

**PREMIER'S
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
COUNCIL**

Thursday 2 July 2020, 11.00 am – 1.00 pm
Tamar Function Centre, 1 Windsor Drive, Riverside, 7250

Meeting Minutes

PLGC Members	
Hon Peter Gutwein MP	Premier (Chair)
Hon Mark Shelton MP	Minister for Local Government
Cr Christina Holmdahl	President, Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) General Management Committee (GMC), Mayor, West Tamar Council
Cr Anna Reynolds	Lord Mayor, Hobart City Council
Cr Ben Shaw	Vice President, LGAT GMC Mayor, Derwent Valley Council
Cr Annette Rockliff	Mayor, Devonport City Council
Cr Mick Tucker	Mayor, Break O'Day Council
Ald Brendan Blomeley	Alderman, Clarence City Council
Cr Daryl Quilliam	Mayor, Circular Head Council
Cr Geoff Lyons	Councillor, West Tamar Council
PLGC Officials	
Nick Heath	General Manager, Hobart City Council
Sandra Ayton	General Manager, Central Coast Council
Des Jennings	General Manager, Northern Midlands Council
Dr Katrena Stephenson	Chief Executive Officer, LGAT
Dion Lester	Policy Director, LGAT
Craig Limkin	Deputy Secretary/Director of Local Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC)
Mathew Healey	Director of Policy and Sector Performance (Local Government), Local Government Division (LGD), DPAC
Secretariat	
Luke Murphy-Gregory	A/g Assistant Director, LGD, DPAC

Mitchell Cook	Policy and Project Officer, LGD, DPAC
Ministerial support	
Mel Brown	Senior Adviser to Minister Shelton
Rick Dunn	Senior Adviser to the Premier
Guests	
Hon Roger Jaensch MP	Minister for Environment and Parks
Hon Michael Ferguson MP	Minister for State Growth
Rod Whitehead	Auditor-General, Tasmanian Audit Office (TAO)
Ric DeSanti	Deputy Auditor-General, TAO
Adrian Christian	Director, Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) Secretariat

Welcome

The Premier welcomed participants to the first Premier's Local Government Council (PLGC) meeting for 2020, and thanked those who had travelled to the West Tamar municipality to attend the meeting. The Premier also thanked the West Tamar Council for hosting the meeting at its Windsor Community Precinct.

The Premier opened the meeting by noting that the circumstances facing the State since the last PLGC meeting have changed dramatically. The local government sector has played a critical role as leaders in their community during the COVID-19 pandemic period, and the Premier thanked the sector for its efforts.

The PLGC noted that the meeting provided an opportunity to take stock of respective State and local government recovery efforts, and identify opportunities for collaboration.

The Premier noted that, while it is important to focus on our recovery, the rising case numbers in Victoria is a reminder that the health threat of COVID-19 is still present.

Several guests joined the meeting to support the discussion of agenda items, including:

- The Hon Roger Jaensch MP, Minister for Environment and Parks to update PLGC on the State's waste and resource recovery program; and
- The Hon Michael Ferguson MP, Minister for State Growth, to update PLGC on the *Building and Construction Regulatory Reform* project.

The PLGC welcomed Mathew Healey, who has recently joined the Department of Premier and Cabinet in the new position of Director of Policy and Sector Performance (Local Government).

Agenda Item 1: PLGC minutes from 9 December 2019

The PLGC noted that there were no actions arising from 9 December 2019 meeting and accepted the draft minutes as a true and accurate record of that meeting.

Agenda Item 2: COVID-19 Response and Recovery

Agenda item 2 was focused on Tasmania's response and recovery from COVID-19, with sub-items focusing on the pandemic's financial impact on councils, the current State and local government recovery programs and the identification of opportunities for collaboration.

Agenda Item 2.1: Local Government Sector Financial Position – Pre and Post Pandemic

The Auditor General, Rod Whitehead, and the Deputy Auditor General, Ric De Santi attended the meeting to give a presentation on the anticipated impacts of the pandemic on the financial position of the local government sector.

Mr Whitehead noted that the financial impact of COVID-19 on individual councils is likely to vary, with the impacts expected to differ according to the geography, population, types of revenue sources, and the financial position of councils prior to COVID-19.

The Auditor-General explained that the Tasmanian Audit Office has been engaging with councils to understand the impacts. The majority of councils are expecting deficits for 2019/20 and the next three to four financial years.

Councils will experience impacts as a result of COVID-19 relief measures such as freezes to rates, fees and charges and concessions. Urban councils such as Hobart have been impacted by lost revenue from car parking and sports centres. Some councils also have childcare centres, the operation of which has been impacted throughout the pandemic.

Mr DeSanti explained that municipalities reliant on commercial, tourism and hospitality sectors had seen the most impact from COVID-19. Whereas for municipalities with strong mining, industrial and agricultural sectors, the impact has been less significant.

Mayor Christina Homdahl noted that councils had received overwhelming support from their communities for the relief initiatives and general leadership they had shown in response to COVID-19. The Premier noted that he has received similar reports from the community in regard to councils' efforts.

Minister Shelton explained that now is a critical time for councils, where they have capacity, to commit to stimulus and recovery measures to support their communities.

Agenda Item 2.2: Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council

Mr Adrian Christian, Director of the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) Secretariat, attended the meeting to give an update on the PESRAC process and provide an overview of its work so far.

Mr Christian explained that the first PESRAC Report was currently being finalised and therefore he was not in a position to disclose any of its details. The first Report will look at and explain the impact of COVID-19 on individuals. This Report will guide the first phase of PESRAC's recommendations.

The Premier explained that, as the advice of PESRAC will guide government recovery efforts, the intention was to not place any government representation on PESRAC – local, State or Australian government.

The Premier stated that PESRAC will need to be nimble in response to the changing circumstances of COVID-19. Mr Christian noted that the medium and longer term impacts as a result of COVID-19 will depend on how the virus evolves over time, and the availability of a vaccine.

Councillor Mick Tucker expressed his concern that the JobKeeper and JobSeeker programs are acting as an impediment to people returning to work and to businesses operating at full capacity. The Premier explained that the JobKeeper program is being reviewed and the Hon Josh Frydenberg MP was expected to give an update on that process at the end of July 2020.

Agenda Item 2.3: State and Local Government Stimulus and Support Measures

Mr Healey provided an overview of various opportunities for State Government and local government sector collaboration on COVID-19 recovery.

The Premier explained that the State Government and Commonwealth's HomeBuilder programs are likely to create a significant increase in development applications for councils.

The Premier proposed that public communications be developed to encourage applicants to apply for the HomeBuilder grants as soon as possible to help in mitigating a 'last minute rush' of development applications near the 31 December 2020 closing date for both programs. The PLGC agreed that the State Government and local government representatives would continue to discuss the proposal out-of-session with Local Government happy to input into, and support dissemination of, the key messages.

A number of councils have expressed concerns that their significant depreciation costs and asset renewal liabilities hinder their ability to allocate cash reserves to expend on immediate stimulus and other community support measures. The PLGC agreed that the State Government should continue to work with the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) to better understand councils' constraints, and consider potential options to assist.

The PLGC also discussed how the Local Government Legislation Review could look at the pandemic experience, to ensure that relevant lessons are captured and incorporated in the design of the final legislative framework. In particular, it was agreed that the Review should look at the live-streaming of council meetings and the remote attendance of councillors and whether such measures could continue in a 'business as usual' context.

The PLGC also agreed that there was a need for a program to ensure that unemployed Tasmanians can be matched to areas where employees are required.

The PLGC agreed that with COVID-19 recovery planning continuing at all levels of government, the State Government and local government sector should continue to identify opportunities for collaboration.

Agenda Item 3: Waste and Resource Recovery

Minister Jaensch provided an update on the State's waste and resource recovery program.

The Minister noted that the draft Waste Action Plan was being finalised, and a consultant had been contracted to work on elements of the State-Wide Waste Levy. Minister Jaensch thanked LGAT for its involvement in this work.

Minister Jaensch also explained that he hoped to have legislation in place for the State-wide Waste Levy (the Levy) in 2021. LGAT would be invited to participate on an Advisory Group to ensure that the expertise of local government can inform the development of the Levy.

Dr Stephenson expressed LGAT's view that, the State's waste and resource recovery program represents a key opportunity to support the recovery of Tasmania from COVID-19. LGAT's PESRAC submission will, in part, advocate for a circular economy as a cornerstone to the State's recovery approach. Dr Stephenson noted that it will be important that this work is appropriately resourced.

Agenda Item 4: Building and Construction Regulatory Reform

Minister Ferguson attended the meeting to give an update on the *Building and Construction Regulatory Reform* project.

The Minister noted that, in response to the pressures of COVID-19, the Tasmanian Government is committed to ensuring the State's construction sector is robust and reliable. The sector employs over 4,000 people in Tasmania, and construction investment has significant positive impacts.

The Tasmanian Government initiated the *Building and Construction Regulatory Reform* project in 2018, and the reforms started to mature earlier this year. Minister Ferguson explained that, due to the need to ensure that priority reforms were in place to support the building and construction sector in response to COVID-19, the Government accelerated the reform process. Minister Ferguson acknowledged that the Government did not provide the usual five

week consultation timeframe and that, ideally the process would have allowed the local government sector more time to provide input on the reforms.

Minister Ferguson provided an overview of the first tranche of reforms and foreshadowed that tranche two and three are likely to focus on State Government processes including those of the Environment Protection Authority and the Land Titles Office.

Dr Stephenson thanked Minister Ferguson for acknowledging the limitations of the consultation process in regard to the first tranche of reforms.

Agenda Item 5: Director of Local Government's Report

The PLGC noted the Director of Local Government's Report.

Agenda Item 6: Update on the Implementation of the State-wide Planning Reforms

Minister Jaensch provided an updated on the State-wide Planning Reforms.

Minister Jaensch noted that all but three council Local Provision Schedules (LPS) have been submitted to the Tasmanian Planning Commission, and the Burnie City Council's LPS will be the first to take effect. The Planning Policy Unit in the Department of Justice, having identified issues with the LPS approval process (particularly where modifications are required to an LPS) is currently developing some amendments to the process in the *Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993*.

The PLGC discussed the issues with attracting skilled planners to Tasmanian councils. Mr Dion Lester explained that LGAT has had discussions with the University of Tasmania regarding Environmental Health Officer professionals, but that it would next be looking at how to increase the number of qualified planners in Tasmania.

The PLGC agreed that the Premier, Minister Jaensch, Minister Shelton and Craig Limkin should re-engage on the matter of skilled planners.

Minister Jaensch noted that the implementation of the single planning scheme should provide more scope for services to be provided across councils. This model will lend itself to more flexible use and deployment of planning professionals.

Agenda Item 7: Communiqué approval

The PLGC agreed that the LGAT CEO and Director of Local Government would prepare a final version of the Communiqué for approval prior to publication, taking account of the meeting discussion.

Agenda Item 8: Other Business and Meeting Close

Dr Stephenson explained that the local government sector is interested in retaining the flexible council meeting arrangements provided by the notices under the *COVID-19 Disease Emergency*

(Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020. Councils have benefited from the flexibility and there is concern that there may be a gap between when the order is lifted and the COVID-19 emergency ends.

The Premier noted that the Government has been monitoring the arrangements enabled under the notices in respect to councils. The Government will report to the LGAT in relation to this body of work.

Ald Brendan Blomeley raised concerns about the Code of Conduct framework. Ald Blomeley queried if it will be possible to look at some form of privilege for councillors during council meetings.

Minister Shelton acknowledged that there were a range of views on the Code of Conduct framework. Minister Shelton noted that the Government is currently looking at the Code of Conduct process and is willing to work with LGAT to find a position that both State and local governments can agree on.

The Premier thanked the local government sector for its work in response to COVID-19. The PLGC agreed that councils should encourage members of their communities to continue to take individual responsibility, including practicing social distancing and following other public health advice, in response to COVID-19.

The Premier thanked the PLGC members for attending the meeting.

Meeting closed 1:00 pm

Actions

Agenda Item	Actions From PLGC Meeting on 2 July 2020	Who	When	Complete
2.3	Consider the need for communications that encourage early application for the HomeBuilder grants.	State Government	ASAP	Complete
2.3	The State Government is to continue to work with LGAT to better understand councils' financial constraints, and consider potential options to assist.	Local Government Division	Before next PLGC	Complete
2.3/8	Report to LGAT on the potential implementation of the flexible council meeting arrangements enabled under the COVID-19 Act notices.	Local Government Division	As appropriate through Review Steering Committee	Complete

6	The State Government is to meet with LGAT to continue to discuss the matter of skilled planners in Tasmania.	LGAT and Minister Jaensch	ASAP	Complete
8	Ask councils to encourage members of their communities to continue to take individual responsibility, including practicing social distancing and following other public health advice, in response to COVID -19.	LGAT	Before the next PLGC meeting	Complete