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## SUBMISSION ON REFORMS TO COUNCILLOR NUMBERS AND ALLOWANCES

The Office of Local Government (OLG) is proposing to reduce Tasmania's 263 councillors to 203 by October 2026, with new numbers of five, seven, or nine per council based on size. In turn, the average councillor allowance is set to increase by 14.25%, funded by the salary savings from the reduced number of councillors. These changes are aimed at improving governance and council sustainability and are planned to be implemented prior to the 2026 local government elections.

In response to the proposed reforms, as outlined in the *Discussion Paper – Reforms to Councillor Numbers and Allowances 2025*, the Central Coast Council has workshopped the proposals to inform its position and formally endorsed this submission at its 20 October 2025 meeting.

Central Coast Council believes a stronger approach would preserve current councillor numbers, provide more substantial and targeted support for councillor development, and ensure remuneration properly reflects workload and public expectation.

Council is concerned that the proposed reforms to councillor numbers and allowances do not represent meaningful or positive value for Tasmanian communities. While the intention to modernise local government frameworks is acknowledged, the reforms risk undermining local representation, reducing overall elected member capacity, and failing to deliver a meaningful shift in remuneration levels – undermining the reforms' intentions to attract more diverse and high-quality candidates.

The reduction in councillor numbers – particularly to five – presents risks to robust debate and diversity of opinions. Smaller elected bodies are susceptible to undue influence and control of dominant personalities.

Reducing the number of elected councillors across Tasmania's 29 councils while offering only a modest increase in allowances will likely weaken, rather than strengthen, local representation. The reforms will not deliver a substantial benefit commensurate with the significant structural changes.

However, if the proposed reforms are implemented as indicated by the OLG, then the Council's agreed responses to the three specific questions posed in the discussion paper are provided below.

**1. Should we consider any strategies/guidance for council decision making where a quorum cannot be maintained?**

Yes, the Government should establish clear legislative or procedural guidance to allow councils to make decisions when a quorum cannot be maintained due to councillor absences or conflicts of interest.

In small councils, particularly those with only five councillors, routine absences, illness, or conflicts of interest can prevent decision-making on key matters. Without flexibility, essential services and statutory decisions (planning permits, tenders, governance obligations) may face unnecessary delays, undermining public confidence and operational efficiency.

In response to this, the reforms could introduce legislative provisions to permit councils to make 'alternative decisions' where quorum is lost due to conflicts of interest, provided procedural fairness and transparency safeguards are in place.

In addition, any reforms should also support councillor attendance through technology (remote attendance of meetings), education, and flexible scheduling

**2. Should councillors' superannuation payments be mandatory?**

No, councillors' superannuation payments should not be made mandatory. Council's preference is to retain the current framework where councillors receive a superannuation-equivalent allowance as part of their remuneration, with the option to self-manage or voluntarily contribute to a super fund. This maintains simplicity, autonomy, and aligns with the representative nature of elected members.

Under current law, councillors serve as elected representatives, not employees. Compulsory superannuation payments blur this distinction and could create unintended legal or taxation complexities inconsistent with the independent, civic nature of the role.

Many councillors are retirees and receiving mandatory superannuation payments may complicate their financial affairs, or disadvantage them.

Additionally, there is no demonstrated community benefit to the proposal. Given the reforms are intended to be cost-neutral and focused on governance improvement, mandatory superannuation payments offer little public value.

**3. Should the methodology and ongoing review framework for councillor allowances and numbers be embedded in legislation?**

No, the methodology should not be embedded in legislation. The methodology and review framework should remain in policy, not legislation, to preserve flexibility and responsiveness to any future changes.

Whilst embedding the methodology and review framework for councillor allowances and numbers in legislation may improve consistency to a degree, it would also reduce responsiveness and flexibility in addressing any future changes. Amending the legislation to effect this change would also present a significant administrative

burden – one that is not warranted given the questionable benefit of the proposed change.

In conclusion, reducing the total number of councillors from 263 to 203 significantly reduces community representation and accessibility. Councillors play a vital role in engaging with residents, representing local interests, and managing increasingly complex governance and service delivery expectations. Fewer councillors will mean higher workloads per individual, less diversity of viewpoints, and reduced ability for communities – particularly in rural and regional areas – to have their concerns heard and acted upon.

The proposed 14.25% increase in councillor allowances is relatively insignificant when considered against inflation and the growing scope of councillor responsibilities. This adjustment will not materially change the capacity of councillors to dedicate more time, or to attract a more diverse or ‘higher-quality’ of candidates, as the paper suggests. Councillors face considerable opportunity costs for their public service, and the minor increase proposed will not materially offset this.

No compelling evidence has been presented that fewer councillors with slightly higher allowances will deliver improved decision-making, efficiency, or community benefit.

Yours sincerely



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