

10 February 2023

Matthew Healey
Director
Office of Local Government
Department of Premier and Cabinet

Via email: lg.consultation@dpac.tas.gov.au

Dear Matthew

2022 Local Government Elections

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the 2022 local government elections. This submission has been prepared by the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) on behalf of our 29 council members.

Councils were encouraged to respond to the Office of Local Government's survey and to provide supplementary written feedback where needed. Any omission of a particular council's issue in this submission should not be viewed as lack of support by LGAT.

LGAT's high level feedback is provided on the following pages.

If you have any questions or would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Dion Lester
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

LGAT feedback: 2022 local government elections

General comments

The 2022 local government elections were successful in attracting high voting participation rates (85 per cent), more gender and age diverse candidates and elected representatives. There are good opportunities to build upon this success to improve the access, fairness, and cost efficiency for the next local government elections.

Compulsory voting

The introduction of compulsory voting was, as we have previously noted, rushed and without adequate consultation with the local government sector.

While the Tasmanian Electoral Commission (TEC) ran a campaign on compulsory voting, the resources applied to this campaign were inadequate through the early phases of the election period and resulted in a need for Government to invest further resources late in the period, result in a large influx of returns towards the close of voting. The influx of late voters highlighted the limited understanding of electors on how to vote, including the process for postal ballots, and issues with ballot packs. This translated into a number of councils reporting high levels of demand on council staff. The full TEC election report will provide a more detailed picture of how well the campaign and associated materials assisted people in correctly voting.

Voting and counting

The successful voter turnout, provided it is sustained into the future, poses new challenges for equitable access to voting and the financial and human resources required to support this.

The addition of assisted voting service was welcome, although this was only following feedback from those needing extra assistance. The service was offered on a single day and required appropriately trained staff. This is unequal and not sufficient. Elections for other spheres of government here and interstate allow for voting at home with secure systems, or multiple opportunities for assistance to vote.

We have had some councils and community members suggest that in-person voting on a single day, as for Federal and State elections, may be more appropriate given the voter turnout. This would allow for concentrated resources to be placed to support the whole community to participate in local democracy and would reduce issues around postal ballots, such as delays with the postal system that de-prioritises letters. A review of voting whether in-person, or otherwise, should consider the total costs, direct and indirect to the TEC and to councils.

There are reports from councils that there remains confusion around voting for Mayor and Deputy Mayor. Some electors did not realise that candidates for these roles must also be elected as councillors, so must provide preferences for them on the councillor ballot paper. In the first instance the ballot papers for Mayor and Deputy Mayor could note that candidates must also receive preferences on the councillor ballot paper. More substantially, there needs to be consideration and broader consultation with our sector on potential changes to our voting system to allow for if a candidate is elected as the Mayor or Deputy Mayor they do not need to have received any councillor votes.

Election costs

As has been noted above, the increased participation in the election brought increased costs, both to the TEC, passed through to councils, and to councils with additional resourcing. A number of councils reported significant resource requirements on the ground, with dedicated staff, particularly in the last week before the polls closed. This was compounded with the timing of the compulsory voting changes, that were made after councils' 2022-23 budget had been set.

LGAT's election campaign

We welcomed the Tasmanian Government's contribution to our election campaign, 'a seat at the table'. The campaign was very successful in both increasing the number and diversity of candidates and increasing the awareness of the elections across the community. The campaign, along with compulsory voting, contributed to positive changes in the diversity of age and gender (only data available from the TEC):

Age

- 20 – 24: doubling of candidates and elected.
- 25 – 34: 31 per cent increase in candidates, but no more elected.
- 35 – 44: 23 per cent increase in candidates, 24 per cent increase in elected.
- 45 – 54: 5 per cent decrease in candidates, 12 per cent decrease in elected.
- 55 – 64: 5 per cent increase in candidates, 11 per cent increase in elected.
- 65+: One per cent decrease in candidates, no change in elected.

Gender

- Councillors - 13 per cent increase female candidates, nine per cent increase in elected.
- Mayor - 32 per cent increase female candidates and 50 per cent increase in elected.
- Deputy Mayor - 10 per cent decrease female candidates and 38 per cent increase in elected.

It was challenging and time consuming to obtain demographic data of candidates and elected representatives from the TEC. This data should be made available as a matter of course to support the understanding of the representiveness of councillors. This would also be in line with the Tasmanian Government's Open Data Policy¹ that explicitly puts the government's position that data should be technically and legally open.

While the TEC is still conducting its review, LGAT requests a detailed understanding of the full suite of diversity measures across both candidates and those elected to inform our future efforts at bolstering the diversity of local government elected representatives.

¹ Available at:

https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/124562/Tasmanian_Government_Open_Data_Policy_2016.pdf