



Local Government Legislation Review
Local Government Division
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TFGA Submission: Review of Tasmania's Local Government Legislation Framework

The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) is the leading representative body for Tasmanian primary producers. TFGA members are responsible for generating approximately 80% of the value created by the Tasmanian agricultural sector.

The TFGA appreciates the opportunity to make comment on the review of Tasmania's Local Government Legislation Framework.

The TFGA reached out to our members for their response on their Local Councils. The response from our members had good participation, responses from 13 of the 29 municipalities.

Minister Mark Shelton's *Reform Directions Paper* provides an overview of what the expectations of the change should be, allowing for more transparency, engagement with the community and having responsible and effective Councils, to name a few.

Agricultural landowners, under the Annual Assessed Value, are paying more Council rates compared to residential or urban constituents. For example, the Meander Valley Council 2019-2020 Budget compares the estimated general rates between residential property and Primary Production (PP) for Northern Councils in 2019. Under table 5¹ the Northern Councils include City of Launceston, West Tamar, George Town, Break O'Day, Dorset, Northern Midlands and Meander Valley. Comparisons between the residential and PP general rates provide a distinct unevenness for general rates. Of the seven Northern Councils each had a significant increase in estimated general rates for PP property compared to residential property. Only one Council's estimated general rates were below a 110% increase for PP property compared to residential property general rates, that was Northern Midlands. City of Launceston, Break O'Day, Dorset and Meander Valley all were above a 130% increase for PP property general rates compared to residential property. Break O'Day estimated residential general rates for residential property are \$1,099 and for PP property are \$2,587.

The level of services that are provided to residential/urban areas needs to match the level for rural areas. As a first step our members are seeking Councils to implement a transparent approach to all

¹ Meander Valley Council 2019-20 Budget, MV Council

constituents of their municipality to know what the Council is providing for the residential/urban and rural areas of the municipality.

There were common issues raised by our members regarding the services Councils provide as rural rate payers. Recurring services that need improving were weed and roadside vegetation management, rural road maintenance and more recycling opportunities on agricultural waste.

Weed and vegetation management on agricultural land is a significant cost to the agricultural sector each year. The significant cost can be from loss of production on farm and damage to fences from weeds and vermin. The recent studies in the Annual Cost of Weeds in Australia estimated the cost to agriculture in Australia at \$5 billion. In the report it references a study completed for Tasmania detailing the impact of weeds, to the figure of \$58 million.

Our members want to see Councils undertake an improved service to manage weeds and undertake more roadside slashing in a timely manner. Agricultural landowners do not need to be worrying about the impacts of weeds coming from Council owned land and the build-up of vegetation on roadsides being a fire hazard.

Maintenance of rural roads are increasingly important for agricultural landowners. Rural roads include all different forms of roads, from gravel to tarmac, and all rural roads should be maintained to the same standard. Rural roads are used daily from trailers, tankers and large trucks travelling on rural roads transporting agricultural produce. Rural roads are the connectors between farm gate to processing plants, ports, service providers and the like, and without good maintained rural roads it can impact on the transporters getting to and from farmgate to their designated destinations.

More recycling options were raised from the consultation with members. Agricultural waste can be substantial and often ends at landfill sites. The recent DPIPWE Draft Waste Action Plan signals a strong indication that waste management is a priority for the State. Agriculture use recycling initiatives such as DrumMuster and ChemClear, and in some instances the recycling plant in George Town for silage wrap. For agricultural landowners that do not live near George Town it is a significant distance to travel to recycle silage wrap. Local Councils should consider having drop off collection points to help assist agricultural landowners reduce waste to recycle silage wrap and potentially other waste including net wrap on bales, poly pipe and single-use fertiliser bags.

Council collaboration, or the idea of having 'Regional Councils', can lead to more efficiencies within Local Councils. In the recent *Regional Population Growth* from the Australian Bureau of Statistics portrays the population for the 29 Local Councils in Tasmania. Three of the 29 Councils take up 33.8% of the Tasmanian population² and 17 of the 29 Local Councils have under 15,000 population in their municipalities, and 11 of the 29 Local Councils have a population under 7,000. Local Councils working together have a better opportunity to develop efficiencies and provide improved services to their rate payers.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the review of Tasmania's Local Government Legislation Framework and we look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

² Regional Population Growth, ABS.

Peter Skillern
Chief Executive Officer
3rd October 2019