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Dear Minister

SUBMISSION TO FINAL REPORT – FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW

In your letter received 16 November 2023, you enclosed a copy of the Local Government Board's Future of Local Government Review (FOLGR) Final Report and invited submissions on the report and its 37 recommendations.

The Central Coast Council have engaged with the Final Report through Councillor and senior leadership workshops and appreciates this opportunity to provide feedback on the review outcomes and recommendations. Together with a restatement of the Council's broad position on local government reform in Tasmania as it relates to the FOLGR process and reports, we have appended a table that lists an indication of our position against each of the Board's 37 recommendations and additional comments where necessary.

Council's position on local government reform in Tasmania

As outlined in our previous submissions, Central Coast believes that communities are looking to their local councils for direction more than ever. Looking to the future, councils will place more emphasis on being facilitators and advocates for their community's wellbeing and ambitions, without detracting from other core responsibilities.

Flexible service delivery and funding models are required to deliver effective results across diverse communities, and the support of the state government in achieving these results is still best delivered through close collaboration with local government, where more direct community representation and relationships can better frame local issues and better respond to specific local requirements. Councils' local area knowledge and connections ensure their necessity to the delivery of successful and lasting economic and social development across Tasmania.

Although the Council did not agree with the Board's approach to the issue of boundary adjustments and amalgamations, we agreed that some council boundaries could be better defined to reflect contemporary demographics. Better alignment with other state services, such as education catchment areas, health services, port and freight

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could be beneficial changes. Another opportunity would be to ensure a greater balance between urban and rural areas within boundaries – creating more equitable capacity and delivery of professional services both across and within all council areas.

At Central Coast, with our current rate-base and staff structure, we believe we are already of an appropriate size and diversity to fully service our community. We do not believe the residents of Central Coast would benefit by any significant boundary adjustments.

The Council strongly believes that if this situation were to change and any boundary adjustments were to be considered in the future, this would be best addressed at the local government level, and not mandated or initiated by the state. Further to this, the Council remains unsupportive of the Government's desire to have a community vote on any boundary adjustments or potential amalgamations.

The Council is committed to playing a key part in regional leadership and in cross-council communication. Following a request from our elected members, Central Coast have commenced discussions with Devonport City Council in relation to shared strategic initiatives and are currently working on a memorandum of understanding to this end.

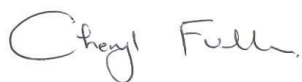
While this work remains in its initial stages, it has become clear that a dedicated resource to facilitate councils' adoption of shared strategic arrangements is necessary. The Council's view is that such a resource should be funded by the state government.

Land use planning can be a conflicting role for councils and councillors. If councils lose capacity for planning services and decision-making, they will lose their ability for place-shaping. Whilst there is a possibility for regionally significant developments to be addressed at a regional planning level – leaving councils to make other planning decisions – any changes to the role of planning authorities must be carefully considered to minimise any potential conflicts of interest and to safeguard a community's ability to determine its own preferences for local land use and development.

The appended table provides more specific feedback on the Board's 37 recommendations and indicates the Council's level of support for each recommendation.

We trust that this submission provides you with practical insights on the Board's Final Report and recommendations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Cheryl Fuller'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Cheryl' being more prominent than the last name 'Fuller'.

Cr Cheryl Fuller
MAYOR

Final Report Recommendations

No.	Board Recommendation	Position	Comments
1	<p>Define in Tasmania's new Local Government Act the role of local government consistent with the statement below:</p> <p>The role of local government is to support and improve the wellbeing of Tasmanian communities by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. harnessing and building on the unique strengths and capabilities of local communities; 2. providing infrastructure and services that, to be effective, require local approaches; 3. representing and advocating for the specific needs and interests of local communities in regional, state-wide, and national decision-making; and 4. promoting the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of local communities, by mitigating and planning for climate change impacts. 	Supported	<p>Councils' role in land use planning should be made clear. Failure to do so, leaves us open to a situation where a new role, as defined in the amended Act, is used to support councils not acting as planning authorities, on the basis that such a role is in conflict with or at least less important than, the four items listed.</p>
2	<p>The Tasmanian Government – through subordinate legislation – should implement a Local Government Charter to support the new legislated role for local government.</p> <p>The Charter should be developed in close consultation with the sector and clarify and consolidate in a single document councils' core functions, principles, and responsibilities, as well as the obligations of the Tasmanian Government when dealing with the sector as a partner in delivering community services and support.</p>	Supported in part	<p>Any charter must outline not only the role of local government, but the role of state government entities as well.</p>

No.	Board Recommendation	Position	Comments
3	<p>The Tasmanian Government should work with the sector to develop, resource, and implement a renewed Strategic Planning and Reporting Framework that is embedded in a new Local Government Act to support and underpin the role of local government. Under this Framework councils will be required to develop – within the first year of every council election – a four-year strategic plan.</p> <p>The plan would consist of component plans including, at minimum, a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community engagement plan; • workforce development plan; • elected member capability and professional development plan; and • financial and asset sustainability plan. 	Supported	<p>Central Coast have already moved toward this model, with the introduction of its term plan, <i>Our Place – Our Future: First Steps</i>, in October 2023.</p> <p>We note this recommendation aligns closely with the NSW local government sector’s Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, which has proven successful in its objectives there.</p>
4	<p>Formal council amalgamation proposals should be developed for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Coast, Waratah-Wynyard and Circular Head Councils (into 2 councils); • Kentish and Latrobe Councils; • Break O’Day, Glamorgan–Spring Bay and Sorell Councils (into 2 councils); • City of Hobart and Glenorchy City Councils; 	No position	No comment.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kingborough and Huon Valley Councils. <p>The Board acknowledges council interest in and discussions on boundary changes are less advanced in respect of City of Hobart and Glenorchy, and Kingborough and Huon Valley councils, but nonetheless believes that these councils have expressed clear interest in further exploring opportunities. The Board believes there is substantial merit in ensuring that those councils (and their communities) are afforded the opportunity to genuinely explore structural consolidation proposals in greater detail.</p>		
5	A new Local Government Board should be established to undertake detailed assessment of formal council amalgamation proposals and make recommendations to the Tasmanian Government on specific new council structures.	Support the intent	To fully support this recommendation, Council would need to see more detail, such as a terms of reference, charter, structure and membership.
6	A Community Working Group (CWG) should be established in each area where formal amalgamation proposals are being prepared. The CWG would identify specific opportunities the Tasmanian Government could support to improve community outcomes.	Supported	The working group should be formed by and report to councils, not an independent body.
7	In those areas where amalgamation proposals are being developed, a community vote should be held before any reform proceeds, to consider an integrated package of reform that involves both a formal council amalgamation proposal and a funded package of opportunities to improve community outcomes.	Not supported	No comment.

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8	If a successful community-initiated elector poll requests councils to consider amalgamation, the Minister for Local Government should request the Local Government Board to develop a formal amalgamation proposal and put it to a community vote.	Supported with conditions	The councils concerned should have the first opportunity to develop a proposal.
9	The new Local Government Act should provide that the Minister for Local Government can require councils to participate in identified shared service or shared staffing arrangements.	Not supported	Any shared service or shared staffing arrangements must be through formal council resolution and after an independent assessment of the benefits of those proposed arrangements is undertaken.
10	Give councils the opportunity to design identified shared service arrangements themselves, with a model only being imposed if councils cannot reach consensus.	Supported with conditions	Individual councils are best placed to design shared service arrangements and any such arrangements must be implemented on a voluntary basis.
11	Before endorsing a particular mandatory shared service arrangement, the Minister for Local Government should seek the advice of the Local Government Board.	Not supported	This would depend upon further detail being supplied, such as charter, membership, structure. Any shared service arrangements must be implemented on a voluntary basis.
12	If councils are unable to reach consensus on a mandatory service sharing agreement, the Minister for Local Government should have the power to require councils to participate in a specific model or models the Tasmanian Government has developed.	Not supported	Refer to previous comments in relation to an independent review of the benefits of any service sharing arrangements. Any shared service arrangements must be implemented on a voluntary basis.
13	The first priorities for developing mandatory shared service arrangements should be: • sharing of key technical staff;	Supported with conditions	The three priority areas are supported, but only on a voluntary basis.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sharing of common digital business systems and ICT infrastructure; and • sharing of asset management expertise through a centralised, council-owned authority. 		
14	Include a statutory requirement for councils to consult with local communities to identify wellbeing priorities, objectives, and outcomes in a new Local Government Act. Once identified, councils would be required to integrate the priorities into their strategic planning, service delivery and decision-making processes.	Supported with conditions	While Council supports the intent of this recommendation, the additional costs to the community associated with such a requirement should be met by the state.
15	To be eligible to stand for election to council, all candidates should first undertake – within six months prior to nominating – a prescribed, mandatory education session, to ensure all candidates understand the role of councillor and their responsibilities if elected.	Supported	No comment.
16	<p>The Tasmanian Government and the local government sector should jointly develop and implement a contemporary, best practice learning and ongoing professional development framework for elected members. As part of this framework, under a new Local Government Act:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all elected members – including both new and returning councillors – should be required to complete a prescribed ‘core’ learning and development program within the first 12 months of being elected; and • councils should be required to prepare, at the beginning of each new term, an elected member learning and capability development plan to support the broader ongoing professional development needs of their elected members. 	Supported	No comment.

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17	The Tasmanian Government should further investigate and consider introducing an alternative framework for councils to raise revenue from major commercial operations in their local government areas, where rates based on the improved value of land are not an efficient, effective, or equitable form of taxation.	Supported	No comment.
18	The Tasmanian Government should work with the sector and the development industry to further investigate and consider introducing a marginal cost-based integrated developer charging regime	Supported	In relation to developing a charging regime, councils' costs should only be associated with core infrastructure in areas identified by councils, and capped. Should developers seek development outside of council identified areas then all infrastructure costs should be borne by the developer.
19	Introduce additional minimum information requirements for council rates notices to improve public transparency, accountability, and confidence in council rating and financial management decisions.	Supported	No comment.
20	<p>Within the context of the national framework, the Tasmanian Government should seek advice from the State Grants Commission on how it will ensure the Financial Assistance Grants methodology:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is transparent and well understood by councils and the community, • that assistance is being targeted efficiently and effectively, and • is not acting as a disincentive for councils to pursue structural reform opportunities. 	Supported with conditions	Financial Assistance Grants need to be fair and equitable, whereby regional and rural councils are not disadvantaged given extensive road networks and low-density populations.
21	The Tasmanian Government should review the total amount of Heavy Vehicle Motor Tax Revenue made available to councils and consider basing this total amount on service usage data.	Supported	Council strongly supports any increase in Tasmanian government subsidies, particularly when based on service usage rates, as this provides more equitable and targeted

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			distribution and would enable councils to better meet the substantial costs associated with maintaining assets to meet service level demands.
22	Introduce a framework for council fees and charges in a new Local Government Act, to support the expanded, equitable and transparent utilisation of fees and charges to fund certain council services.	Not supported	Fees and charges must reflect the cost for the provision of service and take into account the specific council's administrative burden.
23	The Tasmanian Government should review the current rating system under the Local Government Act to make it simpler, more equitable, and more predictable for landowners. The review should only be undertaken following implementation of the Board's other rating and revenue recommendations.	Supported	No comment.
24	The Tasmanian Government should work with the sector to develop, resource, and implement a best practice local government performance monitoring system.	Supported	No comment.
25	The Tasmanian Government should develop a clear and consistent set of guidelines for the collection, recording, and publication of datasets that underpin the new performance reporting system to improve overall data consistency and integrity, and prescribe data methodologies and protocols via a Ministerial Order or similar mechanism.	Supported	No comment.
26	The new Strategic Planning and Reporting Framework should actively inform and drive education, compliance, and regulatory enforcement activities for the sector, and entities with responsibility for compliance monitoring and management – including the Office of Local Government	Supported with conditions	While Council supports the internal audit function, the cost to establish and maintain such a function should be borne by the state, not the community.

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	<p>and council audit panels – should be properly empowered and resourced to effectively deliver their roles.</p> <p>As part of this the Tasmanian Government should consider introducing a requirement for councils to have an internal audit function given their responsibilities for managing significant public assets and resources, and whether this requirement needs to be legislated or otherwise mandated. Consideration should also be given to resourcing internal audit via service sharing or pooling arrangements, particularly for smaller councils.</p>		
27	The Tasmanian Government should collaborate with the local government sector to support a genuine, co-regulatory approach to councils' regulatory responsibilities, with state agencies providing ongoing professional support to council staff and involving councils in all stages of regulatory design and implementation	Supported	While the recommendation is supported, such collaboration ought to recognise the significant regulatory experience of councils' regulatory staff and further, that any collaboration is a partnership, not a hierarchical relationship.
28	The Tasmanian Government should work with the local government sector to pursue opportunities for strengthened partnerships between local government and Service Tasmania.	Supported with conditions	Any partnerships or arrangements must be on a voluntary basis.
29	Councils should migrate over time to common digital business systems and ICT infrastructure that meet their needs for digital business services, with support from the Department of Premier and Cabinet's Digital Strategy and Services (DSS).	Supported with conditions	Whilst the intent of the recommendation and the support of the DSS is supported, each council is unique and ought to be able to initiate and implement systems specific to their needs. Any changes must be on a voluntary basis.
30	The Tasmanian Government – in consultation with the sector – should review the current legislative requirements on councils for strategic financial and asset management planning documentation to simplify and streamline the requirements and support more consistent and transparent compliance.	Supported	No comment.

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31	The Tasmanian Government – in consultation with the sector – should investigate the viability of, and seek to implement wherever possible, standardised useful asset life ranges for all major asset classes.	Supported	No comment.
32	All Tasmanian councils should be required under a new Local Government Act to develop and adopt community engagement strategies – underpinned by clear deliberative engagement principles.	Supported	No comment.
33	A new Local Government Act should require councils, when developing and adopting their Community Engagement Strategies, to clearly set out how they will consult on, assess, and communicate the community impact of all significant new services or infrastructure.	Supported	No comment.
34	Following the phase 1 voluntary amalgamation program, the Tasmanian Government should commission an independent review into councillor numbers and allowances.	Support the intent	To fully support this recommendation, Council would need to see more detail, such as the scope and objectives of the independent review.
35	The Tasmanian Government should expedite reforms already agreed and/or in train in respect of statutory sanctions available to deal with councillor misconduct or poor performance.	Supported	No comment.
36	<p>The Tasmanian Government should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) to develop and implement – in consultation with councils and their staff – a workforce development toolkit tailored to the sector and aligned with the Tasmanian Government’s workforce development system; • support councils to update their workforce plans at the time of any consolidation; 	Supported with conditions	Council supports LGAT’s role in this space, however we see little benefit in any alignment with the state government’s workforce development system. Rather, Council suggests that any workforce development toolkit be best practice regardless of origin.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support LGAT to lead the development and implementation of a state-wide approach to workforce development for key technical staff, beginning with environmental health officers, planners, engineers and building inspectors; • recognise in statute that workforce development is an ongoing responsibility of council general managers and is included as part of the new Strategic Planning and Reporting Framework; and • include simple indicators of each council's workforce profile in the proposed council performance dashboard. 		
37	The Tasmanian Government should partner with, and better support, councils to build capacity and capability to plan for and respond to emergency events and climate change impacts.	Supported	No comment.