President's Message

Two weeks has past and another newsletter deadline has come around. I just wonder where the days go but with Christmas only four weeks and three days away, that could be part of the reason!

I continue to follow the ‘progress’ of the Tasmanians for Reform (TFR) campaign with much interest and when travelling down the West Tamar this week, on garbage and recycling collection night, I was very relieved to see only one bin with a “Reduce Rates” sticker in place. I took comfort in the fact that the stickers had been placed inside the other bins ready for collection!

Today I woke to the news of the results of another EMRS poll where “75% (of those questioned) believed there were too many councils and 73% wanted councils to merge, many in the hope it would save money”. Well guess what? May they live in hope! A further surprise for me today was to see a Metro bus with a large “Reduce Rates” advertisement on the back end, so it is quite obvious that the campaign will continue for some time yet.

As I have said before in this column, Local Government is not afraid of reform but to arrive at a position, there needs to be a robust and fully informed debate. Surveys of communities continue to be loaded with no factual information provided, or any explanation given as to what impacts there may be on services or infrastructure provision. It is therefore important for me to repeat the findings of a study undertaken in May of this year by the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government. The study found that in all of the amalgamations completed in Australia, there has never been an occasion when rates have been reduced. Why then is that likely to occur in Tasmania? I know we are different from all of the other states, but I am sure that we are not that different!

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Increasing Transparency of Local Government Rating

The Minister for Local Government, Bryan Green, tabled legislation on 15 November to increase transparency and certainty for Local Government rates in Tasmania. Mr Green said it is essential that we have legislation that is unambiguous in terms of the authority that is provided to councils to raise rates. “A major component of the Bill includes provisions that allow a council to implement a flat rating structure through the use of an ‘averaged area rate’, but only when a council has extensively consulted with its community,” he said.

Mr Green said that the Bill also:

- introduces principle statements that rates are a tax, incorporating the principle of capacity to pay (as indicated by the value of a ratepayer’s land);
- provides clarity in relation to use of the minimum amount payable; and
- introduces new powers that will allow errors within rates resolutions to be remedied.

“There are additional transparency provisions for all councils, through the implementation of rates and charges policies that will improve understanding of the decisions made by councils,” Mr Green said. The draft Bill can be found at www.parliament.tas.gov.au.
Bring Out Your Chemicals
ChemSafe Homes Tasmania, a free household chemical drop-off service, will operate this weekend in the State’s South. The drop-off service gives Tasmanians the chance to clear out unwanted chemicals, thus creating safer homes. Since the program commenced, more than 55,000kg of potentially toxic waste has been collected and either reused, recycled, treated or destroyed. The service will operate from 9.00am - 4.00pm on 26 November at the Clarence City Council Chambers carpark at Rosny Park, and on 27 November at McRobies Gully Waste Management Centre, South Hobart. Chemsafe Homes Tasmania is a jointly funded State and Local Government initiative.

Changes to the Way the GST Status of Taxes, Fees and Charges are Determined
Division 81 of the A New Tax System (Goods and Services Tax) Act 1999 relating to government taxes, fees and charges has been amended. From 1 July 2011, government entities (including Local Government authorities) must self-assess whether their taxes, fees or charges are exempt from GST. Please note that items listed in the current Treasurer’s determination, at www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/F2010L03352, will continue to be exempt from GST until 1 July 2012. The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) is providing information to assist Australian Government agencies to self-assess the GST treatment of their taxes, fees and charges. This information will be regularly updated and can be found on the ATO website at www.ato.gov.au/division81. For more information, phone 13 28 66.

Tasmanian Women’s Plan 2012-17
The State Government is developing the Tasmanian Women’s Plan 2012-17, which will provide a guiding framework to help ensure that Government is responsive to the needs of women and girls and is representative of their views. Individuals and organisations are invited to provide input to the plan by completing an online survey, or preparing a written submission. Have your say about what is important to women and what you would like to see happen in the State. Submissions close on 23 December. For details, visit www.dpac.tas.gov.au/community.

2011 Tasmanian Employers of Choice Announced
Burnie City Council and Meander Valley Council have been named as Tasmanian Employers of Choice from among fifteen local businesses that were announced at the 2011 Tasmanian Employers of Choice Awards on 17 November. Central Coast Council also received a Highly Commended Awards for working towards becoming an Employer of Choice. The Awards were presented by the Minister for Economic Development, David O’Byrne, who said the best employers understand that a great workplace offers challenging and rewarding careers, while helping workers enjoy a balanced lifestyle. “Employers of Choice are likely to have lower staff turnover and absenteeism, higher productivity and profits, and find it easier to attract highly skilled staff because of their strong reputation,” he said.

Hobart’s Long Beach Promenade Wins Landscape Architecture Award
One of Hobart’s iconic foreshore destinations, the Long Beach Foreshore Redevelopment completed by Hobart City Council in 2009, has won a major award. The foreshore redevelopment was chosen by the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects as an award winner in the 2011 Tasmanian Awards for Excellence on 17 November. The Lower Sandy Bay Foreshore Redevelopment has led to the expansion of a full range of facilities to support the leisure lifestyle associated with the area. Landscaping includes expansive lawn areas, upgraded BBQ and picnic facilities, and new carparks which provide a range of recreational opportunities.

Great Team Skills, Effective Communication, Dealing with Difficult People and Workplace Bullying/Harassment Workshop (Launceston)
Working effectively in groups or teams can be challenging. A one-day workshop to be held in Launceston on 6 December will review and create participant discussion on current workplace approaches to working effectively in teams. It also addresses communicating appropriately with difficult people rather than avoiding them and raises the question “What if I am seen as the difficult person?” It covers assertive handling of issues before they build into workplace problems and includes an overview of workplace bullying and harassment, how to recognise and address it. To participate, register by 30 November. Call High Performance Training on 6236 9055.

Managing Public Communication (Berriedale)
Peter Thompson from ABC’s Talking Heads and a Fellow and Executive Program teacher at ANZSOG, will conduct a one-day workshop on 30 November at Moorilla Estate, Berriedale, which will examine the culture and ethos of the public communication role and explore strategies for proactively managing communication in a government context. The course includes advice on issues and crisis management and communications strategies for influencing public opinion and changing public behaviour, as well as managing public engagement. For further details, contact The Training Consortium on 6232 7033.