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*COVER PHOTO: Benjamin Allen demonstrates the art of Break Boy dancing at Clarence City Council’s ST.ART Street Art and Music Festival*

*Photography by David Bellamy*
With the most breathtaking view of the Hazards imaginable, stunning use of Tasmanian timbers, stylish design, water features, quality furnishings and artworks on display, the Saffire at Freycinet really must be seen and experienced to be believed. From the moment you pull up in the car park, a buggy will be waiting to transfer you to the hotel. Guests are asked what kind of books and music they like so that a special selection of books and CDs can be placed in the library ready for their arrival. If a guest likes the bed, they can purchase it, and if they like a sculpture, or the light fittings in their room, they may purchase those too! At $1,250 - $2,250 per night, some might consider a stay at the Saffire a little out of reach, but the opening of the resort marks the beginning of a new and exciting era for tourism in Tasmania. Head to page 40 for more details.

Chemsafe Homes Tasmania, a free, household chemical waste drop-off service, launched on behalf of Tasmanian councils in late 2009, got off to a great start. This year, the program will be extended to include 20 further sites around the state (see page 33). A brochure will be delivered to households and councils in October. Councils are encouraged to actively promote the program among residents to maximise the opportunity for people to dispose of any hazardous and unwanted household chemicals.

In the Health and Wellbeing section, you’ll find the first of a series of interviews, initiated by the Premier’s Physical Activity Council Local Government Sub-Committee, showcasing leaders in physical activity in the Local Government sector. In this edition, we talk with Launceston City Council Mayor, Ald Albert Van Zetten.

Clarence City Council has put considerable effort and resources into a range of innovative youth programs and events. One such initiative, the ST.ART Street Art and Music Festival, continues to grow in popularity by engaging local youth in a fun, social and creatively constructive setting, to enable them to explore their inner artist and grow their creative confidence. Find out more on page 46.

STEPHANIE WATSON
Editor
As I write this, the Federal Election is only a few days away. The outcome is far from clear. What is apparent though, is that Local Government issues have not featured highly in the policy agendas of the major parties.

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) developed, in consultation with members and State Associations, a list of core priorities and the commitments required from all major political parties to support strong local and regional communities. This 10-Point Plan (see www.alga.asn.au/federalelection/) identified the inadequacy of Local Government revenue, the need for continued investment in regional and local community infrastructure and in the Roads to Recovery program. The plan seeks a renewed and strengthened Intergovernmental Agreement which promotes collaboration and prevents cost shifting, constitutional recognition of Local Government, direct funding to allow local communities to adapt to climate change, improvements in waste policies, coordinated planning, strengthening of serviced to indigenous communities and equity in relation to the National Broadband Network.

So how have the parties responded? In relation to climate change, and particularly water sensitive urban design projects, the ALP and Coalition have both announced water buyback policies. The Greens have focused on reducing demand for water through improving efficiency (via building standards) and greater use of stormwater.

The Prime Minister attended the launch of the National Broadband Network in Midway Point, one of only two Tasmanian visits, and reaffirmed the commitment to that program. The Coalition has indicated they would continue Roads to Recovery funding and also allocate $600 million to rebuild and repair bridges around Australia (with match funding from State and Local Governments). The ALP has also indicated ongoing support for Roads to Recovery and black spot, but seem to talk more about existing investment as opposed to new investment. There have been various commitments by the major parties to transport infrastructure but with little relevance to Tasmania.

Both parties have committed to supporting recognition for Local Government in the Constitution. Earlier this year, the ALP provided $250,000 to the Australian Local Government Association (AGLA) to run community consultations on the issue. The Coalition has stated that they have a plan to ensure more funds can be paid direct to local communities, encouraging decision-making at a local level.

Regardless of these announcements, I feel the response for Local Government, has on the whole been fairly disappointing. I personally think that the major parties have been so focused on winning; they have concentrated most of their efforts in the marginal electorates and lost sight of the big picture!

I am wondering why Local Government issues haven’t gained much traction. Is it that our issues are perceived as less important, or is it that they, and the work of Local Government, are not well understood? There is probably an element of both at play but it certainly highlights the work we need to do in building an understanding of the role and importance of Local Government with our communities and our State and Federal politicians if we are to have success in any referendum on the matter of Constitutional Recognition for Local Government.

The LGAT has made a start in this direction with the ‘Think Big, Work Local’ television campaign which both promotes councils as a good career choice and raises awareness of the variety of functions councils undertake (see www.thinkbigworklocal.com.au). We will continue to draw attention to issues that are important to Tasmanian councils and leverage off our affiliation with the ALGA and the other Local Government Associations to make our relatively small voice louder.
Local Government Reform it is

ALLAN GARCIA, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION OF TASMANIA

Usually when someone mentions the “reform” word there are quick scurries and mutterings, and there is general concern all round. So when the Premier advised his intention of outlining a proposal for Local Government reform at the recent Premier’s Local Government Council meeting, those present were expecting the worst.

What the Premier did advise was that his interest was in aligning any reform agenda with the values that he was putting into place for his own government – innovation, sustainability, participation and connectedness. He indicated that he was keen to progress reform but wanted to do so in a collaborative way with Local Government. He was emphatic that amalgamations, voluntary or otherwise, were not the focus and that the constant discussion of structures tended to get in the way of achieving outcomes.

The Premier highlighted an interest in working with Local Government to improve services, achieve more reliable infrastructure, consider models and systems of aggregation of services or service delivery, and to determine which level of government is best placed to deliver particular services. He emphasised that this process was not about cost shifting or pushing more work onto Local Government, but about improving the broad lot of Local Government. He made it clear that local representation should stay as it is and that he was willing to commit to a four-year process.

Importantly, the Premier committed to putting real money into the project with a view to achieving results. In moving the matter forward, there will be a need to develop an appropriate framework, with protocols and funding arrangements developed and understood.

A series of workshops, discussion papers and working documents are proposed once there is a better understanding of the size and breed of the reform beast, with a convention or symposium envisaged in about six months’ time to allow for robust and vigorous discussion and input from all parties. The process would be conducted under the leadership and jurisdiction of the Premier’s Local Government Council (PLGC). The Premier gave an undertaking that the reform process would in no way resemble the water and sewerage reform process and would be based on collaboration.

The announcement of the reform outline allows Local Government to now get on with the job. Speculation on whether the State Government would have an appetite for structural reform can now be set aside, and effort and resource put into the development of responses and actions to those problems and issues that councils face in relation to service provision, infrastructure and capacity. It is likely to involve a lot of work and will mean councils leading the charge in many areas. The opportunity presented by the announcement ensures a destiny and pathway that can be determined by Local Government, rather than a pillaging and raping exercise that some may have feared or even advocated.

The important thing for councils in this process is to make sure that they engage in the process, have and present all the facts and evidence and ensure that they are fully informed. Like all reforms, there will be good bits and bad bits, but Local Government is in a strong position to influence and benefit from the outcomes.
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