows:

The importance of Clarence and the Eastern Shore:

- Local representation and identity is important. If Clarence City Council were to become part of a single Southern Council (option 2) or part of a Greater Hobart Council (option 3) then local issues will be given much lesser weight. Hobart City issues will dominate given their greater concentration of business and ratepayers.
- Clarence City Council and the Eastern Shore have a unique identify. It has developed differently from Hobart as a more urban suburb.

Rationale for amalgamation:

- The rationale (goals) for amalgamation put in your paper squarely focuses on considerations relating to perceptions of poorer service standards and inefficiencies involved with smaller Councils.
- What this ignores is that local government has traditionally focused on democratic values, such as advocacy and responsiveness to local interests, and accountability. These are essentially discounted in your paper.
- Larger Council's, such as Clarence City Council are able to provide cost effective services, while maintaining local representation.

Improved advocacy and representation of the region:

- I do not believe local Councils should become an equivalent tier to the State Government, as would occur under option 2.
- Under the greater Hobart option 3, Clarence will lose its voice with the Council dominated by Hobart City Council issues.
- Bigger Councils will mean that it will be more expensive for candidates to run and it will be more likely that party politics will come to dominate because it will be even more expensive to run a campaign (they will avoid spending levels by commencing a campaign before the official time line begins) – again, the Brisbane City Council has all Aldermen aligned with a political party.
- Minority groups, women, younger people, will find it even harder to get onto Council.

Improving efficiency and eliminating duplication:

- The Water reforms demonstrate that having three regions has not yet resulted in efficiencies of service delivery (the opposite could be argued) and reductions in costs to ratepayers. While the reform might have been necessary, amalgamation is not a panacea.

- Having one Council is not the only way to achieve more consistent planning decisions. State Government reforms in this area will deliver more consistency while local representation is maintained. The State reforms include Regional Planning process will develop strategies for the North-West, North and South, a common template for planning schemes, and the common building standard.
- Southern Council's are already working together on planning and other issues where there are real opportunities for savings.

Saving money:

- Bigger Councils are not necessarily going to be better at saving money. Savings to ratepayers will only be realised if fiscal restraint is maintained, which cannot be guaranteed. State Governments have not proven themselves to be better fiscal managers because they look after the whole State.
- Larger Councils will still face the same cost pressures – on power, water costs and the like – as smaller Councils.
- Larger Councils can increase rates well above inflation, as occurred with Brisbane City Council in 2009-10 and 2010-11 (5% increases each year). Even with a single Southern Council or greater Hobart Council we will not have the population size to spread the rates burden thereby reducing rates to levels equivalent to mega-Councils on the mainland. To advocate otherwise, would seem to be holding out false hope to ratepayers in times of financial uncertainty.
- A larger Council will mean that the Major and Aldermen will need to be paid more, and there will need to be enough to represent the interests of the community. Under option 2 Aldermen will be looking after the electorates of Franklin, Denison and parts of Lyons – pressure will soon build for allowance increases. Under option 3 a similar scenario of allowances increasing and soon absorbing governance savings could arise.
- Most commentators agree that reducing the number of elected representatives in State Parliament has resulted in less efficient decision making and a growth in unelected support staff, which has not lead to governance savings. Why would the scenario be any different under your proposed option 2?
- Reduction of existing Aldermen and Councillors allowances in recognition of the loss of responsibility for water infrastructure could make significant “governance savings” while maintaining local representation.

Improved community engagement:

- Democratic values, such as advocacy and responsiveness to local interests, and accountability should be given primacy in any decisions made on Council amalgamations.
- Larger Councils that merge rural Councils will result in rural Council interests potentially being ignored.
- Community engagement in Clarence is good as elected representatives are accessible and interested in local issues. Larger Councils with fewer elected representatives will not be able to provide the same level of community engagement.

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Dear Panel..

I would like to see Tasmania cut into three equal parts, each one to be represented by a single Council with the main Council Chambers geographically situated right bang in the middle of that area. I know it will not happen because we the people of Tasmania are too parochial to allow this to eventuate. If it could happen think of the economical benefits for that area. Perhaps something like Service Tasmania centres (if we could ever get the Government and Council working together for the Better of this State) could be set up in the more remote areas from the Council Chambers for the people without the internet or means of transport to communicate with the Council Offices.

Thanking you all for giving the People of Tasmania a chance to put their ideas forward for consideration.

Yours faithfully.

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From reading the responses it seems that an overwhelming majority of respondents favour a single council for Southern Tasmania including absorbing the Lab/Lib Government's failed Southern Water waste of money experiment back into the new single Council

Judging from the comments most ratepayers want the amalgamations to proceed swiftly, like in the next 6 months

So why isn't the question being put to all electors as a referendum on the issue at the coming local government election so we get a definite answer as to exactly what the majority of the people really want?

Tasmania doesn't more procrastination, studies, reports, commissions of inquiry, or costly time wasting bureaucratic paper shuffling while those with threatened power bases try to protect their existing little fiefdoms

Ratepayers are all being unnecessarily stressed financially by rapidly escalating cost increases often several times greater than the Government's official rate of inflation for Council Rates (with the exception of the efficiently run Brighton Council), and essential services for water, wastewater and electricity that are being used to prop up unnecessary money guzzling bureaucracies in the existing 12 power bases and the water and power GBE's

The general mood from my perception is the public want to see reductions in Rates and essential services charges now, not next year or the year after or in maybe 5 to 10 years

So Tasmania, what is holding this amalgamation back, let the people vote on it in next month's elections and then get on and implement the favoured option by the end of the year

I'm guessing that most of the aspiring Mayors, Deputy Mayors and Councilors hoping to be elected next month would face a very short term in office if the Council Amalgamation question was put to the vote next month

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Hobart Tas 7001

Dear Panel,

Having read the earlier public notification of the panel's work I had a few reservations about the independence of a panel selected by the S.T.C.A.

After thirty years of subdivision work and an interest in good planning, not just town planning, I believe I have some relevant comments to make :-

1. At the most superficial level, councils have been sharing resources both physical and intellectual for some years without much increase in efficiency. This is a “do nothing” option.
2. Reducing the excessive number of councils is desirable to provide administrative efficiencies which might be based on a minimum 70,000/municipality.
3. The real benefit to be obtained from reducing the number of councils from 29 to six or so (perhaps should be three, but politically difficult to achieve) is a reduction in the number of planning schemes in operation. It is simply difficult to obtain good professional planners willing to work in relatively small councils.

The result has been planning scheme provisions being over-ridden and confused with ad hoc (hopefully well meaning) policy by councillors lacking adequate expertise and assessment skills in deciphering frequently byzantine planning reports.

4. These many planning schemes which are not only unnecessarily “individualistic” but are frequently poorly drafted and constructed.

(by way of example I read a recent Supreme Court Judge’s comments that pretty much describes the problem ;

“AAD Nominees Pty Ltd v Resource Management and Planning Appeal Tribunal [2011] TASFC 5 (5 September 2011)

AAD NOMINEES PTY LTD v RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING APPEAL TRIBUNAL and KINGBOROUGH COUNCIL and PETER BEHRAKIS, VICTORIA ANN BEHRAKIS, DENNIS BEHRAKIS, MARIA BEHRAKIS and JOHN HAYES

REASONS FOR JUDGMENT FULL COURT

BLOW J

5 September 2011

2 I have read the reasons for judgment of Tennent J in draft form, and agree that this appeal should be dismissed, for the reasons stated by her. I would like to add some comments, mainly concerning the Kingborough Planning Scheme 2000. The full text of each of the relevant mind-numbing clauses is set out in her Honour's reasons for judgment, and I am very grateful for that.

3 The planning scheme is very complex, and exceedingly and unnecessarily difficult to comprehend or interpret. Most ordinary people would not have a chance. Most sensible people, or people with a life, would not attempt the task unless they had

absolutely no choice. In order to determine how the scheme operates in relation to the appellant's proposed development, it is practically essential to have a law degree, decades of experience in interpreting legal documents, a talent for understanding gobbledygook and misused words, a lot of time, and a very strong capacity for perseverance.

4 The appellant is proposing a large retail business development. The proposed site of that development is in the "Business and Civic" zone. One might think that the council would therefore have a discretion to permit the development. But it is not as simple as that."

This is not to imply any particular issue with Kingborough Council, but merely to illustrate that the same sentiments could be readily applied to many of the present planning schemes.

5. Numerous planning schemes are administratively expensive: Note steadily increasing flow in Tribunal and Supreme Court costs for planning matters for State Government and private business.

Marginal councils with indifferent planning schemes beget poor decision making often leading to later council's unable to fund rectification.

6. It is common to see smaller councils, apparently in competition with each other to have duplication of various zones for commercial and industrial sites almost within sight of each other – larger council areas might encourage a broader view.
7. It is apparently intended to draft three planning scheme templates to encompass the state. This is long overdue but logically should be implemented with a substantial reduction in councils. This combination would have to have a more positive economic outcome for a state that has suffered much complacency.

Yours faithfully.

Summary

Of the four spatial structures suggested by the consultants, I consider that the creation of a unit covering all 12 current LGAs is the only one which will provide an adequate spatial framework for the provision of strategic and statutory planning and public services; an efficient and adequate workforce with the capacity for a complex range of duties with appropriate working conditions, oversight and career prospects; economies of procurement; and financial viability. It is, I believe, the only structure which can be considered sustainable in the medium to long term, as distinct from a further short term tinkering with an unviable system.

However, I believe that a second local tier of governance is needed to ensure public inclusion and democratic participation, a focus for advocacy for local areas and perhaps local decision-making for some functions. There is much expert opinion and practical experience that suggest that such a two tier is essential for successful and sustainable metropolitan development. Fragmented jurisdictions, like those found in southern Tasmania to date severely compromise such things as holistic long term planning, providing sustainable infrastructure, utilities and services, building liveable communities and improving social equity, developing a viable local economy, and preserving important natural environments. At the same time they diminish public democratic involvement in local decision making. A two tier metropolitan governance system has the capacity to address many of these shortcomings.

Clearly this community tier of local government must also be sustainable in terms of governance structures, functional and financial capacity and communities interested in and capable of being involved. Given the capacity that local government has to be a continuing crucial element in our democracy I would expect the state government to be prepared to provide initial and probably ongoing financial support.

I explore these ideas in the following sections.

1. Functional regions for Local Government

Most academics and many practitioners with an interest in local government have long advocated functional regions as the appropriate basis for local government. By functional region they mean an area defined by intense social and economic interaction which is typically focused on an urban area and incorporates the area around it. An important scale of functional region incorporates both the origin and destination of nearly all journeys to work, and usually journeys to school and for shopping. A rather larger region may be defined which in addition incorporates typically 'higher order' functions requiring less frequent travel, such as wholesale delivery, and occasional major shopping and social interactions. While the boundaries of all such regions are usually blurred, the integrity of the region as a whole is clear.

In the case of Southern Tasmania, the journey to work region is best defined by Greater Hobart, which extends from rather beyond the towns of Sorell, Richmond, Brighton, New Norfolk and Kingston. The relatively easy accessibility from all parts of this region to the central city and to most other parts of the metropolitan region means that social and economic interactions are high and many locational decisions, such as choosing a place for a home or business, are made within the framework of the entire region and have an impact throughout the region. The larger region based on higher order functions is well defined as 'Southern Tasmania' as used for many state government and other purposes, a region which precisely incorporates the current 12 southern LGAs.

Of these two scales of functional region I strongly advocate the larger one covering all 12 LGAs in Southern Tasmania as a basis for a future local government system, despite the journey to work region of Greater Hobart having some attractive features. However, the advantages of this smaller metropolitan region as a local government area are totally outweighed by the lack of viability of the 'rural' remainder of the Southern Region whether envisaged as a single LGA or as several spatial units in terms of finance, managerial and professional capacity, a common sense of place or economic and social integration. Thus using metropolitan Hobart as a basis would lead to immediate or future problems of viability and capacity in the rest of the Southern Region. An additional disadvantage of the 'Greater Hobart' proposed in the discussion paper is that it excludes Sorell and the surrounding areas of potential urban growth, which runs counter to the rationale of an integrated functional region.

2. Land use planning and Southern Tasmania

The consultants suggest some of the strengths of the larger metropolitan or southern region as a basis for local government include economies of procurement and economies and capacity of management and employment. I acknowledge these and in addition wish to emphasise the importance of a larger region for strategic and statutory land use planning and to argue strongly that this should take place within the broader 'Southern Region', within which the journey to work region of 'Greater Hobart' would see a strong focus.

Most academics and practitioners recognise that an encompassing regional scale is essential for effective urban strategic land use planning and that the power to implement strategic land use plans and the associated statutory land use planning approval process must be integrated. If other arrangements are made planning is very likely to be piecemeal and reactionary rather than forward looking and strategic, while smaller units of local government almost inevitably compete for development as they pursue their own perceived self-interest.

State governments have taken over the planning role for many Australian metropolitan regions, while in Tasmania the past 40 years have been punctuated with failed attempts to achieve cooperation among metropolitan LGAs or to impose a higher authority in land use planning. The failure of these attempts has led to uncoordinated competition among LGAs and many poor outcomes in terms of the metropolitan area as a whole as well as state government playing an increasing role within the region, notably in water supply and planning.

Current attempts to improve the Tasmanian planning system, including a tightening of the relationship between broad and local scale strategic land use planning and statutory approval processes, the introduction of a Southern Region strategic land use plan and work on a capital city strategy as part of the COAG reform process all offer significant but long overdue opportunities for improved, more integrated and less competitive planning and development in the Southern Tasmania and especially in metropolitan Hobart.

It would be unfortunate not to use the reform of local government as an opportunity to integrate with and build on this work and to ensure that local government has major decision making powers within the Southern Region rather than these being assumed by government.

3. A case for a two-tier Local Government structure

As the consultants note, public inclusion and participation are likely to suffer if a single LGA is established for the entire Southern Region or indeed for Greater Hobart. For this reason I advocate a tier of local, place and community based governance in which public information exchange on local (and broader) matters and local participation can be developed. I envisage such communities being based, not on existing LGAs, but on individual towns and the areas immediately surrounding them. Experience elsewhere suggests that a spatially all-inclusive system with small-scale functional regions based on suburbs or towns and their surrounding rural areas is appropriate at this scale. Within these local units the existing sense of community integration, involvement and representation could be strengthened and the feeling of powerlessness reduced, while formal local democratic structures should reduce the need for intense wide-ranging, issue-specific political action on local matters by *ad hoc* pressure groups.

I know that there are various models for such local units, ranging from a body with few powers but with an important formal role in local advocacy to a formal democratic decision making process based on town hall public meetings, in which, for example, local communities may agree on the level of service they wish to purchase (above a required minimum) at a realistic price from the larger service providing tier. Communities may then become more aware of the link between the cost and the provision of services and become empowered to make explicit decisions about the quality they would like of the range of services, possibly including for example the extent of parks and open space, the frequency of rubbish collection or water supply. These community powers could perhaps extend to involvement in the development of local area plans and perhaps the location of different statutory planning zones within the local area.

A structure encouraging local involvement and empowerment may not be easy to implement, but it seems to be an essential step in the revitalisation of local government and in sustaining the widely recognised importance to democracy of this scale of community involvement.

4. Representation, governance and finance for local government

There are significant discussions to be had and decisions to be made about the political, administrative and financial structures in a revised local government system. I leave recommendations to others who have far more expertise in these areas than I do. I am clear, however, that the functions to be performed by local government authorities in different tiers, for example their political representation and power on the one hand and their responsibilities for services on the other are crucial elements in considering representation and governance.

The financial viability of an efficient local government system in southern Tasmania is also crucial and a range of funding models should be considered. Clearly unsatisfactory and ambiguous aspects of the rating system need to be addressed and difficult decisions made about the allocation of rates to different tiers of local government.

However, given the widely acknowledged importance to democracy of regional and local scales of governance, I believe that some continued financial support by state government should be considered within these to ensure the viability of local government in southern Tasmania and to help fund some of the regional structures which the state government may be able to transfer from its direct control. In addition, financial and other support from the state government should be available to help establish a revised system of local government.

5. Data for strategic planning and monitoring at regional and local scales

A sophisticated spatially based information system, integrating data from many sources and providing historical and indicative information at state, regional and local scales, is essential for effective monitoring, management and planning in all tiers of government and much private sector activity within Tasmania. Such a system of spatial data management appears to be being belatedly developed.

An essential backbone of such a data system with information on past trends and a capacity to model different scenarios for the future is official data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) – both the survey data provided at least once a year and usually more often, and the five-yearly Census. Among the many improvements in recent years to ABS data are recently revised boundaries for the presentation of data. I am quite clear, for reasons I consider below, that these boundaries, explicitly based on a hierarchy of functional regions, must be the basis of any data system developed and should be carefully considered and usually incorporated into any revisions of LGA boundaries. They would be essential in defining the regional or metropolitan level of government and an important consideration in delimiting the lower tier; monitoring change and planning the future is almost impossible without adequate, easily accessible data.

The new spatial data structure introduced by the ABS in mid-2011 provides four tiers of spatial data within the state based on functional regions based on different scales of social and economic interaction while maintaining population size at each tier which permit more data to be published than has been possible in the past without breaching the confidentiality constraints imposed on them by law. This structure overcomes the major shortcoming of the previous spatial framework, which used LGAs as a fundamental basis and had inherent problems of confidentiality severely restricting data published in the many smaller LGAs. Data for LGAs (both current and as they may change in the future) will continue to be provided but, depending on their size, they will continue to have confidentiality problems and will not necessarily mesh readily with other ABS geographical structures.

Within this new structure the boundary of Southern Tasmania (comprising the Hobart and South East Statistical Areas level 4) remains, although the metropolitan 'Hobart' area now extends beyond Sorell (at the expense of the South East Area) to reflect both Hobart's functional region as it now is and the area of likely metropolitan growth over coming decades. It seems to me to be essential that this extended area is considered as part of metropolitan Hobart's area within a revised local government structure and for strategic and statutory planning purposes.

6. Summary and conclusion

I have argued that a two tier local government structure in southern Tasmania based on functional regions can provide a framework best able to provide for local democratic representation, service provision and appropriate strategic and statutory land use planning into the future. Moreover, it may be a catalyst to reverse the tendency for state government to assume responsibility for some functions, which in the past have been the responsibility of local government but which now increasingly operate at a regional scale.

I consider the whole Southern Region, encompassing all 12 current LGAs should be the higher tier, and suburbs and urban centres and their surrounding rural hinterland the basis for the local community tier.

The new ABS spatial data units, based as they are on a hierarchy of functional regions, are an excellent and essential data base for planning and monitoring and should be carefully considered when determining the extent of local government areas, and ABS data, now more easily accessed than ever before, be extensively used in an integrated information system.

I hope that I will receive a detailed response to these suggestions, whether seen as appropriate or not, and I would welcome a chance to discuss these matters further.