

12 February 2024

The Honourable Nic Street MP
Minister for Local Government
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Hobart TAS 7001
nic.street@dpac.tas.gov.au

Dear Minister Street,

I write in response to your letter dated 16 November 2023 regarding the Future of Local Government Review Final Report. Meander Valley Council (Council) previously formed a submission which was provided to the Local Government Board on 1 August 2023. Council has taken our position on the review seriously and broadly engaged with relevant stakeholders to inform our position. Council has undertaken a phone survey, online survey, two public meetings, a meeting with all employees, individual meetings with community members and attended numerous information sessions. Council has considered the feedback received in forming our positions. Council's General Manager Jonathan Harmey and myself also attended meetings with the Acting Director Michael Mogridge (cc) on 8 February 2024.

In response to your invitation for a submission on the Final Report, at the Ordinary Council Meeting held on 16 January 2024 the elected members of Council formed the following position:

1. Meander Valley Council does not support forced amalgamation or forced boundary changes to the existing Tasmanian Local Government areas.
2. Meander Valley Council does not support the maps of alternative future design for Local Government in Tasmania, involving a structural redesign to form 15 new Local Government areas.
3. Meander Valley Council supports councils that wish to progress voluntary amalgamations to do so with the support of their communities and the Tasmanian Government. Our community does not support voluntary amalgamation of the Meander Valley Council area with any other Tasmanian councils.

4. The Final Report does not adequately outline the substantial costs to achieve the proposed reforms. It is unrealistic for Council Officers to deliver the significant reforms in addition to their current roles. The cost of implementing the reforms should be met by the Tasmanian Government and not property owners.
5. Final Report Recommendation 3: *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. The plan would consist of component plans including, at minimum, a: community engagement plan; workforce development plan; elected member capability and professional development plan; and financial and asset sustainability plan.* This recommendation does not recognise the significant time and cost required to develop the suggested new plans. It may take years to develop informed and accurate plans.
6. Final Report Recommendation 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.* This recommendation should be limited to the voluntary amalgamation proposals identified by respective councils in Recommendation 4.
7. Final Report Recommendation 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.* This recommendation seeks to force councils and their employees into structurally different resourcing arrangements. Shared service arrangements are recommended to be voluntary or by agreement from a majority of Tasmanian Councils.
8. Final Report Recommendation 10: *Give councils the opportunity to design identified shared service arrangements themselves, with a model only being imposed if councils cannot reach consensus.* This recommendation seeks to force councils and their employees into structurally different resourcing arrangements. The following wording is recommended for removal *with a model only being imposed if councils cannot reach consensus.*

9. Final Report Recommendation 11: *Before endorsing a particular mandatory shared service arrangement, the Minister for Local Government should seek the advice of the Local Government Board.* Recommended change that the Minister for Local Government will consult with all Tasmanian councils.
10. Final Report Recommendation 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.* This recommendation seeks to force councils and their employees into structurally different resourcing arrangements. Shared service arrangements are recommended to be voluntary or by agreement from a majority of Tasmanian Councils.
11. Final Report Recommendation 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.* Meander Valley Council supports education sessions following a candidates election, not before being elected. This is not a requirement for State or Federal election candidates. This recommendation should also take into account those elected members that are reelected and have previously completed training. Education sessions must accommodate a range of learning styles to be available for all elected members to participate.
12. Final Report Recommendation 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.* The current Local Government Act has many avenues for councils to provide an equitable rating system. The principal reason that rates vary and may fluctuate is changes to property values which are determined by the Tasmanian Government's Office of the Valuer General.
13. Final Report Recommendation 24: *The Tasmanian Government should work with the sector to develop, resource and implement a best practice local government performance monitoring system.* The Council supports best practice local government performance reporting which should be used for benchmarking purposes only.

14. Final Report Recommendation 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. The Tasmanian Government should fund and deliver the performance reporting platform that is user friendly for Council Officers to input data.*
15. Final Report Recommendation 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 and council audit panels – should be properly empowered and resourced to effectively deliver their roles. 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. This recommendation implies that council audit panels are not properly empowered and resourced to effectively deliver their role, this is not the case at Meander Valley Council.*
16. Final Report Recommendation 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. This recommendation has a level of subjectivity around the definition of significant new services or infrastructure. The requirement to engage should be limited to major change, it would be impractical for councils to engage on all service delivery.*
17. Final Report Recommendation 36: *The Tasmanian Government should: 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; 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. It has been widely accepted for many years that there are vacancies at Tasmanian Councils due to a shortage of available applicants in areas such as environmental health, planning and engineering. The Tasmanian Government are recommended to review and advocate for greater training opportunities for potential employees in these areas.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss Council's position further, please contact me on 0417 316 208.

Regards

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'W. Johnston', with a stylized, cursive script.

Wayne Johnston

Mayor

Cc: Michael Mogridge – michael.mogridge@dpac.tas.gov.au