

## Speech Notes

Local Government Association of Tasmania - Annual Meeting

### Acknowledgements

- Ald Doug Chipman, President of LGAT (Outgoing)
- Ald Christina Hohmdahl, President of LGAT (Incoming)
- Dr Katrena Stephenson, Chief Executive Officer, LGAT
- Continuing and newly-elected mayors, deputy mayors, and elected officials

### Introduction

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- Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very pleased addressing you at the LGAT Annual Meeting as Minister for Local Government.
- I would firstly like to congratulate Mayor Christina Holmdahl on her election as the new President of LGAT. Christina brings considerable local government experience to the role, with expertise developed through her roles as a councillor, deputy mayor, and as Mayor of West Tamar Council since 2014. Christina, I know your experience on the LGAT General Management Committee as a strong advocate for the local government sector will serve you well in your new role as President. I look forward to us working together.
- My congratulations also go to the other successful candidates elected to the GMC.
- I would like to thank Doug for his contribution as President and acknowledge the effective role he has played in championing the sector. Doug, during your tenure, the relationship with the Government has not been without its challenges. But the ability to jointly resolve these issues

speaks to the strength of the partnership between the State and local government in Tasmania, and our shared commitment to delivering in the best interests of the community.

- To the outgoing GMC members, thank you for your contributions and for your advocacy on behalf of the local government sector. I am confident that your experience on the GMC means that you will continue to be strong advocates for the sector.

## **2018 Local Government Elections**

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- I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and welcome new and returning councillors.
- The 2018 elections saw a good balance of new and returning representatives elected.
- I look forward to seeing the contributions and innovations this term of local government representatives bring for the sector and to Tasmania more broadly. The community has bestowed on you the privilege and responsibility of working in their interests,
- The 2018 local government elections resulted in some pleasing trends.
- Across the State there were a record 481 candidates standing for election. I am pleased to say that the elections also saw an increase in the number of women elected from 32 per cent in 2014 to 39 per cent in 2018.
- The number of women elected to leadership positions also increased, with notable increases in the number of women elected to the positions of mayor and deputy mayor compared to numbers in 2014. This is in addition to near

record levels of voter turn-out, with 58.73 per cent of votes returned.

- These statistics clearly indicate that Tasmanians want to have a say in local government.
- The figures also reflect the strong collaborative effort of the State Government and the local government sector to promote the elections to the Tasmanian community and encourage voter participation.
- Particular credit goes to LGAT for its efforts to support, inform and educate candidates about local government and their roles and responsibilities.

### **Local government sustainability**

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- As newly elected and returning members settle into their roles, it is timely to continue the conversation about local government sustainability and viability.
- Population change in Tasmania has formed a large part of the discussion at the two most recent Premier's Local Government Council (PLGC) meetings.
- Tasmania's strong economy has increased the attractiveness of the State as a place to live and work, leading to population growth. But, as recent work by the State Government and others has shown, population growth at the State level often hides more complex and nuanced trends at the regional and municipal level.
- For example, the Department of Premier and Cabinet's *Population Trends: Tasmanian Local Government Areas 1993-2017* shows that the majority of Tasmania's population growth has occurred in the South of the State, particularly in the Greater Hobart area. Whereas the population in some

smaller councils in more regional areas of the State has either stalled or declined.

- Population projections released in May by Tasmania's Department of Treasury and Finance indicate that similar trends may continue over the next 25 years.
- For instance, councils projected to have the highest rates of growth are located in the South and central North, around the population centres of Hobart and Launceston. Councils projected to experience the largest percentage declines are located in more regional areas, further from the current population centres.
- Treasury's projections are supported by research released by the Institute for the Study of Social Change (UTAS), which further highlights the mixed experience of Tasmania's local government areas when it comes to population change.
- Some of the projections at the local government area level make for sobering reading and will further exacerbate the sustainability challenges some councils already face.
- While they are projections only at this stage, and events can alter outcomes. The past 25 years, together with Tasmania's ageing profile means a population decline is unavoidable for some.
- Indeed, while some councils may be able to change course, much of the change is likely to come at the expense of other municipalities.
- There are clearly different challenges and opportunities confronting different parts of the State. Over the next 25 years, there will be an increasing mismatch between current council boundaries and where people live, further to the

already significant changes that we have seen occur since 1993, and resulting in significant and continued changes to the various 'communities of interest' that we see all around the State.

- These trends also have implications for local government representation. For instance, 56 councillors in Tasmania's five largest councils now represent 50 per cent of the population, while the remaining 207 councillors represent the other 50 per cent. And Tasmania's seven smallest councils represent less than five per cent of the population.
- The implications of population trends cannot be addressed effectively via individual council responses. They will require strategic planning at the regional and State-wide level.
- The *Greater Hobart Act* is an example of the local government sector working collaboratively with the State Government to take a strategic approach to managing regionally significant matters. The Act provides a framework for collaborative decision making between the Greater Hobart councils and the State Government. This type of approach is critical for addressing the transboundary issues arising from population growth in Greater Hobart, particularly for regionally significant planning and traffic congestion issues which are exacerbated by population change.
- The State Government has also included \$6 million in the 2019-20 Budget to develop and implement the Government's Strategic Growth framework. The framework takes a whole-of-government approach to policy, planning and investment for sustainable, long term growth, to ensure all Tasmanians, no matter where they live, can participate in and benefit from a strong economy.
- The framework is about delivering on the Government's 10 year \$13.9 billion infrastructure plan, coordinating this with

education, skills and training programs to unlock the potential of our regions and create more jobs, so local people have the best chance to live and work where they want to live.

- Initiatives such as these are part of the State Government's effort to address the implications arising from population changes occurring in Tasmania's regions.
- In working with the State on these issues, the local government sector will need to be increasingly open to innovative governance and service delivery models. It is clear that we will not be serving Tasmania's broader social and economic interests if we see population change as a 'zero sum game'.

### **Directions Paper – Local Government Legislation Review**

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- In the context of these future challenges and opportunities facing the sector, the Government is conscious of its responsibility to provide a modern local government legislative framework that enables councils to effectively and efficiently meet their roles, responsibilities and 21<sup>st</sup> century expectations.
- It is crucial that the legislation governing the Tasmanian local government sector reflects and supports what communities expect from their local councils, and supports councils to meet these expectations in an increasingly changing and dynamic environment.
- On 26 June 2018, the Government announced a major review of Tasmania's local government legislation, and it was at last year's Conference that the Review's draft Terms of Reference were launched.

- The Review is seeking to develop, in close collaboration with the local government sector, a best practice, 21<sup>st</sup> century framework that:
  - supports greater innovation, flexibility and productivity;
  - minimises red tape;
  - enhances accountability and transparency; and
  - increases community engagement, participation and confidence.
- The initial consultation phase opened on 7 December 2018 and closed on 1 March 2019. Through this process, we asked the community “what principles do they feel should underpin a legislative framework for local government in Tasmania?”
- This consultation process again highlighted the importance of local government to Tasmania, with 382 submissions received, and high engagement with the Review’s advertising campaign, which reached over 186,500 Tasmanians.
- Since the initial public consultation process, the State Government has worked with key sector and community stakeholders represented on the Review’s Reference Group and Steering Committee, to workshop a number of local government reform areas.
- On behalf of the Government I particularly want to thank the members of the Reference Group, who dedicated their time, skills and knowledge to considering the issues raised in the first phase of public consultation. They provided valuable advice to the Steering Committee on reforms to create a stronger, more effective legislative framework to support local government into the future.

- Today I am pleased to announce the release of the Review's *Reform Directions Paper* (Directions Paper) which kicks off the second phase of public consultation.
- The Directions Paper includes 51 reform directions covering a number of major reform areas, including:
  - modernising electoral provisions (including a separate electoral Act for local government);
  - a stronger focus on council transparency, with greater community engagement in local government activities;
  - increased local government accountability through reporting, oversight and interventions;
  - promoting consistency in council operations across municipalities;
  - reducing red tape by removing unnecessary prescription and creating legislation that is flexible to future changes.
- I do not have the time to canvas each of the Reform Directions with you today, but would like to take the opportunity to mention two which I know you will have an interest in.
- The first is simplifying the voting process. Reform Direction 7 puts forward options for how Mayors are elected. While the status quo remains an option, there has been clear feedback that the current dual candidacy to have to stand as a Mayor and Councillor is confusing for voters and complicates the electoral process.
- While all options have their pros and cons, the Government wants to hear from the sector and community on how the electoral process can be simpler for all.

- The other significant reform direction which I would like to highlight, which links back to my earlier point about innovative governance and service delivery models, is the proposal to allow for the creation of Regional Councils.
- The idea is that a Regional Council would incorporate a number of individual local councils and would be responsible for region-wide planning and service delivery. Local councils would retain certain local decisions and be the primary advocates for their communities..
- Membership of a Regional Council would be drawn from the participating local councils and at a minimum would include the Mayors. A Regional Council would represent the strongest collaboration model that does not involve amalgamation.
- A Regional Council could be formed on the decisions of individual councils or through a Local Government Board review process, consistent with the existing mechanism in the current Act for structural reform.
- The Government supported studies into voluntary amalgamations and shared services in its first term of Government which revealed significant opportunities for councils. What the Government would now like to do is give councils and communities more options to leverage these opportunities, and this is what this Reform Direction seeks to do.
- I have no doubt that a number of the reform directions being posed will generate significant interest and debate, both from within and outside the sector. As a Government, we welcome this discussion. That is, after all, what a wholesale legislative review should be about.

- Consultation on the proposed Reform Directions will offer opportunities for engagement, through public forums and stakeholder consultation which will be held around the State.
- The formal consultation period will be open from today, 3 July, until 30 September 2019. Further details about making a submission and other engagement opportunities will be available on the Review's website. Information is also available at the Local Government Division's stall at the Conference.

## **Conclusion**

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- Consultation on the Directions Paper represents an important opportunity for the sector to have its say on Tasmania's future local government legislative framework. I encourage you all to get involved, and to encourage your communities to also have their say.
- I am looking forward to receiving your feedback on what is proposed in the Directions Paper.
- I look forward also to considering your thoughts and ideas that will contribute towards the development of a contemporary Local Government Act that will serve the sector well for the future.
- Thank you for the opportunity to address your Annual Meeting. I hope you enjoy the conference and I look forward to hearing the outcomes of your discussions and debate.