

TASMAN COUNCIL

A Natural Escape

Hon Kerry Vincent MLC
Minister for Local Government
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport
Minister for Housing and Planning
Level 10, 15 Murray Street
Hobart TAS 7000
Minister.vincent@dpac.tas.gov.au

31 October 2025

Dear Minister Vincent,

REF Proposed Reforms to Councillor Numbers and Allowances

Tasman Council appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Discussion Paper – Reforms to Councillor Numbers and Allowances*.

Council acknowledges the intent of the proposed reforms to modernise the framework for councillor representation and remuneration across Tasmania's local government sector. The Council recognises that a fair, transparent, and sustainable system will help ensure effective local governance into the future. However, as there are multiple aspects to these changes, all Councils should be presented a final proposal to consider and provide feedback, prior to adoption. Declarations of interest, modes of meeting attendance and quorum management need to be dealt with as a package.

Support in Principle

Tasman Council supports, in principle, the proposed changes to councillor numbers and allowances. However, the impact of Tasman moving to 5 Councillors is unclear at this point. Council acknowledges that aligning councillor representation with factors such as population, infrastructure, and development activity provides a consistent and data-driven approach across the State. However, the logic of using sealed roads as an indicator of council capacity is unjustified and not a useful measure. Council also supports the intent to improve councillor remuneration to better reflect the growing complexity, workload, and responsibilities associated with serving as an elected member.

Local Context and Representation

Tasman is a small but diverse council, experiencing significant seasonal population fluctuations in addition to a significant visitor load throughout the year. While the proposed reduction from seven to five councillors is understood within the context of achieving comparable ratios of elected members to voters, state-wide, Council highlights that smaller rural municipalities face unique challenges in maintaining effective representation across dispersed communities. The retention of local representation is critical to ensure that appropriate services are delivered and to act as a conduit to State and Federal governments.

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Meeting Attendance and Flexibility

Council emphasises that any change to councillor numbers should be accompanied by greater flexibility in meeting attendance, including formal provisions for remote and online participation.

The ability for councillors to attend and vote remotely under defined circumstances is critical for smaller rural councils, where travel distances, work commitments, and emergencies can limit physical attendance. Enhanced flexibility will help maintain effective governance and community representation. Importantly, any new regulations must ensure that day-to-day Council operations and functions are not reliant upon approvals from the Office of Local Government or Ministers.

Conflicts of Interest

Council also encourages the State Government to provide clearer and more practical guidance on conflicts of interest for councillors. The current provisions can be complex and open to interpretation, creating uncertainty for elected members who are seeking to comply in good faith. Additionally, reduced councillor numbers and unnecessarily cautious 'declarations of interest' may impact the achievement of a quorum. Additionally, the idea that a Councillor declaring an interest forms part of a quorum – in the event numbers drop below a standard quorum - should not be considered a good governance model.

Simplifying and better defining conflict of interest requirements, supported by accessible examples and training, would make it easier for councillors to understand when declarations are required and help strengthen public confidence in transparent decision-making.

Summary

In summary, Tasman Council:

1. Supports in principle the proposed reforms to councillor numbers and allowances;
2. Emphasises the importance of enabling greater flexibility for meeting attendance, including online participation;
3. Requests the Minister arrange a review of conflict of interest guidelines to provide increased clarity around circumstances that create a conflict; and
4. Requests ongoing consultation with smaller rural councils to ensure the framework remains equitable, practical, and reflective of the realities of rural governance.

Tasman Council thanks the Minister and the Office of Local Government for the opportunity to provide input and looks forward to continued engagement as these reforms progress. We request that a further consultation period be undertaken to respond to the complete package of proposed changes.

Kind regards,



Cr Rod Macdonald
Mayor