



MEDIA RELEASE

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Forced amalgamations only benefit vested interests to detriment of ratepayers - LGAT

The Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) has strongly rejected the campaign by Tasmanians for Reform saying that forced amalgamations to benefit vested interests are unlikely to deliver savings and are not in the interests of ratepayers.

LGAT says savings and efficiencies were already being delivered through council cooperation and resource sharing and councils, as the closest level of government to the community, were delivering major initiatives that may well be lost in larger bureaucracies.

LGAT President Barry Easter said Local Government was not opposed to council amalgamations where they could be shown to clearly benefit all ratepayers and improve services for the community.

“However, we will not accept being forced into amalgamations simply to satisfy the greed of vested interests or to provide some diversion from some other greater political or economic issue.

“Local Government reform was discussed extensively at the recent LGAT conference and the presentations and debate highlighted the lack of evidence of benefits to ratepayers and communities in places where amalgamations had taken place.

“The cost of transition, the equalisation of rates and the higher expectations of communities once they are part of a larger councils, quickly dissipates any savings from efficiencies and scale.

“History and experience clearly demonstrates these facts and they do not support the rhetoric and claims of Tasmanians for Reform that glibly claim savings and rate reductions propped up by suspect and biased polls and surveys.”

Recent claims of 80% of Tasmanians supporting amalgamations are farcical. If this was the case we would have communities marching on Town halls across the state demanding change. Nothing could be further from the truth. Community members tell me that they are sick of being used as part of this grab for cash by the big end of town.”

Mayor Easter said council cooperation had already achieved much including the multi-million street lighting project for Hobart and Glenorchy, and savings through resource sharing for sports grounds maintenance, garbage collection, waste

management, land use planning, environmental initiatives and a range of other services. Spirited cooperation between councils sharing back office systems, professional officers and large equipment is seeing a new enthusiasm among councils that is delivering major benefits to the community.

This is saving ratepayers many millions of dollars and has already enabled councils to enhance services and keep down rate rises to benefit all ratepayers and the community.

Local Government is the closest sphere of government to the community, with a far better understanding of community aspirations and needs than an unrepresentative big business grouping.

Mr Easter said Tasmanians for Reform was nothing more than a business lobby of vested interests headed by the Property Council, masquerading as a group that had community interests at heart.

"The reality is actually the opposite and the community only has to look at what is happening in retail where small businesses are being forced to abandon traditional trading spaces as a result of exorbitant rents being demanded by big property owners.

"The property barons are looking to increase their profits and these are the same people behind Tasmanians for Reform who want lower rates for their big properties at the expense of home owners and smaller ratepayers.

"The bottom line is that Local Government will simply not accept this push by vested interests despite the hundreds of thousands of dollars being poured into the campaign, and the misleading and fraudulent statements and claims being made by Tasmanians for Reform.

"LGAT is advising the State Government and the parliament of its strongly held position and is prepared to mount a strong campaign should council amalgamations be imposed on Local Government," Mr Easter said.

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