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# Review of the State Service

SUBMISSION BY UNIONS TASMANIA  
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## INTRODUCTION

Unions Tasmania is the peak body representing workers in Tasmania, comprised of 23 affiliated unions with approximately 50,000 members across industry, in both the private and public sector. For over 135 years, we have been the only peak body dedicated to giving a voice to working people in Tasmania. We advocate for the improvement of wages, conditions, and workplace safety for Tasmanian workers.

Unions Tasmania welcomes the opportunity make this submission. Our submission is general in nature and is not agency specific. Any agency specific comment will come from the relevant public sector unions directly engaged in those agencies.

Unions Tasmania is extremely critical of the timelines for the review of the Tasmanian State Service ('the Review'). We strongly oppose the timetable that has been established for the following reasons:

- The risk factors of undertaking this Review at this particular time are significant.
- COVID-19 impacts are still being experienced.
- The uncertainty on employees during the Review will affect the morale of public sector employees who have already worked under extreme pressure during the pandemic.
- The Tasmanian State Service (TSS) is the largest provider of assistance to the community, it is also the largest employer in this state.
- There has been no rationale established for the need of this review.
- No changes should be made at this stage.

At a time when consumer confidence and spending is at an all-time low and security of employment is a major concern for all workers, to embark on a Review in accordance with the current terms of reference is unwise.

It is our strong recommendation that this Review be deferred until there is a clear path out of COVID-19 and that the terms of reference be extended to include the following:

- The politicisation of the public service.
- The failure of past privatisation decisions.
- The role of industrial relations and Human Services that are designed to protect senior public servants.
- Maintenance and improvement of the independence of the public service.
- The impact on local communities and on the economy of changes to public sector employment, including opportunities to create good, new public sector jobs.
- The impact on local communities and on the economy of changes to service delivery and accessibility.

The composition of the Reference Group needs to ensure that there is adequate representation of employees. One person representing the interests of workers, who stand to be significantly impacted by the recommendations of the Review, is not sufficient. We strongly recommend that the reference group be composed of at least 50% worker representatives.

The lack of persons on that reference group with intimate knowledge of the public service is an impediment to delivering recommendations that will enhance the public service. It is our view that the hidden agenda is for more services to be privatised.

## **COVID-19 LESSONS**

In their policy responses to COVID-19, governments have accepted the need for more direct economic intervention to offset the serious hardship that many workers and businesses have experienced. Unions Tasmania submits that Tasmania takes the time to learn from these lessons and takes more direct control of many vital services that have underpinned our response to the pandemic.

## **CONSULTATION**

Unions Tasmania cannot stress enough the importance of proper consultation during this Review. Notwithstanding the tight timeframes established, Unions Tasmania recommends that Public Sector Unions be involved in establishing appropriate member focus groups, to ensure that the views of workers are sought on the recommendations arising out of the Review.

In addition to member focus groups, community consultation and vulnerable groups should also be consulted directly as part of this Review.

Those who most rely on essential public services and vulnerable Tasmanians should have the opportunity to directly contribute their views. Most are these vulnerable people and their views should also be listened to.

During the pandemic there was a regular briefing between Health Department leaders and unions, which was useful to all parties. Any proposed changes must continue to facilitate and build on this type of engagement.

## **PUBLIC SERVICES IN PUBLIC HANDS**

Unions Tasmania holds the strong view that this Review must also consider, not only the gamut of services that the public sector delivers, but the importance of retaining these services in public hands. It should also examine the utility of reversing those services that have been privatised and should be returned to public control and ownership.

The lessons from COVID-19 need to be heeded, and areas where public health have been compromised due to the outsourcing of services, such as contract cleaning, security and pathology services, should all be under the responsibility of the State Services Act.

## **RISK-BASED DECISION-MAKING**

Unions Tasmania believes the siloed nature of the TSS needs addressing in this Review. Limited cross-department collaboration is a factor that can limit strategic work. Unions are advocating for a coordinated, multi-faceted recovery plan. We have advocated for a tri-partite (unions, business and government) forum to plan and collaborate on all major issues affecting the TSS, including a just transition. These things will require multi-department or whole-of-government coordination.

An example of this is the strange decision last week to allow potatoes to be imported from South Australia. This has implications for biosecurity, for local agriculture, and for local food processing jobs. Farmers were not consulted, nor were food processing workers, and it appears that the Government simply wrote a letter to the supermarkets effectively requesting they buy local. This is not the sort of planning that exemplifies best practice decision-making.

Good governance will be crucial to getting it right when it comes to balancing priorities in decision-making. If the Review recommends changes that facilitate cooperation and risk management, it will also need to consider how to do this without introducing bias that might make one factor dominate. For example, jobs or environment; fulltime jobs or casual employment, outsourcing or insourcing.

#### The Review's Terms of Reference (ToR)

1. *Promoting public service change and innovation that delivers public policy and service delivery to improve the client experience and meet the needs of governments and the community;*

It is unclear what is meant by improving 'the client experience'. The public service role is to provide the best services to the community irrespective of cost and it is the role of Government to develop public policy which best serves the interests of the community. Rather than the public service meeting the needs of Government, Unions Tasmania submits that the TSS should implement the decisions of Government and be free from political interference and be prepared to provide the best advice to Government without fear or favour.

2. *Identifying opportunities to deliver government services, programs, projects and other initiatives more efficiently or effectively, including information technology platforms;*

Unions Tasmania opposes privatisation and this ToR sounds suspiciously like another attempt to privatise public services. We totally reject any further attempts to privatise public services. If we have learned nothing else during the past 10 months, it is that services which have been privatised have led to massive dislocation for the community and job insecurity for hundreds of thousands of workers. With regard to IT platforms, changes to internal IT management, a normal process of ongoing development should be grounded in proper consultation with all workers who are impacted by those changes. If the intention is to ask the Tasmanian public to access more services online, this must also be balanced against the real prospect of dividing the community in terms of digital access and literacy, as well the impact on employment outcomes for public servants.

3. *Identifying ways to promote collaboration and partnerships including to support more flexible movement between the private and public sectors;*

Again, is this privatisation by stealth? Efficiencies can and will be achieved when adequate resourcing is available to agencies. The obsession of governments with budget surpluses should end and be replaced by a focus on what the community needs and how to achieve it. Having to run balanced budgets has been blown out of the water by the responses all governments have made during the pandemic. This reliance on balanced budgets does not deliver improved services to the community.

4. *Achieving greater economies and efficiencies in TSS administration, including opportunities to streamline bureaucracy and services where suitable;*

This has been the mantra of successive governments for many years. Given the cuts that have occurred across the public sector, it is unclear where this could occur without sacking public servants and further curtailing stretched services to the community.

5. *Examining the feasibility, effectiveness and efficiency of further decentralisation of government services;*

This has to be based on real needs and proper job creation, not just to satisfy the political desires of government to fulfill populist views.

6. *Facilitating areas of cultural change within the TSS (e.g. promoting risk-based decision-making, promoting innovation, improving accountability and identifying ways to enhance performance);*

If we cherish our democracy then it is not so much that cultural change must occur within the TSS, but that cultural change should occur within the broader community. In promoting risk-based decision-making, the government has an opportunity to build Tasmania's capacity for coordinated action to meet our strategic needs. Good governance is paramount in balancing the targeting of risks and their management. Equally important is the monitoring and evaluation associated with this cultural change, to ensure that it is achieving its goals.

It is not clear why the current governance structure or legislation is a barrier to improving accountability or enhancing performance of the state service. Any changes to existing arrangements should be evidence-based and grounded in consultation with worker representatives.

7. *Identifying ways to help develop the long-term capability of the TSS;*

This will require government commitment to ensure that adequate resources are available and that issues like career development are properly embedded in departments.

That there is continuity in the engagement of new entrants into the public service to ensure that skills and experience are maintained in the service.

Proper staffing levels need to be maintained within departments to ensure services that the community expectations are delivered in a timely and efficient manner.

8. *Implementing enhanced workforce management processes across the employee life cycle, including opportunities to implement improvements to how the TSS manages and recognises employee performance;*

Consultation and being prepared to engage in a meaningful way with Unions and their members is essential to the TSS implementing this term of reference. Marginalising a significant portion of the workforce because of ideological differences is not sustainable in this current environment.

9. *Attracting, developing and retaining a skilled public sector workforce with the capacity to meet emerging economic, social and technological opportunities and challenges.*

The nature of work has undergone a massive shift during this pandemic. An inclusive approach to meeting these challenges must be developed, that recognise the rights of workers to have jobs that are secure, well paid, and provide opportunity for learning and skill development. The casualisation of work has shown the vulnerability of workers when a pandemic occurs.

The TSS has an opportunity to be a leader in this area.

### **CONCLUSION**

Unions Tasmania has attempted to briefly address each term of reference, however, the vagueness of the terms of reference make it difficult to respond in any way other than a broad manner.

In addition to the Terms of reference, Unions Tasmania has also highlighted other areas that the Review needs to be cognisant of; the COVID-19 lessons, consultation, retention of services and risk-based decision-making.

While it is unclear what the rationale behind this review is, the tight timelines and the haste with which it is now being proceeded upon only add to the scepticism that there are already preconceived ideas of what the review will determine.