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Submission to the Independent Review of Regional Development Australia

The Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) welcomes the Independent Review of Regional Development Australia and is pleased to make the following submission.

This submission has been developed in collaboration with member councils. Where a council has made a direct submission to this process, any omission of these specific council comments in the LGAT submission should not be viewed as lack of support by the Association for that specific issue. Further, LGAT has provided input to the submission made by the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA).

LGAT is incorporated under the Local Government Act 1993 and is the representative body for Local Government in Tasmania.

The objectives of the Association are:-

- To promote the efficient administration and operation of Local Government in the State of Tasmania;
- To watch over and protect the interests, rights and privileges of municipal Councils in the State of Tasmania;
- To foster and promote relationships between Local Government in the State of Tasmania with both the Government of Tasmania and the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia;
- To represent the interests of the members of the Association generally, and in such particular matters as may be referred to the Association by its members; and
- To provide such support services to the members of the Association as the Association may by resolution in meeting determine.

In general there is support from the Tasmanian Local Government sector for retaining RDAs.

LGAT has a good working relationship with RDA Tasmania, cemented over a number of years. The CEO of LGAT has for some time attended RDA Tasmania meetings as an observer and the CEO of RDA Tasmania, Craig Perkins, is currently on the General Management Committee of LGAT (as Mayor of Meander Valley Council).

In addition to the Local Government Association of Tasmania, the Tasmanian *Local Government Act* also provides for the establishment of joint authorities and three (3) regional authorities of councils currently exist in Tasmania (Southern Tasmanian Councils Authority, Cradle Coast Authority and Northern Tasmanian Development). While the governance, membership and functions of these regional authorities vary, and indeed are in a state of flux, all of them touch to lesser or greater extents on regional development. RDA Tasmania understands well the workings of the Local Government Regional Authorities and has actively engaged with and supported them as required.

At a State Government level, there has been a significant decline in resourcing for economic development activities at a regional level over the last 2 years, and so RDA Tasmania and the Local Government Regional Authorities and their member councils are playing an increasing role in this space. However the lack of clearly defined roles, transparent and recurrent resourcing and overlapping plans adds complexity to the regional development task and sometimes leads to misalignment and/or competition (both real and perceived). LGAT's experience at a bureaucratic level of State Government has been that there is little awareness or understanding of RDA Tasmania functions and activities. This suggests opportunities for better alignment and partnership might be missed.

From time to time the suggestion is made that there should be three (or four) RDAs in Tasmania. Ultimately there is a need to balance the cost of resourcing multiple RDAs vs. a central RDA with regionally based workers such as exists currently in Tasmania. There are advantages in a single RDA committee beyond efficiency and resourcing concerns, particularly as relate to engagement and advocacy with sectors (and their peaks) and State Government however additional funding to boost presence and effort at a 'sub regional' level would likely see greater connectivity with councils, regional authorities and related industries and business.

LGAT is aware that at a national level there have been very different experiences by councils of how RDAs are working. Some appear to have developed strong and effective partnerships with councils, others less so. There is also a lack of consensus nationally, and across Tasmanian councils when considering large and/or capital cities, are really 'regional'. Is there really a need to have several RDAs across urban Sydney and Melbourne? This is a question that is difficult to answer without clear agreement of what a regional development is and what outcomes need to be achieved. It is critical to answer those questions as a precursor to a review of the RDA program. Structure must follow function.

The LGAT supports the criteria for enhancing regional development policy as agreed by the ALGA Board in September this year. These include clearly defined objectives, self determined regional boundaries, regional identification of issues and priorities, policy interventions focussed on the key drivers of growth and decline in the region, evidence based policy, transparent monitoring and evaluation and adherence to the principle of subsidiarity.

LGAT notes that RDA outputs can be difficult to quantify and measure. This is a difficulty we often encounter ourselves. In Tasmania, our experience has been that the RDA role has been about support, liaison and getting conversations going, about changing policy and promoting partnerships and ideas rather than delivering products or projects. There is real opportunity, where RDAs are working well, to inform Federal program development and delivery, ensuring workable programs and meaningful outcomes. Further, RDA Tasmania is well positioned to play a more meaningful role in influencing, supporting and even recommending funding decisions for grants around regional development planning because of their local knowledge and connectedness, ensuring both Federal and regional priorities are being addressed in a transparent and coherent way.

There is support across the Tasmanian Local Government sector for enhancing council engagement with the RDA committee, perhaps through a formal local government appointment to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katrena Stephenson', written in a cursive style.

Dr Katrena Stephenson
Chief Executive Officer