



Annual General Meeting 24 August 2024

President's Report

During 2023 – 2024 PMAT continued to work hard to achieve best practice planning and a healthy democracy based on our values and principles.

An important part of working towards best practice planning is helping the Tasmanian community to understand planning and the part that it plays in the lives of individuals and communities, and for our natural environment. The Resource Management and Planning System and the various planning, environmental regulation and review elements that form part of it are complex and difficult to understand.

In arguing for a better system, PMAT has a responsibility to articulate what an alternative vision for planning in Tasmania might look like. Our Strategic Plan 2024-2029 includes a renewed commitment to developing a Values-Based Planning vision for Tasmania. We are currently developing a discussion paper – based on broad concepts of individual, community and environmental well-being – to inform our future work. The aim is to share this with Alliance member groups and others for comment soon.

We have continued to face big challenges over the past year. During 2023 – 2024 PMAT has had to respond to a succession of proposed changes to the planning system. These have continued the pattern of weakened planning controls that place Tasmania's environment and the many things we value about living in our State at risk. At the same time, we see the capacity for effective public participation in the process being diminished.

However, it is encouraging that we have had some success this year in raising awareness about the planning system and its impact on us all, and in helping to limit some of the proposals that would otherwise have further compromised the planning system. Of course, much more needs to be done and, as ever, new challenges continue to emerge.

The PMAT Board has continued to work closely with Sophie looking for ways to spread the message about good planning and to influence government and the media where we can. This has been particularly important since the commencement of the new State Parliament in May. The make-up of both houses has changed significantly and we have been actively seeking to brief members on PMAT and our key issues.

Sophie also continues to do so much to support Alliance members and get PMAT's message across. This includes commenting in the media, working with local communities, convening public meetings and talking to key people and organisations on planning issues. This work – along with that of our communications consultant Monique Kreis – is critical.

Our planning system work over the past year

So much of PMAT's work over the past year has been in response to State Government efforts to introduce further planning reforms and initiatives that would put more pressure on our communities and the environment:

- **Development Assessment Panels (DAPs)**. Since the late 2023 announcement of proposals to allow DAPs to replace Councils in assessing development applications (with no merit-based appeals), PMAT has led the campaign to keep local government as the planning authority. In March we convened the largest public meeting held during the State election campaign on DAPs and the parallel push for **Independent Assessment Panels** to assess development in our national parks and reserves (Reserves Activity Assessment reform).

These will continue to be major issues in 2024 – 2025.

- The **State Coastal Policy** has long been critical in protecting Tasmania's coastlines. PMAT has played a key role, working with other groups, in arguing against the legislation now before Parliament to change the application of the Policy and questioning a proposed review that risks weakening the protections within the Policy.
- **Tasmanian Planning Policies (TPPs)**. The final draft TPPs have been considered by the Tasmanian Planning Commission (TPC) and PMAT appeared before the Commission in October 2023 in support of its submission on the draft. There remain serious concerns about how the TPPs will provide much needed strategic guidance to the planning system.
- PMAT remains engaged in the current review of the **State Planning Provisions (SPPs)** that has been underway since 2021. Securing improvements to the SPPs will be central to improving the planning system. Currently, feedback is being sought by the State Planning Office on *Draft Recommendations for Improving Residential Standards in Tasmania* and on *Draft Medium Density Design Guidelines*.
- PMAT continues to be involved in the **Review into the Future of Local Government in Tasmania** following our major effort in mid 2023 to organise nine public meetings around the State to raise awareness of the Review and encourage local community discussion on issues including forced amalgamations and Councils' role in planning. We made a submission on the Stage 2 Interim report and presented at the Local Government Board hearings (August 2023). In my view, PMAT has had a genuine impact in shaping this debate.
- The State Government has committed to resuming 5-yearly *State of the Environment* reporting. PMAT has been part of the push for this and will be looking closely at the next report when it is released.
- As part of the **State election 2024**, PMAT surveyed candidates on the DAP issue and published the results.
- In support of PMAT's values around democracy and transparency, in late 2023 we wrote to the Legislative Council encouraging support for amendments to the *Electoral Disclosure and Funding Bill 2022*, seeking to prohibit political donations from property developers. PMAT also joined other organisations in an open letter on the operation of Tasmania's Right to Information system.

Making PMAT more effective and sustainable

The Board has continued its efforts to strengthen the Alliance, engage the wider community, and to support Sophie in her role as State Director. Much of this is behind the scenes, but essential to enable PMAT's ongoing operation. Highlights include:

- **PMAT Strategic Plan 2024 – 2029.** Followed a review by the Board in May.
- Effective communication is essential and the past year has seen a complete redesign and rebuild of the **PMAT website**. It is now more responsive, easier to navigate and information-rich, with updates on planning issues continually added. Our mailchimp database, social media presence and donation system have all been upgraded.
- We continue to strengthen our budgeting and compliance systems.
- PMAT is now listed by the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission as a registered charity.
- It was wonderful to welcome three new member groups to the Alliance this year – Westbury Region Against the Prison (WRAP), South Hobart Sustainable Community and Cultural Heritage Practitioners (Tasmania) – we now have more than 70 Alliance groups.

Thank you to everyone who has worked to make PMAT a success

- **PMAT member groups.** You are the Alliance and I would like to thank you all for your support and the huge amount you do individually on planning issues.
- **Our State Director and Communications consultant.** Thank you to Sophie Underwood for her energy and commitment to PMAT – it is what allows PMAT to operate so effectively. Thanks also to our Communications consultant Monique Kreis for her huge effort in allowing PMAT to better present its message.
- **Our donors.** Thank you to all of those individuals and organisations that support PMAT. Our work is totally reliant on you, and your wonderful generosity is very much appreciated, especially so in the current economic climate.
- **PMAT's volunteer Board.** The Board works very hard behind the scenes to keep PMAT effective and viable. Thank you all for your hard work and expert guidance collectively, and for all you do individually to help PMAT to operate.
- **Campaign Advisory Group (CAG).** These community leaders provide key advice on, and assistance with, planning advocacy. Thank you all for your commitment and hard work.
- Many thanks to Eric Pinkard, our **Public Officer**.
- A special thank you again this year to **Anne Harrison** for her support with fundraising and other aspects of PMAT's work. Anne's expertise and experience continues to be invaluable.

Kerry Burns
State President
Planning Matters Alliance Tasmania