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COVER PHOTO: Newly elected Glamorgan-Spring Bay Mayor, Bertrand Cadart pictured in his home town of Bicheno with the controversial mayoral motor scooter.
One cannot help but notice the high level of media and community attention that Glamorgan-Spring Bay’s newly elected Mayor, Bertrand Cadart has been receiving since he took up the position in late 2007. If his French accent and distinctive moustache wasn’t enough to capture people’s attention, then perhaps it was the controversial trading in of his mayoral car for a motor scooter and his past involvement with the highly successful Mad Max movie that catapulted him to virtual celebrity status overnight. Not only does Bertrand’s newfound fame place Bicheno on centre stage, it’s also good for business. Suddenly, tourists from everywhere are heading into town just to get a glimpse of the “mad mayor” on his motor scooter. Most will probably be disappointed though, since he is far too busy getting on with his new job to be as visible as they might like. Bertrand certainly brings a breath of fresh air to the Local Government sector and highlights the wonderful diversity of people working within it. To find out more, head to page 6.

Are you new to Local Government? Do you struggle to recognise our Local Government leaders at meetings and events? If so, turn to page 12 for the names and faces of our Mayors and General Managers across the state and keep the magazine handy for future reference.

Inside, you will also find details about the upcoming Local Government Conference to be held at the Launceston Country Club from 18-20 June. Be sure to mark the dates your diary and to keep an eye out for the full program of speakers and events to be distributed soon.

As a special offer, Lenna of Hobart are offering an accommodation package valued at $1,000, for two people over two nights in a luxurious Harbour View Suite. For a chance to win, complete the entry form on page 79 and return it to LGAT by 6 June. Good luck!

Following our coverage of the Tasmanian devil facial tumour disease in the December edition of LGAT News, we received a good deal of positive feedback. I would like to recognise photographer, Robert Elliott, for the stunning image of a Tasmanian devil featured on the cover, which captured the attention of our readers and helped to raise awareness of the disease.

We hope you enjoy this edition of LGAT News and look forward to seeing you at conference.

STEFANIE WATSON
Editor

LGAT News – the latest in Tasmanian Local Government

LGAT News is circulated to every council throughout Tasmania. Circulation also includes senior government staff, state parliamentarians, interstate and national local government representative bodies and private companies operating in Tasmania.

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All councils would be well underway with the 2008/09 budget process. As elected leaders of municipalities, we are charged with the responsibility of attaching a ‘dollar figure’ to the services required to meet the identified needs of the community. This process is made somewhat easier when councils have adequate and appropriate forward planning documents, reports, policies and guidelines to assess and guide decisions. Positive and proactive discussions with council staff well before the ‘rates setting meeting’, also allows for more objective judgements as we undertake certain functions and obligations.

There have been many articles and numerous comments recognising the sensitive balancing act that councils consider when raising revenue to complete the necessary works and cover operational expenses. Elected members are very aware of the capacity (or lack thereof) for some residents to pay rates. Traditionally, councils have tried to ‘protect’ residents (and there is a strong case for this approach) from drastic rates increases.

Councils are constantly being asked to take on board more roles, and enforce increased regulation and compliance measures. Local Government is willing to do its share and be supportive of initiatives, and there are many examples where we have entered into discussions and partnerships with State and Federal Governments in good faith.

However, elected members would be aware and have reflected on the Treasurer’s media release some weeks ago regarding the unexpected financial windfall experienced by the State Government in the last 12 months. It is beneficial for Tasmanians that the Government is experiencing healthy economic times. However, it perhaps indicates the need for local councils to review and receive greater benefits and financial returns for the services it provides.

The CEO’s report for this issue of LGAT News focuses primarily on the water and sewerage reforms, however, it would be remiss of me not to thank council and LGAT staff for their diligence, efforts and many road trips travelling to and from meetings while working through the reform issues.

It is also acknowledged that there are still a number of concerns to be addressed, however, just 12 months ago, many people believed that water and sewerage ownership was not going to be retained by Local Government. The current model and situation may not be ideal but it is probably a much better position than first expected.

Another, big ticket item in the last year has been the Local Government Sustainability Report undertaken by Access Economics. Whilst there may have been a “little media bruising” directed towards some councils and Local Government, it was much less than anticipated. Working groups have been formed to address the 26 recommendations and to determine practical options and solutions for councils to consider.

Having been LGAT President for over 20 months (how quickly time flies?), it has been my pleasure to act as spokesperson for the Local Government sector. In this time, I have met many enthusiastic elected members and council staff. It has been a priority and very important to me that we recognise and accept the different viewpoints of individual councils in a mature and objective manner.

I have very much appreciated the respectful and ‘down to earth’ approach and dialogue which has been adopted and fostered at general meetings, workshops and forums, and I look forward to speaking with you at the Local Government Conference in June.
Resolution and Reform Brings Relief

ALLAN GARCIA, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Local Government Association of Tasmania

With the announcement at the last PLGC meeting that water and sewerage infrastructure was to remain in the hands of Local Government, came a great sense of relief. The slow to commence consultation process culminated in a flurry of activity in the period up to the announcement, with significant goodwill and sensible dialogue between all parties.

While the final result heralds another key milestone in the relationship between State and Local Government, the real work now commences. Resolution of the structural model, although very important, perhaps represents a relatively minor element of the reform process when compared to implementation.

Councils and bulk water authorities have a major job ahead to ensure the timely and effective transfer of assets and employees to the new entities. A key component of the transition process will be the completion of a comprehensive due diligence. This will underpin the establishment and worth of the entities and will determine the relative equity of owner councils and the basis of future dividend distributions to owners.

Common board membership across the entities provided for an interesting governance structure, but the role of the independent chair cannot be understated in the establishment and implementation phases of the reform process. A strong and visionary chair will be required to build the three new entities, develop a culture of excellence and drive a construction program - the likes of which has never been seen in the water and sewerage sector in Tasmania.

Maturity will be required on the part of councils in the selection of owner representatives that can appropriately represent the regions’ overall interests, and to provide that group with adequate autonomy to fulfil its responsibilities.

Transitional arrangements will require significant input, goodwill and patience on the part of all councils and bulk water authorities. Some funding has been provided to assist with this process and it will be critical to ensure that the appropriate resources are directed to these activities, to enable a smooth transition to the new model. The timeframes are tight and the tasks are complex but it is expected that some statewide and regional processes should alleviate the strains on individual councils.

In all of this process, it is important to acknowledge that a significant number of employees will be affected. Personnel associated with the water and sewerage function, will transfer to the new entities with entitlements. It will be important to ensure that information is conveyed to employees as and when it becomes available. The Association will be working with the State Government, councils and bulk water authorities to develop comprehensive implementation and communication plans. Key elements of these plans will involve providing timely and relevant advice to employees.

A steering committee is in the process of being formed to oversee the transition processes. Working groups will be established to support the steering committee, and to develop tools and processes to aid councils with the transitional arrangements. Where possible, processes that meet the requirements of all councils will be favoured, although it is acknowledged that there may be the need for regional and council level solutions to issues arising.

The agreement reached with the State Government is monumental in a time of less than perfect intergovernmental relations in other jurisdictions. Local Government now has the opportunity and responsibility to forge a strong and robust water and sewerage sector that meets the needs of all Tasmanian communities, and to place any returns from those commercial activities back into the communities from where the investment initiated. The hard work begins now and we must ensure that the effort we put into the implementation and establishment processes, provides the opportunity to achieve the best outcome for the longer-term, and reinforces that the decision to retain water and sewerage in the ownership of Local Government was the correct one.
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