

Council to inform community as Local Government reform talks progress

Circular Head Council will be holding a series of community drop-in sessions starting next week to seek input and feedback regarding the looming changes emerging from the State Government's Local Government Review.

"The State Government is going to reform Local Government in Tasmania. There's broad agreement that 29 councils is too many for the size of the State. In fact, Tasmania has more councils for its land area than any other part of Australia, with more than six times the national average," Mayor Gerard Blizzard said.

All 29 councils currently have their own individual policies, hold their own insurances, issue building permit and compliance certificates, and manage animal control and waste largely independently.

"29 Councils mostly operating as silos while all doing the same things is a system designed for the pre-digital age. It is no longer necessary for every function to be done by every council."

Over the last year a Review Board has been gathering information about how councils manage their responsibilities and whether they are sustainable.

The challenges impacting rural and regional councils are similar across Tasmania. Smaller councils, such as Circular Head, have a lower rate base yet have to maintain the same or larger amounts of infrastructure than urban councils. More infrastructure results in increased maintenance and renewal costs which can be challenging given the smaller rate base.

"Additionally rural and regional councils have limited ability to manage the impact of climate change, and limited ability to modernise and be financially sustainable without imposing undue burden on communities," Mayor Blizzard said.

Capability and capacity to continue to maintain service levels changes drastically from council to council and the situation is steadily getting worse. In 2018, 69 per cent of Tasmanian councils were experiencing a skills shortage. In 2022, 86 per cent of Tasmanian councils were experiencing a skills shortage, including Circular Head.

"This means that many rural and regional councils can't provide the levels of service that communities increasingly expect," Mayor Blizzard said.

"Despite this, the State Government continues to ask councils to take on more responsibility for services such as cat management and child safety," Mayor Blizzard said.

"In our area, Circular Head, King Island and Waratah Wynyard Council have all averaged net deficits over the last 10 years. This suggests financial sustainability issues are on the horizon. It means we won't be able to afford the services that our region needs given the current population base we have, which is both ageing and declining."

There is a broad agreement across councils, community and other stakeholders so far consulted, that the status quo is not optimal or sustainable given growing demands, complexity and sustainability challenges. The State thinks some form of scaling up is necessary to deliver greater economies of scale and scope to improve the overall quality and range of services provided to the community.

The Review Board has concluded that the scale and extent of the consolidation needed to deliver significantly better services will not occur on a voluntary basis.

#### HAVE YOUR SAY

“Now we are getting to the pointy end of the review and the Board has provided some ideas for change. We want to hear your views to help Council decide how to respond,” Ms Adams said.

“Circular Head has a relatively low and slightly decreasing population base. While Council wants to change that, it is clear that right now, our increasing service delivery responsibilities will soon outweigh the community’s ability to fund them.”

“Despite the need for change, Council is determined to ensure that the role of local government as a voice for the community and a provider of advocacy to other levels of government is not lost or diluted in the reform process.”

Circular Head Council will be hosting a number of drop-in sessions across Circular Head to hear what you have to say. We would love to hear your perspective and thoughts on the upcoming changes to local government, its structure and its function.

The sessions will be held around the locality as follows:

Smithton – Friday 16 June, 5:30pm to 6:30pm, Council Chambers

Stanley – Wednesday 21 June, 5:30pm to 6:30pm, Stanley Rec Hall (TBC)

Marawah – Wednesday 28 June, 5:30pm to 6:30pm, Marawah Hall (TBC)

Rocky Cape – Wednesday 5 July, 5:30pm to 6:30pm, Rocky Cape Hall

Forest – Wednesday 12 July, 5:30pm to 6:30pm, Blackberry Inn (TBC)

Additionally, if you are unable to make it to one of these drop-in sessions you can have your say online on the Future of Local Government Review Website by heading to [www.engage.futurelocal.tas.gov.au](http://www.engage.futurelocal.tas.gov.au) and clicking ‘Make a Submission’ on the top right hand side. Alternatively you can get in touch via email at [submissions.lgboard@dpac.tas.gov.au](mailto:submissions.lgboard@dpac.tas.gov.au).