President’s Message

Amalgamation season has arrived again. Residents, journalists, elected members and business are engaging in conversations about the perceived need for amalgamations. The conversations are generally gloomy with the ‘A’ word generally referenced in an unsavoury light. The experiences of 1993, coupled with the failed process in the late nineties by the Rundle Government, present vivid and distasteful recollections for many residents and communities.

The difficulty with a number of the conversations is that amalgamations are viewed by some as a panacea – a cure for all ills – the silver bullet to sustainability, overcoming skills shortages and avoiding duplication. These matters are significant and do represent major challenges to councils. In addition to protecting and representing the views of the community, councillors do have a responsibility to ensure that their council runs effectively and efficiently.

However, it must be recognised that Tasmanian councils are constantly interacting with their neighbour(s), or utilising a regional or state-wide approach focusing on resource sharing and economies of scale. Nowadays, councils are much more willing to assist, share and learn from each other, more so than when I first entered Local Government in 1994. This willingness is one of the important strengths of our sector.

I believe that the issue with amalgamation is not one of “good” or “bad” but one that deserves an investigative and assessment process that needs to be understood and driven by the community and the local council.

Surely our sphere of government is able to address an issue that will impact (or not) on our residents without looking to other levels of government for leadership. There are many experienced and pragmatic leaders within our local communities and councils who have the ability, skills and knowledge to negotiate, drive and forge a way forward.

Local Government is constantly changing and adapting to new methods, ideas, regulations, shifting demographics, community needs and expectations. The onus on councils is to appreciate the views of the ratepayer and provide opportunities for individuals to access and be aware of a range of models which will achieve economic efficiencies and simultaneously provide a safety network for ‘community, self and place’.

Amalgamation is perhaps one way of achieving benefits for our residents and councils may need to consider this issue at an appropriate time, in a mature and rational manner. But first, there needs to be a more thorough understanding of the potential to work together, trust must be built, and rigorous analysis and communication with the community needs to take place. Then councils and communities can engage in sensible and authentic dialogue regarding the benefits of various strategies, including amalgamations.

Water and Sewerage Reform

The Treasurer, Michael Aird has announced the next steps in the Government plan for water and sewerage reform. The Ministerial Water and Sewerage Taskforce is planning to make a recommendation to Cabinet on the structural reform option and key aspects of regulatory reform in the first quarter of 2008. A decision at this time will enable legislation to be introduced in 2008, so a transition to the new arrangements can begin in early 2009.

An extensive consultation program will include:

- Bi-monthly meetings between the Treasurer and the General Management Committee;
- A series of regional workshops explaining the regulatory objectives, including pricing and service standards;
- One-on-one meetings between council Chief Finance Officers and the Government’s financial advisors;
- Meetings between the Water and Sewerage Project Team and the regional council groupings; and
- Regular Project Team meetings with other key stakeholders.

The Premier has also committed to meet with the PLGC before Cabinet makes a decision and, over the coming months, issues papers will be released. Mr Aird urged all stakeholders to support the water and sewerage reforms which are vital to Tasmania’s public health, environmental and economic outcomes.

Council General Managers will be meeting in Launceston on 13 November to discuss progress with the Local Government response to the reforms.

Acting General Managers for Flinders and West Coast Councils

Following the resignation of John Vucic of Flinders Council, Robert Higgins has been appointed as Acting General Manager. At West Coast Council, Brian Lovell is now serving as Acting General Manager until a new General Manager is appointed following the Local Government Elections.
Reforms For Better Dog Control
The Tasmanian Government will strengthen dog control by legislating to impose tighter guidelines on
dangerous and restrict breeds such as pit bull terriers. A package of reforms to improve public safety,
through better control and more responsible ownership of dogs, includes controls for keeping and
restraining restricted breed dogs, mandatory de-sexing of restricted breed dogs and dogs declared
dangerous, and restrictions on selling and exchanging restricted breed dogs and dogs declared
dangerous. The State Government will work with Local Government and other stakeholders to finalise the
draft legislation as soon as possible.

Web and Online Accessibility Workshop
On 19 October, Vision Australia is running a Web and Online Accessibility Workshop in Hobart to provide an
overview of accessibility issues and how to address them, an in-depth review of the World Wide Web
Consortium’s Content Accessibility Guidelines, and issues confronting users with particular needs. For further

Historic Heritage Position Paper Released
Details of proposed reforms to the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995 were recently released. The new
legislation will be clearer, more consistent and will generate greater certainty for property owners,
developers and Local Government. The proposed reforms include categorising heritage into places of
either ‘state’ or ‘local’ significance, the ability to reject frivolous or vexatious nominations, and introducing a
range of permitted works to heritage properties. Interested parties are invited to provide feedback on the
proposed reforms by 31 October. A copy of the position paper is available from www.heritage.tas.gov.au.

$430 million in Additional Drought Assistance
The Australian Government has announced an additional $430 million in drought assistance, including
extending for a further six months Exceptional Circumstances (EC) declarations in 38 areas that were due to
expire in March, 2008. All farmers in Tasmania’s agricultural regions are now able to apply for interim
drought assistance. In addition, those located in the Central Midlands, North-East and Flinders Island EC
regions will receive interim assistance until September 2008. For details, contact the Drought Assistance
hotline on 132316.

Get Walking Tasmania Week – Go the Distance!
November 8-14 is Get Walking Tasmania Week. Councils, community and corporate organisations are
encouraged to participate by registering and coordinating a group-walking event during the week. There
are great prizes and give-aways available for participants and walk organisers. Get Walking Tasmania
Week is an initiative of the Premier’s Physical Activity Council is being coordinated by the Heart
Foundation. To obtain a copy of the registration form, go to www.getmoving.tas.gov.au.

Tennis Court Rebate Scheme
Tennis Australia has launched a National Court Rebate Scheme to improve facilities around the country,
offering $2 million annually for three years. The funds can be used for base preparation and development,
lighting, resurfacing, fencing, water-saving and ancillary items. Councils who receive funding requests from
tennis clubs are encouraged to review the scheme. For details, contact Tennis Tasmania on 6231 2579 or

Workplace Relations Fact Sheet
Recent changes to the law require employers to give existing employees a copy of the Workplace
Relations fact sheet by 20 October 2007. From 20 July, all employees starting a new job must be given a
copy within seven days of their start date. The fact sheet is part of the recent changes to the workplace
relations system which have strengthened protections for employees. For further information, visit

Sustainable Living Expo
Find out everything you need to know about living sustainably at Tasmania’s Sustainable Living Expo, to be
held in Hobart on 20-21 October. There will be displays, talks and workshops on sustainable building and
renovating, renewable energy and solar hot water, energy efficient heating and cooling, saving water,
smart transport, community solutions and much more. The expo will be held at the City Hall from 10am-
5pm and entry is free. Phone 6234 5566.

Active 07 – On Common Ground
The annual sport and recreation industry conference will be held on 18-19 October in Perth, WA. Topics will
include workplace physical activity and recreation centre management. For details, go to

Upcoming Events
General Management Committee Meeting, Hobart: 26 October
General Meeting, Launceston: 14 November
Mayors’ Workshop: 15 November
General Management Committee Meeting: 12 December