
Communiqué

Premier's Local Government Council Meeting – 10 December 2018

The Premier's Local Government Council (PLGC) met in Hobart on 10 December 2018. The Premier, the Hon Will Hodgman MP, chairs the PLGC, which also includes the Minister for Local Government, the Hon Peter Gutwein MP, the elected members of the General Management Committee of the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) including the President, Mayor Doug Chipman, supported by members of the PLGC Officials Committee.

The PLGC provides an important forum for the Tasmanian Government and the local government sector to jointly identify, progress and oversee strategic initiatives for the benefit of the Tasmanian community.

This was the first PLGC meeting following the October local government elections and will be the last for the 2018 calendar year.

October 2018 local government elections

The PLGC held an in-depth and broad-ranging discussion about the conduct and outcomes of the recent council elections. The PLGC reflected on the joint efforts of the sector and the Tasmanian Government in promoting the elections and the importance of local government more broadly.

The PLGC noted a number of positive trends to emerge from the elections, including:

- a record number of candidates standing for election;
- an increase in the statewide voter return rate, including increases in all but three councils compared to 2014;
- significant increases in the number of women elected to councils, including in leadership positions; and
- a healthy balance between newly-elected and returning councillors (approximately 40 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively).

The PLGC also discussed the high level of public interest in a range of policy matters in the lead up to and throughout the election period. It was noted that stakeholders had proposed a number of measures aimed at increasing voter participation and engagement, enhancing the representativeness of councils, and reforming how elections are conducted. Issues raised

included caretaker provisions, compulsory voting, voter eligibility and the functioning of the Tasmanian Electoral Commission website.

The PLGC agreed that the Tasmanian Government's current review of local government legislation – which is being undertaken in close collaboration with the sector - presents a genuine and timely opportunity for key stakeholders and the broader Tasmanian community to consider these issues in more detail and put their views forward on potential reform options.

Population and Migration

The PLGC noted that Australia's population policy will be a central focus of the agenda for the 12 December 2018 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting. Options and strategies to promote population growth and dispersal outside of the mainland eastern seaboard capital cities are likely to form a key part of this discussion.

Tasmania's Population Growth Strategy aims to increase Tasmania's population to 650,000 by 2050. Population growth is a key driver of economic growth, and the attraction of skilled interstate and overseas migrants is a central element of this plan. The PLGC agreed that the Australian Government's proposed policy direction on migration and settlement could present significant potential opportunities for furthering Tasmania's population and economic growth agenda, particularly in relation to regional development.

The PLGC agreed that a cooperative and collaborative approach between the State Government and local councils will be needed, both in terms of responding to the Australian Government's immediate population data requests, and at a broader strategic level to identify and pursue policy opportunities for the State as they arise.

Local government legislation review

The PLGC was briefed on the current status of the Tasmanian Government's review of the legislative framework for local government.

The PLGC agreed that 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.

The PLGC noted that the review will adopt a 'first-principles' approach, and will focus on delivering a modern, fit-for-purpose framework that:

- supports greater innovation, flexibility and productivity;
- minimises red tape;
- enhances accountability and transparency; and
- increases community engagement, participation and confidence.

The PLGC heard that the review is already well advanced. Since the Minister's initial announcement in June 2018, the Tasmanian Government has appointed a dedicated project team, finalised terms of reference, and appointed an experienced Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee comprises the following members:

- Mr David Nicholson, Deputy Secretary, Department of Premier and Cabinet (Chair);
- Mr Alex Tay, Director of Local Government (Deputy Chair);
- Dr Katrena Stephenson, CEO of LGAT (Member);
- Ms Roseanne Heyward, former Mayor of Tasman Council (Member); and
- Mr Greg Preece, former general manager and current Chair of the Local Government Board (Member).

A Discussion Paper was released for broad public comment on 7 December 2018, along with an Expression of Interest for membership on a Reference Group.

Camping facilities and competitive neutrality principles

The PLGC was briefed on the status of the Government's review of how competitive neutrality principles should apply to camping facilities provided by public entities, including local councils.

The Tasmanian Government is committed, under long-standing inter-governmental agreements, to applying National Competition Policy principles to all of its significant business activities, where it is in the public interest. These principles are designed to ensure that no government business – including those run by both the Tasmanian Government and councils - operates with an unfair competitive advantage over a private business operating in the same market.

The review was instigated by the PLGC in response to concerns raised by councils and commercial caravan park operators. Significant consultation has been undertaken during the review through a Stakeholder Reference Group, which includes representatives from the local government sector, caravan park operators and RV tourists and camping facility consumers.

Stakeholders in the Reference Group represent a broad range of interests which informed their interaction with the review. The Minister for Local Government attended the 8 November 2018 Reference Group meeting to listen to the various positions and concerns raised during the process.

In light of significant differences in stakeholder positions, the Government has focused on providing greater clarity and certainty to all parties, seeking to balance competition policy and broader 'public interest' policy objectives in a more predictable and transparent way.

The PLGC noted that the State Government would be publicly releasing its final policy position on this matter before the end of 2018.

PLGC Protocol Agreement review

The PLGC endorsed the amended PLGC Protocol which accurately captures the joint strategic objectives of the Tasmanian Government and the local government sector. The most significant change in the Protocol was the inclusion of the agreed principles that underpinned the collaborative efforts of the sector and the Government in the lead-up to the 2018 council elections.

Inclusion of the principles formalises the PLGC's commitment to promoting:

- the important – and increasingly complex - role of local government in serving and representing the interests of local Tasmanian communities, whilst discharging statutory obligations such as acting as a planning authority;
- the inclusion of elected members from a diverse range of backgrounds, so that councillors reflect a broad cross-section of the community and the value diversity brings;
- the continuous improvement in the professionalism, capacity, and integrity of councils and councillors;
- a recognition of the valuable role that a councillor plays in local communities and the personal satisfaction councillors can gain from helping their communities; and
- an increase in active community engagement and participation at the local government level, both at and between council elections.

Other Topics

The PLGC noted action and progress on a range of other matters of importance to the local government sector, including:

- implementation of the Tasmanian Government's planning reforms (presented by the Minister for Planning, the Hon Roger Jaensch MP);
- the recent passage of amendments to the *Burial and Cremation Act 2002*, which preserve, protect, and, where appropriate, strengthen both the rights of community members and the obligations on cemetery managers;
- waste management and recycling issues, including the ongoing impact of recent changes in global recycling markets;
- the recent discussion facilitated by LGAT on the current issues and challenges being experienced by local government in how they deliver services and how they might be addressed;
- work being progressed by the State Government under the banner of 'Tourism 21' to increase the regional dispersal of visitors to the State, and the important role for councils;
- relevant legislative changes impacting on the sector, including refinements to the local government code of conduct; and
- an update on key economic development initiatives and indicators.

The PLGC will meet again in the first half of 2019. Further information on the PLGC is available on the LGD website: www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/local_government/plgc.