

Strengthening Local Government

Rosalie Woodruff MP | Local Government Spokesperson



Local Councils are the democratic pillar of our communities. They must be supported by the State Government, to protect services and the governance of our regions.

Councils are, and should be, the backbone of local communities. It's their services and governance that are essential for strong and resilient towns and cities.

It's the role of State Government to protect and support local councils, so they can look after the interest of their community.

The Liberals have failed councils and local communities. They failed to intervene in a timely manner to stamp out allegations of fraud, corruption and misconduct in several councils across Tasmania. The costs of Boards of Inquiry processes have been levied to councils, hitting their long-term financial viability, and there are still municipalities without a democratic voice.

We will reform the Local Government Act to build incentives for good behaviour and timely action to issues and conflict.

Strengthening the functioning of councils, and ensuring the government doesn't unfairly penalise ratepayers for their own failure to address allegations before they escalate is critical to solidifying democracy and good governance at a local level.

THE GREENS WILL

Strengthen the Local Government Act to:

- ▲ Require the State Government to bear the costs of Boards of Inquiries
- ▲ Prohibit councillors dismissed by a Board of Inquiry from standing for re-election for four years

STATE TO BEAR COSTS OF BOARD OF INQUIRY

Two local councils have been dismissed by Boards of Inquiry in the last two years, and the costs have been passed on to ratepayers. The cost for the Board of Inquiry into Glenorchy could be more than \$1.5 million.

The State Government, through the Local Government Division, is responsible for enforcing the *Local Government Act*, including investigating complaints of misconduct, fraud, and other matters – and to refer them to appropriate external bodies. The Minister is also responsible for initiating a Board of Inquiry process, making the determination to dismiss a council, and to place the council in administration.

There must be stronger incentives for the State Government to act in a timely manner to do everything it can to prevent a Board of Inquiry needing to be established. Allegations of misconduct, fraud and corruption in local council activities should be investigated and addressed before they escalate. Too often, serious allegations about inappropriate tendering and contracting processes, and controversial approvals surrounding development applications, have been left unaddressed. When serious allegations do not get properly investigated by an independent third party, internal conflict between councillors and community disquiet becomes inevitable.

The Greens will legislate to require the **State Government to cover the costs of Boards of Inquiry**. The prospect of having to cover any costs will be a powerful incentive for the Minister for Local Government, and their department, to put more energy into supporting councillors, establishing stronger governance processes, and saving ratepayers from having to pay for costs that are not their fault.

A 4 YEAR BAN ON RE-ELECTION

Councillors should work together to represent the best interests of all ratepayers. The collapse of the Huonville and Glenorchy councils demonstrates that stronger incentives are required to encourage councillors to cooperate.

Under the *Local Government Act*, the Minister for Local Government has the power to dismiss any councillor or all councillors if, in the opinion of the Minister: the failure of the councillor or council to perform any function has seriously affected the operation of the council; or the irregularity of the conduct of the councillor or council has seriously affected the operation of the council. However, nothing in the Act stops the dismissed councillor/s from immediately running for re-election.

The Greens will amend the Local Government Act so that when a councillor or all councillors are dismissed through a Board of Inquiry process **those councillors will not be eligible for re-election for four years**.