

CLARENCE ACTION NETWORK

A better future for Clarence

REVIEW OF TASMANIA'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION FRAMEWORK

SUBMISSION ON BEHALF OF CLARENCE ACTION NETWORK

Clarence Action Network (CAN) <https://www.clarenceactionnetwork.org/> E info@clarenceactionnetwork.org is an informal group of Clarence residents who have come together through:

- A shared interest in and appreciation of the local natural and built environment; and
- a desire to see greater community involvement in development decisions.

This submission focuses principally on the issues of Democracy and Engagement.

1. Values and processes

CAN supports clear and rigorous commitments to:

- openness;
- transparency in decision-making;
- commitment to using Plain English in all public communication including correspondence, websites, and advertising materials;
- clear and easy processes for community involvement and participation;
- regular feedback on hot topics via a range of communication channels;
- information-sharing in a timely and user-friendly manner; (Council minutes and agenda are part of the business of Council and impenetrable to the average citizen)
- clear, approachable, and well-advertised channels of communication with elected members and officers;
- prompt responses to community concerns.

2. Community participation

CAN supports stronger recognition of the importance of community participation in local government operations. Local government decision-making impacts directly on the lives of individuals in each community and can have long-lasting social, environmental and community outcomes.

Members of the community have information and opinions to contribute on many issues and this should be seen as a means for Councillors to improve the effectiveness of their decision-making. This could be achieved by a legislated requirement to undertake regular public forums or consultation processes in addition to the opportunities for public attendance and participation at Council meetings, which are highly formalised and constrained by the business needs of Council.

3. Information available to electors and quality of information supplied

CAN strongly supports a process to improve the information available to electors about candidates prior to an election. This would include basic, objective, and factual information

about each candidate such as education and professional background and any political affiliations, together with short information about a candidate's major priorities if elected.

Many comments prior to the 2018 elections noted the inadequacy of the booklet issued by the Tasmanian Electoral Commission. Candidate websites were the only other source of detail on individuals and these were likewise biased and highly selective in the information offered for scrutiny.

4. Use of Forums

In a large and growing electorate such as Clarence, word of mouth and local networks are inadequate sources of candidate information. A public forum organised and funded by CAN volunteers prior to the 2018 elections was well attended and valued by the community. Funds to run such forums could be incorporated into the general election framework and run by Council officials as part of their duties.

5. Community Education and its outcomes

CAN supports a process of improved community education on election processes to be run by the Local Government Association of Tasmania or the Tasmanian Electoral Commission. In view of the fact that Tasmania has a high level of functional illiteracy, a complex preferential voting system may be hard to fathom, especially for first-time voters, new migrants, and those with literacy issues. CAN notes that a concerted and well-targeted program of public education which focuses on the how and why of voting should aim to:

- a) increase the level of voting;
- b) decrease the number of informal votes;
- c) improve the general level of satisfaction with local government.

6. General Manager's Roll

CAN supports a review of the role and function of the General Manager's Roll, to ensure that its purpose is more clearly articulated, and that its operation is both regulated and fair.

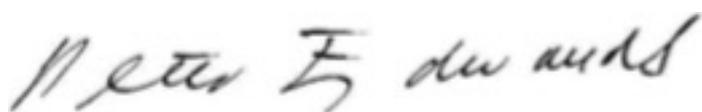
7. Council operations during election period

CAN supports a review into the limits of Council operations during an election period, understanding that some business needs to continue, but believing that, because of their scale and/or impact, there are some decisions that require longer consideration. Making such decisions without the certainty of re-election to implement them could be highly irresponsible and should be avoided.

8. Effective use of digital media

CAN supports further investigation into the most effective use of digital media in local government operations, bearing in mind the barriers this may impose for those who are unconnected or lack confidence in using technology.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the review. Acknowledgement of receipt of this submission to E info@clarenceactionnetwork.org would be appreciated.



Peter Edwards
On behalf of Mike Geard Convener of Clarence Action Network