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Contact: Sally Blanc
Phone: 6443 8311

Local Government Board
GPO Box 123
HOBART TAS 7001

EMAIL:- lgboard@dpac.tas.gov.au
EMAIL CC: vadams@circularhead.tas.gov.au
EMAIL CC: dion.lester@lgat.tas.gov.au

**RE: WARATAH-WYNYARD COUNCIL
FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW SUBMISSION – FINAL REPORT**

We wish to provide comment on the Future of Local Government Final Report. We thank the Board for the comprehensive and well-presented documentation provided for consideration.

Introduction

Waratah-Wynyard Council supports the view of the Board in that there is nothing manifestly wrong with the range and scope of current services and functions councils are performing. We also support the view provided in the report that:

1. The status quo is neither an optimal nor sustainable model for the sector, given growing demands, complexity, and sustainability challenges.
2. Some form of consolidation is necessary to deliver greater economies of scale and scope, at least for some services.
3. The scale and extent of the consolidation needed to deliver significantly better services will, unfortunately, not occur on a purely voluntary basis within the current framework

These points are consistent with Council's previous submissions.

Furthermore, Council agrees with the view that many councils will struggle to deliver for their communities unless we make significant changes to how our current system of local government is structured and funded, and how it delivers services.

In Council's previous submission to the Board, it stated "The outcomes of the reform process should deliver Councils that are sustainable in their own way...It is only with combined improvements and relationships with State Government, exploration and commitment to relevant resource sharing models, refinement and clarity of service delivery and a total commitment and adherence to all aspects of accountability will reform become successful. Making no change simply exacerbates the issues being faced by the industry at present".

Waratah Wynyard Council

21 Saunders Street (PO Box 168) Wynyard Tasmania 7325
P: (03) 6443 8333 | F: (03) 6443 8383 | E: council@warwyn.tas.gov.au

Waratah-Wynyard Council has previously stated it is open to exploring and discussing all structural reform options.

Council at present has no true gauge of community support, or otherwise, for change, and this will be an important aspect of the process into the future.

Timeframe

The Final Report proposes a recommended timetable for future decision making, culminating in a likely alteration of Councils in line with Local Government elections in 2026. This final date appears a reasonable and achievable aim. Councillors are willing to extend terms rather than go to an additional election if changes are close, but not quite ready, by the scheduled October 2026 elections.

The timeline proposes a community vote taking place in the first quarter of 2025 (calendar year). Waratah-Wynyard Council would ideally like to see some indication of community support prior to this date to prevent unnecessary resource being directed into a project that may not garner the appropriate level of community support to proceed. The challenge with this, however, is the considerable work involved to ensure appropriate analysis and preparation required to ensure an informed vote. An earlier vote would remove existing uncertainty and aid decision making which, at present, is affected by an unclear future operating model. For these reasons, Council does not support any voting process being deferred beyond the recommended date.

It is imperative the State Government minimise delay in recruitment and establishment of supporting resource and structures to assist councils in the detailed preparatory analysis and development of community benefit packages. Specifically, this includes supporting, suitably qualified resources (particularly project management) to assist councils and ensure any amalgamation or transition to shared services is a success and minimises disruption and costs.

In relation to shared services, the proposed timetable states that Council's submit initial shared service proposals to the Board by the end of 2024. Our request is that these proposals are completed after a community vote on voluntary amalgamation has taken place. The impact of this vote will significantly impact the model of shared services recommended.

Community Engagement and Voting

The voting process is unclear at this stage, but Council is committed to ensuring the community have informed decision making regardless of the methodology. It is imperative a strong communication plan is developed to ensure all people are aware of any proposed changes to local government structure and any possible impact on services.

At the conclusion of this process, once Council is satisfied all appropriate communication has been undertaken, consideration should be given as to whether it is more appropriate for Council to have the final decision on any changes, or whether a community vote is required. A simple yes/no vote will not provide the required detail in the case of Waratah-Wynyard whether both significant boundary changes and amalgamation have been suggested. Councillors may be able to provide a more representative and balanced view in this regard.

Community Working Group

The Board recommends that Community Working Groups (CWG) are established in each area to develop packages to maximise community benefits of amalgamation. These will be presented to the State for a funding commitment prior to a local vote.

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Council is unclear about the mechanisms suggested for formation and governance of these Boards and has some reservations about whether the suggested process will provide a better outcome or simply slow the process. At a minimum, Council would like to have input into how these proposed working groups would be structured.

An alternative and more streamlined approach would be for the interested Councils to develop an information package and present this to designated community focus groups prior to broader community engagement.

Shared Services

The first priorities for developing mandatory shared service arrangements have been identified as:

- Sharing of key technical staff (where capability gaps are being felt the most with Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) suggested as the first priority);
- Sharing of common digital business systems and ICT infrastructure; and
- Sharing of asset management expertise through a centralised, council-owned authority.

Council supports the first dot point; this is an identified area of need across the spectrum of 'technical staff'. Regarding the second dot point, historically this has been very difficult to achieve voluntarily and may require further persuasion. Regional or sub regional options may be beneficial to prevent monopolisation.

Council believes that sharing of back-end services, or high-end transactional tasks, should be actively explored as part of any future model.

North West proposed model

The final report suggests creating a larger North West council with a consolidation of Waratah-Wynyard and Circular Head Councils and boundary adjustments that see all major mines in western Tasmania as part of an expanded West Coast Council.

Council requires further time to analyse and consider the merits and benefits of a proposed move of Waratah, Corinna and Savage River to another Council. The loss of mining and forestry land will have a significant financial detriment and it is likely the current service levels of the area will not be maintained. Community discussion has not taken place.

The report goes on to add that in the long-term, it may be desirable to amalgamate the new North-West and Western Councils and Council agrees with the notion of this future state. That said, given the Tasmanian Government's stated position on mandated structural reform, Council understand that change will occur incrementally.

Funding and Support

This submission expresses a desire to move quickly and decisively on the reform recommendations to prevent any further delays and uncertainty. It is imperative the government lead in this regard.

Councils who wish to work through the voluntary consolidation process, culminating in a community vote, should be provided funding sufficient to prepare engagement and education materials, conduct the vote and the, if appropriate, implement any changes.

A funding package to implement change is required to contribute towards employment changes, branding, information technology changes and a number of other transitional costs

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List of Recommendations

Council has provided comment to the list of recommendations in the attached table.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or require any further information.

Yours sincerely



Dr Mary Duniam

MAYOR

Encl.

Waratah Wynyard Council

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WARATAH-WYNYARD COUNCIL

Future of Local Government Final Report

ATTACHMENT: Response to Recommendations

Recommendation #	Summary	WWC Comment
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 promoting the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of local4. communities, by mitigating and planning for climate change impacts.	Support in principle
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>	<p>Council repeats the previously stated position that this is unnecessary and another unneeded layer of bureaucracy.</p> <p>Current legislation would need to be updated to reference operating as per the proposed charter and all references to items in the charter are removed from all relevant Acts.</p>
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-</p>	<p>Support in principle</p> <p>Is “within the first year of every council election” the best time to do this, particularly in cases where there is high turnover at an election?</p>

Recommendation #	Summary	WWC Comment
	<p>year strategic plan. 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. 	<p>Why is workforce development plan linked to election cycle?</p> <p>Could this be renamed a “4 year delivery plan” which would allow the current 10-year strategic plans to remain as is and be the “parent” plan. There is a risk with the proposed approach that Councillors do not think strategically, or long term, and only focus on the election term.</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; • Kingborough and Huon Valley Councils. 	Support in principle
5	<p>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.</p>	<p>Support in principle. Would need to ensure the make-up of the Board and their terms of reference is clear including whether their role strategic or operational. A Senior Project Manager should be responsible for operational reporting to board as per any other key strategic project. Must have someone who is experienced in amalgamation.</p>
6	<p>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.</p>	<p>Refer comments within submission. In many respects, Council is a representative working group.</p>
7	<p>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.</p>	Refer comments within submission

Recommendation #	Summary	WWC Comment
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	Not supported. This recommendation does not take into account the position of the neighbouring Council and their appetite for change. Both (or all) Councils involved should be required to have a successful poll for any action to be considered.
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	The principle or intent of this recommendation is understood and clear, however the implications of such decisions will need to be carefully considered.
10	Give councils the opportunity to design identified shared service arrangements themselves, with a model only being imposed if councils cannot reach consensus.	Refer comments under proposed timeline. Suggest the recommended timeframes need revision.
11	Before endorsing a particular mandatory shared service arrangement, the Minister for Local Government should seek the advice of the Local Government Board	The Minister should seek advice from an audience broader than the Board. Councils should have the ability to comment on any proposal.
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	Refer recommendation 9
13	The first priorities for developing mandatory shared service arrangements should be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sharing of key technical staff; • sharing of common digital business systems and ICT infrastructure; and • sharing of asset management expertise through a centralised, council-owned authority 	Refer comments within body of submission
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	Support in principle.
15	To be eligible to stand for election to council, all candidates should first undertake – within six months prior to nominating – a prescribed, mandatory	Support in principle.

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	education session, to ensure all candidates understand the role of councillor and their responsibilities if elected.	It is acknowledged that too many candidates do not have a realistic understanding of the role for which they are seeking.
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 	<p>Support in principle.</p> <p>Consideration needs to be given to those with disability, those with English as a second language and those with literacy challenges. Excluding them does limit broader representation around the Council table and not support broad representation.</p> <p>This process will not change the behavioural issues within the sector at present. Further thought needs to be given to the process of how to work together.</p>
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.	Support in principle with particular emphasis on mining and renewable energy projects.
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	Support in principle
19	Introduce additional minimum information requirements for council rates notices to improve public transparency, accountability, and confidence in council rating and financial management decisions	Support in principle
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 	Support in principle

Recommendation #	Summary	WWC Comment
	opportunities	
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	Support in principle. Council has made many previous submissions in regard to this subject.
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.	Support in principle. Some fees should be consistent across the sector to provide consistency for customers.
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	Support in principle
24	The Tasmanian Government should work with the sector to develop, resource, and implement a best practice local government performance monitoring system	Support in principle
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	Support in principle
26	<p>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.</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>	<p>Refer previous submission regarding more scrutiny and consequences for Councils failing to meet obligations.</p> <p>Internal audit simply needs to be part of the Audit Panel work plan to oversee.</p>

Recommendation #	Summary	WWC Comment
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	Support in principle
28	The Tasmanian Government should work with the local government sector to pursue opportunities for strengthened partnerships between local government and Service Tasmania	Support in principle
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).	Support in principle.
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.	<p>Caution should be applied to any simplification of current asset management planning documentation requirements.</p> <p>The report <i>Review of Council Strategic Asset Management plans and practices Aug 2022, R J Howard</i>, found that only 13 of 29 Councils have published all three of the required plans, policies and strategies and concluded in section 1.8 Summary: -</p> <p><i>"The review has identified the need for improvement in Council's compliance with the Local Government Act and Local Government (Contents of Plans and Strategies) Order.</i></p> <p><i>..Good stewardship would see compliance with the Act and Order as a major step in ensuring Council services were appropriate, affordable and sustainable in the medium and long term."</i></p>

Recommendation #	Summary	WWC Comment
		<p>There is not, however, a finding from the report Author that the current legislative requirements are onerous, could or should be simplified to achieve appropriate, affordable and sustainable Council services.</p> <p>Asset Management as a de-centralised, common competency for management personnel and other key staff should become a key workforce development objective for Local government management and employees as with Elected member development plans.</p> <p>IPWEA Australia have produced a 2022 White Paper consistent with this notion which urges a Federal Government funded educational program that raises capacity and asset management practice. <i>Best Practice asset management of essential public infrastructure – How investing in asset management professionals can deliver a better return on investment on infrastructure and an improved outcome for Australian communities</i></p> <p>A set of 6 recommendations in the report amongst other things, recommend federal funding assistance being tied to local government maintaining a level of asset management proficiency.</p>
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.	<p>The report <i>Review of Council Strategic Asset Management plans and practices Aug 2022, R J Howard</i> concluded in section 1.8 Summary -</p> <p><i>“The Board may consider further research on road assets with individual Councils to review the approach to management of road surface and pavement</i></p>

Recommendation #	Summary	WWC Comment
		<p><i>component assets and the information used to justify and substantiate the useful life of road surfaces and long-life component assets.”</i></p> <p>It would seem beneficial and consistent with R J Howard’s recommendations to allocate time and resource to investigate best practice useful life assessment in developing any standardised useful asset life ranges for major asset classes.</p>
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	Support in principle.
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.	<p>While consulting is valuable, excessive input-seeking can lead to decision paralysis, time inefficiency, and diluted accountability. A constant need for consultation may hinder agility and hinder the council's ability to make timely decisions. Overreliance on consensus may also stifle innovation, as ground-breaking ideas often emerge from individual expertise and vision. Seeking input on every detail may overwhelm team members, impacting morale and productivity.</p> <p>It is crucial to strike a balance between collaboration and decisive action, ensuring that the consultative process remains constructive rather than becoming an obstacle to progress. Effective leadership involves knowing when to trust expertise and when to empower individuals to take ownership of their responsibilities.</p> <p>The International Association for Public Participation notes that it is critical to determine whether there is a</p>

Recommendation #	Summary	WWC Comment
		need to engage the community to avoid wasting Council resources and disappointing the community by proposing an engagement process that will not influence an outcome or decision. Perhaps this recommendation could focus on a universally accepted framework to determine what engagement is appropriate.
34	Following the phase 1 voluntary amalgamation program, the Tasmanian Government should commission an independent review into councillor numbers and allowances.	Support in principle.
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.	Support in principle
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; • 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. 	Support in principle. Need to ensure de-centralised Asset Management competency is a key workforce development objective as per comments on recommendation 30
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.	Support in principle. Government support and direction regarding climate change impacts to date has not been satisfactory.