President’s Message
Well – pine plantations, politicians, and Pura Cup cricket finals grabbed the media spotlight at the same time Local Government was launching its financial sustainability report undertaken by Access Economics.

We were definitely not bowled over by reporters frantically trying to get a front row seat at the official launch of the report but it was heartening to have Southern Cross Television and ABC Radio present. Since the launch a number of reporters have contacted LGAT and council representatives for interviews and further information.

The lack of media fervor possibly reflects the complex nature of the report. Without background information or knowledge of the process readers would experience difficulty understanding the relevance of the data, graphs, terminology, recommendations and more importantly the intent of the report.

This is definitely not a criticism of the community or the media but is perhaps more a reflection of the task. Local Government in Tasmania recognised that it needed this assessment and accepted that a well-credentialed independent organisation was required to scrutinise the financial management and stewardship of councils.

Whilst the results are more positive than those of our mainland colleagues it must be remembered that this exercise was not undertaken as a comparative measure of performance between our councils or indeed those from other states. It was designed to assist councils identify strengths and weaknesses in the maintenance of community assets and the governance and financial management strategies for present and future needs. Individual councils will consider recommendations from the report and a steering committee from within the Local Government sector will be established to provide an opportunity for further discussion and direction.

It is appreciated that there is still a lot of work for councils to do to address their own circumstances and simultaneously provide the community with accurate and responsible information regarding the outcomes of the report.

There are always issues and challenges in Local Government and I have been exceptionally impressed with the high standard of informed debate, the level of maturity and councils’ willingness to support each other through this process. Congratulations and well done.

Review of Financial Sustainability of Local Government in Tasmania
The review of financial sustainability of Tasmanian councils was released on 21 March. The independent study provides a snapshot of councils’ current situation regarding issues that are impacting on their financial sustainability and details a suite of initiatives that will assist in improving their long-term sustainability.

Access Economics was commissioned by LGAT to undertake the study. The report follows similar studies undertaken in NSW, SA and WA by Access Economics and is in keeping with the recent work completed by PricewaterhouseCoopers, for the Australian Local Government Association, which looked at the overall financial sustainability of councils across the country.

The report investigates the major financial stressors on councils, highlighting an infrastructure backlog and the provision of increasing services to the community as the key challenges facing councils. The report also identifies areas of improvement regarding sustainable financial management strategies and suggests a range of actions for councils to consider.

Six Tasmanian councils have been found to be under some pressure in terms of broad financial health and while this does not impact on their ongoing financial viability, there will be a need to address issues associated with their long-term finances. These councils serve approximately 8% of the population which is less than the significantly 20%+ population figures that resulted from the SA, NSW and WA studies.

These councils are generally likely to exhibit minimal (or negative) growth; have limited access to rate revenue due to relatively small populations; have limited access to essential asset management skills; and are facing expanding service provision due to rising community demands.

Access Economics has also recommended a series of actions for the Local Government Association of Tasmania to pursue, in terms of financial governance policies and processes.

The Association will be moving quickly to establish a Steering Committee, comprising elected members and officials, to work through the recommendations and develop a program of action to implement those that are supported.

The Steering Committee will also be looking at ways and means by which councils can work together to enhance their financial sustainability and will draw on the experiences and actions taken in other states.
Local Government Awards for Excellence
With the 2007 Local Government Conference fast approaching (30 May-1 June), a reminder that nominations for the Local Government Awards for Excellence should be submitted to LGAT by 16 April. Councils intending to submit a nomination are encouraged to advise the LGAT office in advance. For further information and nomination forms refer to the LGAT website at www.lgat.tas.gov.au or phone 6233 5966. The Awards will be presented at the LGAT Conference Dinner on 31 May.

2007 Local Government Conference – The Art of Survival
This year’s conference theme - The Art of Survival - will encompass Local Government sustainability, leadership, community engagement, public art and climate change. To address the issue of climate change, Professor Ian Lowe will deliver a presentation on day 1 of the conference exploring the theme of Climate Change: Global Threat, Local Opportunity. Peter Boyd will also run an interactive workshop addressing climate change at the local level. A preview of the program will be printed in the March edition of LGAT News, and is currently available on the LGAT website at www.lgat.tas.gov.au.

Climate Change
In an effort to promote climate change awareness, LGAT would like to take this opportunity to promote up2me.com. This website, an initiative of Sustainable Living Tasmania and the State Government, encourages Tasmanians to use fewer resources and leave a smaller ecological footprint on the Earth. Did you know that by using a water efficient shower head a family of four can save up to 300 litres of water a day? Find out more and take the Environment Challenge at www.up2me.com.au.

Demographic Change Advisory Council Discussion Paper
The Demographic Change Advisory Council (DCAC) has released a discussion paper titled Demographic Change in Tasmania: Challenges and Opportunities and launched its website at www.dcac.tas.gov.au. The report is designed to seek input from the community on the emerging social, economic and fiscal issues that Tasmania can expect to face from demographic change. Comments on the Discussion Paper are required by Friday 27 April 2007. Further information, including the Discussion Paper, can be found on the DCAC website at www.dcac.tas.gov.au.

New Director of Local Government Development Appointed
Alistair Scott has been appointed to the position of Director of Local Government Development in the Department of Premier and Cabinet’s Local Government Office.

Primary Health Services Plan Issue Paper
The Department of Health and Human Services has released an issues paper on its Primary Health Services Plan for public comment. The paper is available at http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/agency/chs/issuesspaper.php and closing date for feedback is 16 April. Also available on the website is a schedule of community consultation forums being conducted around the state.

Tasmanian Forest Practice Systems Survey – Reminder
A reminder that the Tasmanian Forest practices systems survey sent to all elected members is due to be submitted by Thursday 5 April, 2007. Surveys can be returned in the stamped and addressed envelope provided with the survey, or returned to:
Ms Jo Field
c/- School of Geography and Environmental Studies
University of Tasmania
Locked Bag 1376
Launceston 7250

Leadership Wisdom Seminar 2007
The Rotary Club of Hobart and the Royal Hobart Hospital Research Foundation will present the Leadership Wisdom Seminar 2007 on 24 April at the Hotel Grand Chancellor, Hobart. All proceeds from the seminar will be donated to the sponsor charities. For further information refer to http://www.rthresearch.tas.gov.au/.

The State and Northern Territory Local Government Associations are jointly organising the 2007 National Human Resource Conference. The conference will run from 14-16 November 2007 and will be held on the Gold Coast. The conference will explore human resource management practices in Local Government and in particular the challenges posed by issues such as WorkChoices and skill shortages. For further information contact Bron Browning by phone on 07 3000 2220 or by e-mail at bron_browning@lgaq.asn.au.

World Mayor 2007
Between now and the end of May, City Mayors, the international network for strong cities and good local government, is seeking nominations for World Mayor 2007. The annual World Mayor Project aims to raise the profile of mayors worldwide, as well as to honour those who have served their communities well and who have made contributions to the well-being of cities nationally and internationally. For further information refer to http://www.worldmayor.com/voting/voting2007.html.

Upcoming Events
General Management Committee Meeting
Annual General Meeting/General Meeting
LGAT Conference

Campbell Town, 18 April
Hobart, 30 May
Hobart, 30 May -1 June