

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to present my objection to the proposed Tasman and Sorell council merger, chiefly from the perspective of a Tasman resident. I have largely confined my arguments to the four principles outlined in the KPMG report.

1. Be in the best interests of ratepayers

While Sorell residents are unlikely to be disadvantaged by an amalgamation with Tasman and may retain similar levels of representation, localised services and governance, the same would not be true for Tasman residents.

Currently the local council represents the hub of the community, provision of services and governance from a remote and relatively unrepresentative council would undermine the sense of community that now exists within the Tasman municipality.

Within the current discussion there has been no mention of where the chambers of a newly merged entity would be located. The Sorell community would reasonably assume no change to their existing circumstances and could furnish us with many sound reasons why a move to Nubeena would be inappropriate. These same reasons justify retention of the status quo with distinct regional areas being served by their own local council.

Currently Tasman council is enjoying a period of stability and good governance and the area is experiencing a boom in tourism and associated developments. The accompanying influx of new residents is effectively increasing the pool of local talent and skills. Our evolving community has distinctly different characteristics and is not only best served by an independent local council but will continue to improve its capacity to deliver local governance and meet future challenges, whether perceived or real.

Many researchers have noted that bigger is not necessarily better and that regional integrity is a more important consideration than population size or borders drawn up by economic considerations (Bish 2001; Allan 2003; Dollery and Crase 2004; Aulich et al. 2014)

2. Improve the level of services for communities

As stated in the KPMG report many gains have already been made via shared service agreements and there is *"limited additional financial capacity for efficiency savings to be reinvested into improved services"*. As yet the advocates for amalgamation have not substantiated how amalgamation will further improve services. The likelihood of asset rationalisation and the suggested \$944,423 saving in first year employment costs (KPMG report) are incompatible with improving services over a geographically extensive region.

3. Preserve and maintain local representation

The KPMG report states that in the case of a Sorell/Tasman merger the creation of wards may not be warranted. The population inequity (14,000 to 2,500) suggests that the Tasman region will be under represented within a newly merged entity. This situation is contrary to the third headline criteria "*Preserve and maintain local representation*". Even if a ward system were to be introduced it would provide limited redress for a limited time.

4. Ensure that the financial status of the entities is strengthened

The KPMG report claims an overall neutral outcome for a new Sorell/Tasman entity. This neutral outcome comes at the cost of job losses to the community (as stated above). It must further be acknowledged that there is a history of projected savings not being realised and that financial efficiencies and service delivery can often be better delivered by small councils (Dollery and Johnson 2005). There is therefore little evidence to suggest that a new Sorell/Tasman council will be financially stronger than the two that currently exist.

5. Conclusion

As a long term resident of the Tasman municipality I have serious concerns that we are currently facing a threat to our thriving local democracy. This proposal has the potential to undermine empowerment of our local community, challenging local capacity, resilience and community identity.

To date, from the perspective of the Tasman community, a positive case for amalgamation has not clearly been made or promulgated to the public and any claims for the benefits of amalgamation have been vague and lacking in evidence. While some proponents of amalgamation have raised fears of future challenges these 'challenges' have not been articulated and seem a mystery in the face of our growing local economy and thriving community.

Yours faithfully,

Stuart Macdonald

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Dollery, B. and L. Crase (2004). "Is bigger local government better? An evaluation of the case for Australian municipal amalgamation programs." Urban Policy and Research 22(3): 265-275.

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