

## Opinion Editorial

### **Difference between assertion and evidence.**

I admit I get frustrated by statements such as those made by the TCCI this week, that taking planning away from Local Government will resolve all and any issues. I find all too often such assertions are not backed by evidence and reflect a lack of practical understanding of how land use planning regulations, determined by State Government, must be applied locally.

At the recent Housing Summit, I noted that the evidence simply does not support assertions that current processing timelines for council planning applications contribute to the housing shortage. In fact, average development applications timelines are in line with statutory requirements. I also noted that this data is collected annually by the State Government, is publicly available and yet was unknown by most at the Summit including those making commentary on planning.

What would be more useful than unsubstantiated rhetoric, is examples of where things are not working, which can then be worked through by experts, to understand what is truly impacting on a development progressing. When the Red Tape Reduction Coordinator presented to a LGAT meeting in 2016 it was noted that there had been few examples identified that sat within the direct sphere of influence of Local Government. In fact, the recommendations developed following extensive industry consultation related to legislation and policy within the State Government's control.

A single body for managing planning will not automatically lead to sustainable development that respects our built and environmental heritage values. To reflect our communities' values, there is a need to engage with community. As the level of government closes to communities, councils are well placed to engage locally and do so efficiently on daily basis.

Local Government has been working hard to implement the continuous planning reform agendas of successive State Governments, including the current Tasmanian Planning Scheme. However, in the absence of other key requirements, such as the development of strategic planning policies and the promised review of the residential planning provisions, the Tasmanian Planning Scheme does little to shape our environments or effect planning process efficiency.

The time has come for less unsubstantiated rhetoric and more evidence. An evidence-based approach is vital when it comes to planning and other key aspects of Local Government service delivery, including the proposed takeover of TasWater. By reviewing the submissions and transcripts for the Legislative Council Committee into the takeover of TasWater, it is clear the evidence was just not there to back the claims of what could be achieved through a change in ownership.

It is time to shift dialogue about Local Government. Tasmania's councils are modernising and emerging as lean, collaborative and accountable to their communities. Local Government is always open to improvement but let's start an improvement dialogue from an evidence base. Let's be strategic and develop a clear understanding of the current and future role of councils in our communities and how this can positively impact Tasmania as a whole.