

23rd March 2018.

Sorell and Tasman Councils Review Submissions,
Local Government Board,
GPO Box 123,
HOBART. TAS. 7001.

Dear Local Government Board Members,

Submission against the amalgamation of Tasman Council with Sorell Council, or any other Council.

I live in the Tasman Municipality and I am strongly opposed to the amalgamation of Tasman Council with Sorell Council or any other Council for that matter.

Firstly, I note in the Consultation Paper regarding the community survey: That the results of the survey demonstrated that an overwhelming majority of respondents voted in support of voluntary amalgamations. Although this statement may be correct given the minimal return rate, taken in the context of Tasman having 2340 electors of which only 301 responded and of those 74.25% responded in favour of amalgamation, this is only in the vicinity of 10% of our electors. Far from an overwhelming majority of electors, in fact a very pathetic response, perhaps indicating that there is no appetite for the amalgamation of Tasman Council.

Human nature being as it is, those wanting change would have ensured that they completed a survey, those who were happy for things to remain the same may have felt there wasn't the need to complete the survey. In my opinion, the lack of interest in the survey reveals that people are happy with the status quo rather than the reverse.

The survey itself was appalling, there wasn't an option for no amalgamation, and there wasn't the ability to add your name and address or any comments. The other issue was that the survey was only provided on-line. This would have prevented many of the senior people living in this municipality from completing the survey. According to the population statistics provided in the Consultation Paper, Tasman has 909 people aged 65+ years. Most of those wouldn't own a computer and therefore wouldn't have the ability to complete the survey, unless they asked somebody else to complete it for them.

There has been an enormous lack of transparency and no real community consultation or engagement on this issue from Tasman Council. Residents of Tasman have been calling for a public meeting on this issue for months. Those who attended council meetings to ask, "when is there going to be a public meeting to discuss the amalgamation issue", were told by the mayor, that there won't be a public meeting because council conducted a survey, or words to that effect. The laughable survey!

Many people had no idea about this issue until they read the notice placed by the Review Board in the Mercury Newspaper several weeks ago. There are still many people who have only just become aware of the issue now, not due to the Council, whose responsibility it is to be consultative, inclusive and transparent, but due to the outrage felt by community members who are spreading the word.

There is some strange idea amongst the Tasman Council employees that they won't lose their jobs. But unfortunately there seems to be little doubt that Sorell Council will move quickly to remove Tasman's staff, and the Council Chambers, Offices and Depot will be closed. If there isn't "streamlining" of services, where will the savings be made?

Anyone who believes that the employees won't lose their jobs should read the estimated redundancy figures in the K.P.M.G South East Councils Feasibility Study, Final Report, 30th September, 2016. This report reveals that in the first year following amalgamation that 10.5 full-time equivalent employees will be made redundant, this will provide \$944,423 savings in employee costs in the first year, let's face it, they will all be Tasman employees. Without any doubt, the second year will see the rest of the Tasman staff gone or relocated to Sorell.

Tasman Council is considered a major employer in the Tasman region. Tasman Council has 19 or 20 (depending which report you read) full-time equivalent employees. When they lose their jobs, employment isn't easy to find in the Tasman Municipality, they will most likely need to relocate to gain employment. Remove these employees, their husbands or wives and children, from our community, a total estimated to be somewhere in the vicinity of 80 to 100 residents, this will have a devastatingly negative effect on our community. In a small community such as ours the devastating effect on our School, Shops, Doctors, Pharmacy, Banks, Post Offices and the list goes on and on and the knock on effect that this would cause would be very difficult for the community to recover from and could well be the destruction of our community. Councils are supposed to support and build rural communities, not destroy them!

The K.P.M.G report states that an amalgamation with Tasman and Sorell will provide a neutral outcome! So why on earth would anyone consider amalgamating Tasman and Sorell! Although neutral on paper, it will be devastating to the economy and social fibre of the Tasman community.

The K.P.M.G. report and also noted in the Review Board Discussion Paper compares various options. The option of a merger with Tasman and Sorell delivers a combined additional surplus of \$1.3m p.a. The option of resource sharing delivers a combined additional surplus of \$900,000. p.a., (this figure may not be accurate). If this surplus is accurate one could assume that these savings could still be achieved with continued and enhanced resource sharing, without amalgamation. Comparing both figures, if Tasman and Sorell amalgamated, as opposed to continuing and enhancing their resource sharing arrangements, the difference for both Tasman and Sorell combined will only provide a surplus of \$400,000, so we are going to amalgamate on the basis of \$400,000 shared between the two councils, \$200,000 each, with these figures, how shocking is it that we're even having a discussion about amalgamation.

What is very clear in the K.P.M.G. report is that the total amalgamation surplus of \$1.3m p.a. split across the two councils would provide Tasman with a surplus of \$370,210. and Sorell \$913,191. So Tasman has been sold out to Sorell for \$370,210. This is outrageous!

Please note that it's very poor form to provide the public with possibly inaccurate financial figures and expect them to prepare submissions on the basis of it.

In the 2016/17 financial report Tasman council had a surplus of \$1.879m, Sorell council had a surplus of \$3.628m. Given these figures, both Councils are doing just fine on their own. The financial figures provided by the commissioned K.P.M.G. report into a Tasman and Sorell amalgamation are so minimal that it simply isn't worth the agitation and angst this proposal has caused the Tasman community.

In the K.P.M.G. report the cost of amalgamation in the first year will be \$1,112,659. Over a million dollars to amalgamate, what a shameful waste of our money!

No doubt Tasman ratepayers paid considerable amounts of money commissioning K.P.M.G.'s report. The really annoying part of this situation is that we find ourselves having to do all of this work because of certain Tasman councillors who voted to continue the amalgamation process and after

the event they are now trying to justify or cover up their decision by saying pathetic, ridiculous things, such as, "we're looking into the future" or "I voted to continue this process, so I can make an informed decision", as if they have just invented the wheel, or sliced bread, or amalgamation! If they wanted to be so well informed, they should have conducted some research, they may have even learnt something. There are dozens of reports undertaken regularly on this issue, some very recently, including the K.P.M.G. report which was meant to "inform" Tasman councillors prior to voting on the review process, perhaps some of them should have read it! They were elected to make informed decisions, perhaps some should start doing so!

As for those Tasman councillors who are so keen on seeing the future, they should take a good hard look at the history, or do some research, or read reports that are placed under their noses, or purchase a crystal ball, it would be more accurate than the methods they are currently utilising, which appears to be nothing.

As noted in the Discussion Paper Tasman Council's average rates are \$1234.00, Sorell Council's average rates are \$1315.00. After amalgamation, Tasman ratepayers can look forward to an instant rates rise for reduced services and representation and total loss of identity, how is any of this fair and reasonable?

Again, according to the Discussion Paper for the 2015-16 financial year, Tasman had \$6.253m in cash reserves. Sorell had \$8.573m in cash reserves, this is only around \$2.3m more than Tasman with its much smaller ratepayer base and income. Perhaps Sorell Council should get their act together before looking over the fence at us. Please note, that I have utilised the older 2015-16 financials as noted in the Discussion Paper rather than the current 2016-17 financials, because on Tasman Council's website the 2016-17 financial report is still marked as a draft, not sure why?

Sorell doesn't really attract tourists as such, they just pass through Sorell, perhaps stopping to purchase petrol or groceries on their drive to get to somewhere better, Tasman or Glamorgan Spring Bay. Sorell's businesses would benefit from our tourists, because they have to travel through Sorell.

Given that Tasman attracted 320,000 tourists in 2015, I would guess that there are some at Sorell who would believe that Tasman will be the jewel in their crown. But once they realise that tourists aren't ratepayers and therefore don't contribute to council's finances and, in fact, cause additional wear and tear on our roads and cost council additional expense for things such as rubbish bins, public toilets and the ongoing cleaning and maintenance of same and, most of these costs must be met by Tasman ratepayers, Sorell will quickly lose interest in all of us down here and redirect our funding to those things that are important them. This statement isn't meant to be negative about tourism, many businesses rely on it and it keeps many locals employed, I am just simply stating the facts.

Tasman embarked on resource sharing approximately ten years ago, as reflected in our much improved financial position. Tasman Council has had to be innovative and forward thinking to continually evolve in order to address financial sustainability issues and manage community needs and expectations. Amalgamation is anything but innovative and what more do we have to do to be left alone, we have well and truly proven ourselves over the past decade, consistently punching above our weight. On the other hand Sorell only saw the light regarding resource sharing five years ago, Tasman certainly doesn't want to be shackled to Sorell.

But of course the residents of Tasman are more than happy for the Council to continue with the existing arrangements and to identify, develop and enhance further resource sharing opportunities

into the future. The last decade has proven it to be a win, win formula, ensuring that local employment and services are maintained, whilst providing considerable savings to Tasman.

I note in the Discussion Paper that the Board will consider options for maintaining representation and minimising the loss of representation in any transitional process associated with any potential merger proposed under a merged council option. The Discussion Paper also goes on to say that wards could provide an option to maintain local representation, at least as a part of a transitional process towards the adoption of a consolidated local government electorate. The key words in these statements are "transitional process" meaning that we may maintain our current quota of seven councillors for a year or two, if we're lucky, after that we'll be faced with trying to elect one or maybe two councillors from our area, our local government representation will virtually be gone. One of the principles that must be applied in the Consultation Paper is to preserve and maintain local representation, the fact is you cannot and will not meet this principle, by your own admission. Sure you may do it for the transitional period, but once Sorell is in total control, it's virtually all over for Tasman constituents, their elected representation and voice on Sorell Council. One against eight or two against seven councillors, will prevent Tasman's issues from being heard.

If we have to travel over an hour to Sorell to conduct council business, we will eat there, shop there, bank there, utilise the pharmacies and visit doctors and conduct other business there, all great for Sorell, but this will be financially and socially devastating for Tasman businesses and communities.

Sorell has become a satellite city of Hobart or Clarence, growing to be a suburb of Hobart and has lost its rural feel. Tasman in area is comparatively larger than Sorell and is still very much rural with scattered communities. It would be far more appropriate for Sorell to be amalgamated with Clarence or Hobart or both, like with like. Tasman has very few, if any, synergies with Sorell.

The Tasman Municipality is virtually an island and quite isolated, and for many of us over an hour away from Sorell. When major disasters strike like the devastating 2013 bushfires, we were left with no power and no access in or out for days. We had to revert to utilising boats to provide necessities and ship people in and out of the municipality. Tasman Councillors did the best they could under extremely difficult and stressful circumstances and at least they were here. Where would we be as part of the Sorell municipality, the Sorell Councillors wouldn't have been able to gain access to us to render assistance. The Port Arthur tragedy is another example. Following both of these tragic events, Tasman Council was instrumental in the recovery process, which took years and for some probably will never be totally finalised.

In rural areas such as Tasman people do relate strongly to the locality in which we reside and everyone knows just about everyone. With the influx of new comers, I dare say that has been lost at Sorell.

In Tasman there are very strong ties to the places we live, our family and the people we associate with and our jobs or voluntary work within the community. We live, work and play together and when our lifestyle is threatened we band together and stand up and fight against that threat. Hence, what's happening right now, this amalgamation issue is one of the biggest threats to our way of life. Sure, we fight amongst ourselves fairly often, but that's fine, we're allowed to, but once we're threatened by external forces, all of that is put aside, to protect what is ours.

Although, we're happy to continue with the existing resource sharing arrangements, the resource sharing of a General Manager is one step too far, one should understand that this is a very unique situation. Given the current amalgamation discussions between Tasman and Sorell, it could easily be argued that the General Manager has a conflict of interest and he may well be viewing

amalgamation as inevitable. Unfortunately when Tasman agreed to share their General Manager with Sorell, this situation was very predictable. It is far from inevitable for us, living in Tasman, it is our lives and our futures. Shame on particular individuals, having proven the community correct, that they couldn't be trusted to deal appropriately with this level of trust or responsibility. This is total treachery and betrayal and is viewed by many Tasman residents as an act of treason! This situation has certainly highlighted to Tasman electors that there needs to be a review and rethink about the existing structures (staff and councillors) within Tasman Council.

Many of the public buildings within this municipality have been built (or partially built) by community members, with hours of voluntary labour and thousands of hard earned dollars donated. What happens to these community assets once we're amalgamated with Sorell? Would Sorell just close down the smaller halls around the district, due to too much maintenance being required, and sell them off? Does Sorell still have that same sense of community, would their residents' band together to build something they want or see a need for, or would they expect the council to build it for them? Volunteering is vital to Tasman for example, service clubs, sporting organisations, the Men's Shed, Op Shop, volunteer Fire Fighters, S.E.S. and Ambulance, and the list goes on and on.

In the past twelve to eighteen months property sales have skyrocketed and it is virtually impossible to find long term rental accommodation in Tasman and this has generated increased building activity around the Municipality. Together with the expansion of Tassal, promising over seventy new jobs, major upgrades to the school, the cruise ships visiting the Port Arthur Historic Site, the Three Capes Track and other bush walks, Shipstern Bluff (becoming iconic for surfies), game fishing at Pirates Bay, 1000's of hectares of National Parks, beautiful safe swimming beaches and outstanding fishing in bays and from beaches and jetties, and new businesses such as the Lavender Farm, Whisky Distillery, vineyards, and planned new major developments such as The Remarkable Lodge and Federal Hotels development, and the list goes on, alongside our existing businesses, our Municipality is booming! Why cause all of this disruption and anguish with discussions of amalgamating with Sorell, we don't want or need Sorell interfering. We have our own set of unique challenges and opportunities, which are polar opposite to Sorell.

The proposed amalgamation appears to be change for change sake, without any logical justification for doing so and is most certainly not in the best interests of Tasman ratepayers and will not improve the level of services for our communities.

Yours sincerely, *Judy Hardy*