



#PlanningMatters

---

PMAT MEDIA RELEASE 16 FEBRUARY 2023

## **Scale of changes and dubious consultation prompts call for more community engagement on Local Government reform**

The [Planning Matters Alliance Tasmania \(PMAT\)](#) today called for a three-month extension to the Tasmanian Government's consultation process over reforms to Local Government, citing the scale of changes (forced amalgamations and removing planning decisions from local councils) and the style of consultation as key reasons for the community to have more time.

Major proposals such as removing planning decisions from local councils and replacing them with State Government appointed 'independent assessment panels' are buried in the [appendix](#) of the consultation document; meetings have been convened in only eight of Tasmania's 29 Local Government areas and consultation commenced 11 days before Christmas, a notoriously poor time to engage community on large scale change.

"We're deeply concerned about the openness, transparency and timing of the current round of public consultation into the future of local government and when you finally discover the magnitude of the proposed changes, buried in an appendix, it is very concerning" said Sophie Underwood, State Coordinator of PMAT. Why are highly contentious options buried in the documentation and not declared openly for all to consider?

"Forced amalgamations and Government-appointed assessment panels are deeply divisive reforms that have been long discussed and rejected. In 2020 Government explicitly ruled out forced amalgamations and the creation of regional Councils, and now they are back on the table.

PMAT is not against amalgamation per se - we accept amalgamation of some Councils may be advantageous - we are particularly concerned with forced amalgamations. Interstate experience demonstrates this can have poor outcomes for people and democracy with local representation being lost.

Recent advice also indicates that the proposed changes, despite their scale and significant impact on the way development decisions are made in Tasmania and the future of Local Government, may not be required to pass both houses of Parliament, further diminishing scrutiny and the integrity of this reform process.

"The proposed changes are profound and evidence from mainland Australia indicates they will lead to poor planning decisions and increased costs and conflict in the community," said Ms Underwood. "They're unpopular so it's no surprise people are increasingly questioning this process, how it is being rolled out and the direction it is heading.



#PlanningMatters

---

During the 2022 Local Government elections PMAT surveyed 398 of the 505 Local Government candidates. Of the 398 candidates, 169 completed our survey. The overwhelming majority of local council candidates, who took part in our survey (99.4%), believe councils should retain their role as a Planning Authority and make decisions on local development proposals.

The opportunity to comment on the '[Options Paper](#)' and '[Appendix](#)' currently closes this Sunday 19 February 2023 at 12 midnight.

**More info - Sophie Underwood      0407 501 999**

**Please also read PMAT's opinion piece in today's The Mercury: *PMAT Talking Point Changes to Councils Require Care* 16 Feb 2023 and listen to an interview on Mornings with Leon Compton with PMAT's State Coordinator on ABC [here](#) from Tuesday 14 February 2023 (at around 9:45 am).**