
From:
Sent: Thursday, 5 April 2018 11:26 AM
To: Local Government Board (DPaC)
Subject: Submission to Local Government Review BOARD Tasmania: OBJECTION TO TASMAN & SORELL COUNCIL AMALGAMATION

OBJECTION TO TASMAN COUNCIL AMALGAMATION

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write to object to the amalgamation of the Tasman Council with any of the neighbouring councils. My submission requests that the amalgamation of Tasman Council, with any other council, be abandoned. I address the following points below:

An amalgamation must be in the best interests of ratepayers

It has yet to be (and unlikely to be) demonstrated that the proposed amalgamation is in the best interests of ratepayers or residents generally. An amalgamated Council will remove council staff and councillors further away from individuals within the municipality. The points below describe how amalgamation is not in the interest of ratepayers.

Community of interest

Tasman Council region is very much a discreet community, both in terms activities - (employment, socially and historically) as well as geographically. The Peninsula has evolved as a very self reliant community. From the early days of white settlement it had its own administrative centre and it developed, from there, its commerce and social networks. Indeed today, the Tasman Peninsula, is unique in the role it plays within the Tasmanian tourism industry and the fact that it is identified as historically significant and an area surrounded by forests and national parks. It is important that these distinctions are maintained and that the residents of the day have the opportunity to shape their community's future.

It is essential when considering government of any level that community of interest is considered in decision making. Local government - being as close as it is to its citizens in a day to day role - must be easily accessible. As a consequence, decisions taken by councils must be cognisant of residents needs and indeed their expectations of council.

Whilst there is much debate around many issues within a local government area and a range of views - that are at times quite diverse - there is nonetheless an opportunity for them to be considered by a full council quorum. This understanding within a community of interest then allows a more comprehensive assessment to be made by the individual councillor. A Councillor can enter into this decision making process with the full knowledge that they are then accountable to that community for the decision.

With a significantly smaller population than the other councils in these proposed mergers, the voice of the Tasman population is largely lost and their views become only one of many, a small percentage of voices, within a larger council area.

A council made up of a much larger, much different area and community of interest is not in a position to effectively understand or represent those views.

Improve the level of services for communities

This is often spoke of yet, when when raised, is scant on detail.

In the age of technology there are gains to be had from the sharing of IT resources - software and hardware as well as technical personnel. With the increasing presence of online business, this is an obvious benefit that can be gained by residents and ratepayers.

Beyond this, the benefits are less obvious. The physical services of council are still required to be performed.

There is the desperate need for jobs in the local Tasman Community, with the reduction in large scale farming and the change in agricultural practices. Where once an influx of casual workers during the fruit season would provide literally hundreds of jobs, with incomes that were spent in the local area, supporting local businesses, we have seen this rapidly diminish.

Other industries - such as tourism - have grown and new businesses supported by the visitor economy have developed. Entrepreneurs have also moved into Tasman and started new businesses. However, more work is required. Support is also required from Federal and State governments to build on the success of these economic gains and new the economic direction.

A focus on this requires input from the whole of the community, and again, a real understanding of the importance of change and of the opportunities for the future. It is important to work through these issues - not with the views and decision of the majority who have no direct connection, nor accountability, to the Tasman Community - but a truly representative voice. A council that works undistracted from the task of running multiple regions to provide the service needs of its community.

To cut into the employment of Tasman Council will be a negative outcome for the Tasman Peninsula and merely transfer that economic benefit to other areas.

Preserve and maintain local representation

Clearly, with the numbers and distribution of councillors proposed in any future amalgamation, the voice of residents on the Peninsula will become 'lost in the numbers'.

The short term proposal to maintain councillors for a brief period is totally inadequate. The Tasman community needs to continue to be heard and represented. Not become one of 9 or 11 voices, who very rightly are there to represent the voters who put them into their positions. They are not accountable to Tasman resident and ratepayers, but rather those in their own communities. And rightly so.

Ensure that the financial status of the entities is strengthened.

Tasman Council is in an enviable financial position, with cash assets and a strong balance sheet. There has been no detail as to how an amalgamation will benefit ratepayers and, importantly, residents generally.

Numbers have been bandied around but never supported by detail. As discussed above, employment, the provision of services, local procurement and the activities of council generally are critically important to the growth and community development of the Tasman region. Removing this financial contribution (a likely result of potential "savings measures") will impact dramatically and negatively on the Tasman economy.

Summary

On all counts, the amalgamation of Tasman Council with other councils in the region has a negative impact on the residents and ratepayers of the Tasman Peninsula. Tasman is a discrete community of interest. It is a community which occupies an important and critical role in the development of tourism in Tasmania. It must be allowed to develop and grow through decision making processes which are supported by and in the interests of its population. Not by those who are not immersed in the community and have their own set of priorities for their region. Tasman is an economically viable council and should be allowed to exist in its own right.

Amalgamation must be abandoned.

Yours faithfully,

Rod Macdonald
Ratepayer

