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3rd November 2025

The Honourable Kerry Vincent MLC
Minister for Local Government
Office of Local government
P O Box 123
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lg.consultation@dpac.tas.gov.au

Dear Minister Vincent,

RE: Reform of Councillor numbers and allowances

Council having reviewed the discussion paper wish to make the following responses to the questions raised in this paper:

The Central Highlands community is widely dispersed, with diverse needs and changing life stage and circumstantial priorities. Understanding the factors which impact central highlands liveability and wellbeing is important if we are to attract and retain population and visitors, to support our socio-economic viability.

In addition to elected community representation on Council, wider community and specific purpose participation from people, the organisations and the businesses that have a stake in the future of the Central Highlands and are likely impacted by Council decisions is a requirement and guiding principle of effective Local Government.

Council recognises and respects the voluntary leadership and community contribution people make through organisations and as individuals. This is critically important in a smaller LGA where public resources are limited.

Keeping Councillor number at 9 will ensure a program of engagement at the Community Development Committees and officer level and support community interests and benefits to ensure or focus is aligned to changing needs.

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Should the Government consider any strategy/guidance for council decision making where a quorum cannot be maintained?

For councils with five councillors, maintaining quorums may occasionally be challenging if multiple councillors are absent, but proposed reforms like flexible meeting attendance aim to ensure effective decision-making.

It is Council's view that the reduction of the number of councillors for some councils to 5 appears, on paper, to look good based on the erroneous statistical data used by the Department but does not provide fair representation for the Central Highlands community.

Even worse is when this farcical reduction requires amendments to legislation so that a quorum for council meetings for those councils reduced to 5 can be achieved. How would confidentiality be assured, for Closed Sessions, if "flexible meeting attendance" should include video or telephone conference attendance, for example?

But your office asserts this can also be covered by flexible meeting attendance. Saying this is the case for the Lakes Area of the Central Highlands shows a clear misunderstanding of this substandard mobile and internet services in this part of Tasmania. When the State government refers to "Lake Area of Central Highlands", it further demonstrates how little it knows about the municipality. Which Lakes Area are you referring to? Are you aware, at all, "the landform of central Tasmania is dominated by the Tasmanian Central Plateau where there are more than 4000 lentic water bodies (Lynch, 1972). Regardless, which Lakes Area you refer to, telecommunications is intermittent and has insufficient bandwidth or is non-existent in some lakes areas.

In the case of the Central Highlands, it will mean our square kilometres per councillor will equate to **1,602 per councillor**.

Comparing Hobart, their square kilometres per councillor will equate to **3.3 per councillor**.

In some people's eyes, this level of representation does not seem to be a problem, but for those wishing for face-to-face contact with a councillor may see it differently.

The discussion paper has also used the Bureau of Statistics numbers for population, yet the State Grants Commission are moving to **service population**. This is being phased in over 5 years. Central Highlands Council's **service population** is set this year at **6,239** and not the 2,668 as used to support the reduction of councillors to 5.

This change means the **population per councillor** would be $6,239 / 5 = 1,248$ and not as per the discussion paper $2668 / 5 = 533$

This calculation for Hobart is $56,835 / 9 = 6,315$

There is also the calculation of Councillor per **road length** and in these only **sealed roads** are considered.

Central Highlands $135 / 5 = 27$ kilometres

Amending this to **all road lengths** shows a completely different picture as shown below.

Road Length **per Councillor Central Highlands** $739 / 5 = 147.8$ kilometres

Road Length **per Councillor Hobart** $302 / 9 = 33.5$ kilometres

The report also shows the average value of approved Development Applications for Central Highlands for the five-year period up to 2023/24 to be \$22,791,098 yet if it was extended to include 2024/25 the calculation would be \$111,013,636.

If the focus was for the future and considered the future wind and solar farm developments as well as the Tarraleah redevelopment by Hydro Tasmania these all conservatively valued at nearly \$8 billion if these are taken into consideration the picture for development in the Central Highlands would match or be substantially greater than most Tasmanian councils.

Considering these amendments and other matters raised in this submission as opposed to those used in the Discussion Paper it is in our communities' best interest, at this stage, for the councillor numbers to remain at 9.

This can be done with a further review to be undertaken in three years after the next election which is to be held in 2026. This review would consider the reduction of the current number of 9 councillors to 7. This will enable the workload to be assessed once most of the substantial developments have been assessed.

In this case and including the 14.25% increase in allowances which for Central Highlands equated to \$35,524 or a 0.90% rate increase which I feel residents will be happy to pay to have 9 councillors to represent their needs. Consider though, it is insignificant for the average councillor, equating to \$123.70 increase in the Allowance, which does not reflect the increased workload for the average councillor.

Consideration also needs to be given, based on the rate income that the Central Highlands will achieve over the next few years. It will increase dramatically based on the construction of up to five new wind and solar farms and on the amendments made to the Land Valuation Act 2001 and the proposed introduction of the PiLOR rating system.

Should the Local Government Act 1993 be amended to require councils to pay a 12% superannuation equivalent payment from allowances into a councillors nominated superannuation fund?

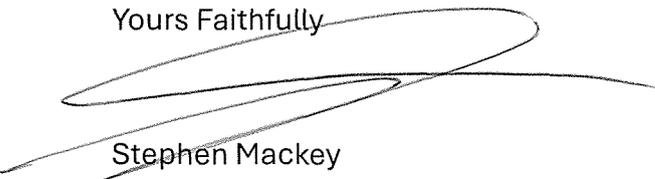
It would appear having an amendment to the legislation to cover the requirements to pay a 12% superannuation equivalent payment from allowances into a councillors nominated superannuation fund would be the best option. Though it should be an amount in addition to the Councillor Allowance.

Should the methodology and ongoing review of the framework for Councillors allowances and numbers be embedded in legislation to provide certainty and transparency for the sector?

Regarding councillors allowances a method that could be used is increasing them as per the Councils Enterprise Agreement. This may be seen as pecuniary interest but a minor change to the legislation would cover this.

Regarding future reviews of councillor numbers, it is clear from this current process that a methodology needs to be developed by Local Government for Local Government, before either this review is set in concrete and before local government could consider it being enshrined in legislation.

Yours Faithfully



Stephen Mackey
Acting General Manager