

Launceston Ratepayers' Association Inc.

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The Mayor & Aldermen
Launceston City Council
Town Hall
LAUNCESTON TAS 7250

Dear Aldermen,

Re: Local Government Association, compulsory voting, climate change and rating systems.

We have noted the media reporting of the Local Government Association of Tasmania Conference, held in Launceston during this past week. As a general concern, we do not understand how Launceston Council delegates participate and vote on the matters that are brought before the LGAT Conferences, as these often appear to be matters for which delegates do not have a clear mandate.

Compulsory voting.

This issue of compulsory voting at Local Government elections, was the subject of some dialogue and submission by our Association in support of compulsory voting, some years ago, when the legislation was last being reviewed. We are pleased that the Premier has signalled his support for compulsory voting and understand that the LCC delegates were also of this view. However, we are concerned that there has not been any meaningful public discussion on the compulsory voting issue, in the Launceston community in the last 12 months. The opponents' argument of increased cost against compulsory voting, are hardly valid. Utilizing the present postal voting system, the cost of processing additional returned votes would be limited to postage and counting, as all voters are already sent ballot papers.

In our opinion, the only way to sort out this issue, is for appropriate public consultation to be undertaken, then a poll of all electors at the next local government elections.

Climate change.

You will have noted the 'Letter to the Editor' from our Association published in *The Examiner* newspaper on June 12, albeit in an edited form.

Climate change is an important issue in Launceston as it affects heating costs, Tamar River siltation, levee protection, air quality, public transport, and ultimately ratepayer's domestic budget pressures. Our Association has made a comprehensive submission to the State Government concerning climate change and the *Government's Climate Change (State Action) Bill 2008*. In accordance with our usual custom, this submission has been published on our website www.launcestonratepayers.intas.net.au.

Rating methods.

It remains of considerable concern that at previous LGAT proceedings, the question of a more equitable rating method, was put to further deliberation by a sub-committee of LGAT, and this is still yet to be finalised. It was made very clear during the last LCC election, that there is widespread dissatisfaction with Launceston's rating method. Candidates made strong undertakings that they would move to see the LCC system reviewed. However, no review has occurred, and we are now proceeding to another rating period for rates to be based substantially on the AAV system. Our Association objects to this situation at the strongest possible level, as rating systems in several Tasmanian municipalities have, or are in the process of abandoning systems substantially based on the AAV system.

Recent press reports note that

- Brighton Municipality ratepayers face only an average of 3.9% increase in rates for next financial year, under that council's flat rating system introduced last year. This will result in a token extra \$50 in residential rates which is below inflation and when compared with a CPI of 4.2%. Commercial rates continue to be based on the AAV system
- Clarence Municipality has limited its rate increase to 3.9%.
- Hobart City Council is set to increase rates by only 3.8%.
- Kingborough Municipality's rates will rise by only 2.2%.
- Georgetown Municipality will adopt a similar flat rate system to Brighton's for residential properties.

We ask that you take particular note of reported comments by Brighton Mayor Tony Foster who said the new rating system was working "extremely well" for both the council and ratepayers. "Overwhelmingly, our feedback has been positive and there have been no issues from ratepayers". "This equitable system means that all normal households pay the same general rate for providing council services to their properties". Councillor Foster reportedly went on to say **that the old AAV system for residential properties took no real account of the cost of providing general services, or a ratepayer's ability to pay.**

Our Association has repeatedly called on your Council to restrict its operations to core activities, and to not undertake projects and services that are outside the essential requirements of the Local Government Act, in order to limit the rate burden.

The headline published in *The Examiner* newspaper on 20 June

Capital works pushes Launceston rates up

and citing your 10-year capital works programme including major spending on projects including the Regional Aquatic Centre, and flood levees, substantially supports our Association's viewpoint.

Launceston residential rates are unaffordable, and your unjust rating method coupled with your seemingly insatiable capital works programme and inclination to engage in capital works that are more-correctly the responsibility of other levels of government and other municipalities in the region, (including flood levees, Tamar River siltation, Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery, Aurora Stadium and the Regional Aquatic Centre), are the principle causes.

Accordingly, we explore that you reconsider your capital works programme; reconsider your reported rate increase and method of rating; and NOT approve your intended budget for 2008-09 and rates.

Yours faithfully,

Kevin Jonett

Vice President
For and on behalf of the Launceston Ratepayers' Association Inc.

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www.launcestonratepayers.intas.net.au