



MEDIA RELEASE

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Constant Criticism of Councils is Counterproductive

“The ongoing call for amalgamations is becoming tiresome and frustrating for those in Local Government trying to deliver services to their communities, said the President of the Local Government Association, Barry Easter. “The constant criticism and ill-informed commentary from those who would have the community believe that councils are not functioning efficiently is counterproductive and mischievous.”

“Tasmanians for Reform Spokesperson, Mary Massina, constantly refers to an independent report commissioned by her organisation that projects a 35% saving from an amalgamation scenario for southern Tasmanian councils,” Mayor Easter said. “The assumptions made in relation to these predicted savings lack rigour and completeness.”

“The propositions around savings take a simplistic, high-level approach to infrastructure and services, and has no regard for present service levels or the condition of those assets,” he said. “It’s easy to add numbers from annual reports and then make some generic assumptions based on an uninformed view of council operations but it doesn’t make it valid or right.”

“Highly regarded academic, Brian Dollery, is referenced consistently throughout the report but his research is inappropriately used to support the Property Council’s desired outcomes. Research undertaken by Professor Dollery into amalgamations is comprehensive but the selective nature of this report is misleading and not in keeping with Professor Dollery’s Research intent,” Mayor Easter said.

“Local Government is not afraid of reform and does not want to appear defensive in relation to calls for reform, but these debates need to be fully informed,” Mayor Easter added. “Surveys of communities asking them if they support amalgamations are loaded - there is no explanation of the impacts on services, effects on rates, or infrastructure provision. There is a simple offer of cheaper rates based on spurious research,” he said.

“References to red tape demonstrate the lack of understanding of councils operating under a State Government legislative framework. Statutory obligations on councils require that there are processes, safeguards and equity built into the system. Again, a lack of knowledge of council operations and the legislation it must comply with brings about simplistic responses.”

“Local Government has offered to work with the groups associated with Tasmanians for Reform to resolve problems but the trial by media continues at a time when councils are constantly subjected to waves of planning reform, ongoing water and sewerage reform, and a multitude of legislative and policy propositions from the State Government impacting on council operations,” said Mayor Easter.

“These matters take time, effort and resources, and the fundamental lack of understanding of a noisy group that seeks self gain from its calls from change is both disconcerting and counterproductive.”

“Local Government is serving its community and the feedback we receive is that there are high levels of satisfaction with service levels, response rates and advocacy on behalf of those communities. It's a pity that Tasmanians for Reform doesn't explore the full picture. It may get a surprise!” he said.

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For interviews, please contact Barry Easter - LGAT President on 0408 334 936.