

[REDACTED]

From: james walker [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 30 September 2019 5:59 PM
To: Local Government Legislation Review (DPaC)
Subject: response to reform directions paper phase two

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the next stage of the reform directions paper.

I offer the following comments in my personal capacity. These comments should not be seen as representing the position of Clarence City Council, which at the time of writing this email, has not been endorsed.

In relation to increasing voter participation (reform 7) I strongly support maintaining the direct election model in place for electing mayor and deputy mayor positions. This is the fairest and most democratic method of accountability for residents and ratepayers. The system is simple with low rates of informal voting.

With council terms now lasting four years it would be desirable to avoid by-elections when a casual mayoral vacancy arises. Several by-elections occurred in Tasmanian councils through the 2014-2018 term. By-elections are costly and a significant disincentive to a mayor stepping down when health, personal or other commitments might make it necessary. It would be preferable for casual mayoral vacancies to be filled in the same way that casual deputy mayoral vacancies are currently filled.

In relation to councillor ballots (reform 9) a minimum of 1 numbered box on the councillor ballot paper should constitute a formal vote. This would provide greater consistency across the mayor, deputy mayor and councillor ballots. It would also decrease the significantly higher rates of informal voting on councillor ballot papers compared with mayor and deputy mayor papers.

Increasing the flexibility to transition from one rating mechanism to another (reform 28) is desirable. Clarence transitioned to Capital Value as a rating basis some time ago. To moderate distortive effects we include a fixed component in the rates levy. It would be good if councils could use different percentages for a fixed charge in commercial and residential rates. Some commercial properties may be worth less than \$200 000 but a couple exceed half a billion dollars which is a profound disparity when compared to residential.

The introduction of an economic regulator for oversight of proposed rate increases (reform 29) is not the best mechanism for driving efficiency and judicious usage of revenue in local government. It will constrain a council's ability to adjust service levels and rating mechanisms that best suit their particular community. It will also punish councils that currently have lower rate burdens as any percentage rise of rates will be off a much lower base. The best mechanism to drive efficiency is through performance ranking of councils.

A local government performance reporting framework (reform 44) is highly desirable to drive improvement and accountability of Tasmanian councils. Experience in Canada showed over time that it delivered improvements in council performance. As an elected representative I would be greatly interested in finding out what we can learn from councils that might perform an area of service delivery more efficiently. In 2014 I successfully moved a notice of motion in support of performance ranking of councils and this position was also adopted by LGAT later that year.

I do not support the formation of Regional Councils (reform 48). It is likely to result in increased red tape, bureaucracy and less direct accountability to residents and ratepayers.

I would be happy to discuss any of these matters further should an opportunity arise.

Regards

James Walker

Clarence Alderman.