

Conversation Starter CS19-01: Engagement with councils

HOW CAN THE COMMISSION AND COUNCILS WORK BETTER TOGETHER TO OPTIMISE THE RELATIONSHIP, INTERACTIONS AND UNDERSTANDING OF EACH OTHERS ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES?

As part of a process of continual improvement, the State Grants Commission (the Commission) regularly seeks council feedback and comments on the Commission's processes and dealings with councils. This year the Commission is seeking feedback using the Conversation Starter format. The Commission strives to communicate and liaise with elected members and council staff to ensure that councils' engagement with, knowledge and understanding of Commission's activities and processes and understanding of decisions are optimized. The Commission seeks this engagement while also not

wanting to be a burden on council resources.

Whilst most councils are already involved in the Commission's annual Hearings and Visits Programs, the Commission is interested in finding ways to communicate and collaborate with councils to increase understanding between both parties and council understanding of the Commission processes and methodology, and ultimately staff's ability to optimally contribute to the Commission's deliberations.

Background

The Commission has always appreciated the feedback and suggestions made by councils through formal surveys and the annual Hearings and Visits. This feedback has helped the Commission review its activities to continuously and progressively improve its processes and relevance of information provided to councils.

As at 2018-19, the Commission is responsible for determining the distribution of almost \$80 million amongst Tasmanian councils each year. Whilst working within the Australian Government's National Principles, the consequences of Commission methodology decisions on council funding can potentially be significant.

As part of the 2019 Hearings and Visits, the Commission is seeking council views on ways to increase the confidence of all parties to which will optimise future contributions to Commission-council discussions.

The Commission appreciates council resources are limited and

seeks information and input from councils to assist it in developing interactions which help provide opportunities for councils to be more strategic in their decisions to invest resources in making submissions to the Commission on issues.

As part of a process on continual improvement, the Commission would appreciate councils' views on:

- What information or other support can be provided to councils, and vice versa?
- Who should be involved in these activities?
- How should these interactions be undertaken? and
- When during the year would be the best time for these activities to occur?

Questions

To help understand these issues and impacts, the Commission seeks councils' views on the following matters:

1. **Information transfer and education** – the operations of councils and the Commission are complex and can have a significant impact on communities. What is the best way for each party to gain a knowledge and understanding of each other's activities and processes?
2. **Communications and data exchange** – how and to whom should the Commission communicate within councils? Is there a single point of contact or, depending on the issue, are there different people in the council who should be involved?
3. **Data requests and accuracy** – a significant proportion of the data used by the Commission comes by way of the Local Government Division's (LGD) Consolidated Data Collection (CDC) process. Issues with the data may require clarification with council, and at times the Commission is seeing issues reoccurring. How can councils and the Commission improve the quality of data reported? For issues of clarification or additional information, who is the best contact person in council?
4. **Annual Hearings and Visits Program** – are there any ways in which the Commission can improve the way in which this Program is undertaken? How and when can the Program be used to best inform the Commission about the changing roles and contemporary issues councils are experiencing?
5. **Commission documents and publications** – are there any suggested changes in the way the Commission provides information to councils?
6. **Involvement of other bodies or individuals** – could the LGD, Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) or other body or person assist both parties to increase their respective understandings?
7. **Other improvements** – are there any other matters which councils consider could increase their capacity to contribute to the Commission's work and vice versa?

Submissions deadline

To enable discussion at the Commission's 2019 Hearings and Visits which are expected to commence on 18 February 2019, submissions should be received by **Friday 1 February 2019**.

These Conversation Starter flyers are not intended to be detailed papers. Council submissions on Conversation Starter issues can take any form councils wish – written and/or discussion at the 2019 Hearings and Visits.