



MEDIA RELEASE

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Reform Already Happening

“The lobby group pushing for reform of Local Government needs to understand that this is a sector made up of councils with democratically elected members, members elected by the people they represent”, President of the Local Government Association of Tasmania, Mayor Easter said today.

“Those people are not knocking down the doors of town halls around the State, nor are they converging upon council meetings seeking their council to be amalgamated, he said. “That a few vested interest groups want change, almost for change sake, is becoming monotonous and self-serving.”

The southern councils in the State commissioned an expert panel to consider a range of issues including structural changes. When presented with the report those that commissioned it had some queries of the authors relating to assumptions, evidence and data, and have sought further clarification.

“It is a pity that the Property Council hadn’t done the same when it commissioned its report, otherwise it may not have reached the outlandish conclusions it did,” Mayor Easter said. “The southern councils have every right to take the appropriate time to address issues that have potentially significant impacts on their communities.”

“Unfortunately, the Tasmanians for Reform lobby group considers that it is the voice of the people. Let me assure you that the communities that councils represent would prefer to do their own bidding, rather than having a lobby group do it for them,” he said.

“The surveys that have been conducted take no account of facts and provide little evidence to respondents in terms of the impacts of any changes on their particular circumstance. The “facts” of massive rate decreases is a significant taunt but has not materialised anywhere in the western world where structural reform has occurred.”

“Conveniently forgotten, are the costs of reform, the need for investment into infrastructure and the general raising of service delivery demands that eventuate from amalgamation processes. This is not to say that efficiencies are not possible but they tend to be reinvested back into the operations of councils to achieve improved benefits and outcomes for communities,” he said.

Mayor Easter also commented that it is interesting to note that the small business lobby has also criticised the work being undertaken by the TCCI on potential Local Government reform.

“Here is a paper that the Chamber has developed after consultation with the Local Government sector which is not focused on amalgamations, but questioning what types of reform are possible. For Mr Mallet to call this a distraction is indeed hypocrisy when the entire debate we are having in this space is a broader distraction to the things that we probably should be focusing on in the State”.

“And let’s not forget who led the charge for water and sewerage reform. The Property Council lobbied hard and strong for this reform on a simplistic premise that consumers should pay for the water they use. Of course such things as pricing, infrastructure standards and the enhanced regulatory regime were left out of the Property Council’s considerations and the barefaced facts of implementation and all that goes along with a major reform has demonstrated that these are not simplistic concepts,” Mayor Easter said.

“True reform takes much planning. It takes will and it takes leadership. At the present time, the southern councils are considering a range of implications that have been presented to them. The northern councils have commissioned leading academic, Brian Dollery, to consider potential opportunities for reform. It does not rule out amalgamations but is looking at the broad gamut of possibilities for reform. Local Government is a willing participant in the reform process and capable of leading it but it must not be ill-conceived and simply in response to those that speak the loudest and most often.”

“It would be a useful exercise indeed for those calling for reform to actually sit down with Local Government and understand what it is doing, how it works and how the community benefits. Local and State Government are working on a series of reforms collaboratively for the benefit of all Tasmanians, not just those with vested interests, and it would be again be helpful if these groups actually took the time to understand and acknowledge exactly what is going on. Planning reform, further water and sewerage reform and reviewing the rating and valuation base in the State are significant reforms,” Mayor Easter said.

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