

# Review of Commission Processes in response to Council Survey Feedback

Discussion Paper – DP14-04

February 2014



Tasmania  
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# Review Background

The State Grants Commission is an independent statutory body responsible for recommending the distribution of Australian Government and State Government funds to Tasmanian local government authorities. To ensure that the distribution of available funds is as equitable and contemporary as possible, the Commission continually monitors council practices and updates assessment methods and data where appropriate.

To provide some structure to updating the distribution methods of the Australian Government Financial Assistance Grants (FAGs), the Commission operates a triennial review policy whereby major method changes are introduced only every three years, with data updates and minor changes applied every year.

## Overview of Triennial Review Period (FAGs)

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| Distribution | Action                        |
|--------------|-------------------------------|
| 2012-13      | Method Changes + Data Updates |
| 2013-14      | Data Updates                  |
| 2014-15      | Data Updates                  |
| 2015-16      | Method Changes + Data Updates |

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As part of the Commission's performance appraisal processes, the Commission sought council feedback on its processes and interactions with councils in September 2013. While feedback was overwhelmingly positive, a number of suggestions for changes to processes were raised.

The Commission wishes to discuss the wider council views regarding the feedback and suggestions prior to determining any process changes.

# Council Survey Feedback

## I. Background – Hearings and Visits process

Each year the Commission conducts a series of council visits that typically involve meetings with council staff and elected members at the council administration centre. There is also the possibility of some physical inspections of particular aspects of council operations which council believes to represent significant cost issues. The Commission normally visits one third of councils each year.

In conjunction with council visits, the Commission also holds public hearings at which councils that are not being visited have the opportunity to make representations to the Commission.

Council hearings are held in three regional locations over a period of two or three days each, and are interspersed with council visits in the region.

The Commission has previously conducted regional presentations on the Commission processes. More recently the Commission has moved to providing this information as part of the discussions at the one on one visits with councils. The Commission is able to tailor these presentations to the individual council and believes there is greater participation by councils with this format.

## 2. Survey Feedback

In September 2013, the State Grants Commission wrote to councils requesting their views on the Commission's processes and dealings with councils during 2012-13. Councils were asked to rank the Commission's performance and provide qualitative responses to a series of questions on all facets of dealings with councils. Questions covered aspects of the hearing and visit processes, clarity and reasonableness of Commission data requests, transparency in the Commission's processes, availability of reports, papers and information on the Commission's website and adequacy of explanatory material provided to councils. Councils were also asked for suggestions on how the Commission could improve its performance.

Twenty two of the 29 councils provided some form of response to the request for council views. This represents more than 75% response rate. The Commission is very pleased to receive such a high response rate from councils.

The September 2013 council feedback indicated a high level of satisfaction with the Commission's current processes. However, there was some feedback from councils that indicated a level of interest in the Commission periodically conducting regional presentations which are open to all councils to attend. It was suggested that conducting regional presentations would make more time available for the Commission to visit councils and understand their issues more fully. It was also suggested that such sessions could be run biannually.

Other feedback relating to visits included a desire for the Commission to better understand individual council issues and a desire for the Commission to specify what it would like to see during the visits.

Other council suggestions included the Commission providing some web based training and education.

The Commission seeks council views on how the Commission can best fulfil its obligations to ensure councils are well informed regarding the Commission's models and processes. The Commission is also seeking input from councils on how the hearings and visits processes might be varied to better accommodate councils' need to inform the Commission of issues of concern.

The Commission also seeks to determine if there is sector wide interest in holding regional Commission presentations and how the Commission should accommodate feedback regarding hearings and visits and information suggestions from councils.

### 3. Points for discussion

- 1. How do councils suggest the Commission can get better value from their visits to Council's local area?*
- 2. How might the Commission better acquaint itself with council issues relevant to Commission matters?*
- 3. How can councils be given the opportunity to acquaint the Commission with the issues that councils consider important for the Commission to understand? How can the Commission better communicate with councils on its consideration of issues raised by councils?*
- 4. How can the Commission best fulfil its obligations to ensure councils are well informed and educated on the Commission's models and processes?*
- 5. What training and educational information would councils find beneficial to have available on the Commission's website?*
- 6. Is there support for the Commission conducting regional presentations on a regular basis? If so, what frequency would councils consider optimal?*

## Submissions and timeframes

The Commission invites comments and input from councils on the issues raised within this discussion paper. However, council input need not be confined to the issues identified. Councils should feel free to provide comments on other pertinent issues regarding the Commission assessment methodologies.

Submissions should be forwarded to the Commission Secretary, Ms Pam Marriott as follows:

- By post: Secretary  
State Grants Commission  
GPO Box 147  
HOBART TAS 7001
- By email: [pam.marriott@treasury.tas.gov.au](mailto:pam.marriott@treasury.tas.gov.au)

Further details regarding the annual assessments can be found in the 2013-14 Annual Report that is available on the Commission website. Go to the Department of Treasury and Finance webpage ([www.treasury.tas.gov.au](http://www.treasury.tas.gov.au)) and click the State Grants Commission 'Quick Link', then click Publications.

**Submissions close on Friday 14 March 2014.**

Any queries should be directed to the Secretary on (03) 6166 4274.

## 2014 Hearings and Visits

The Commission will provide councils with an opportunity to discuss this paper and any other concerns during the 2014 Hearings and Visits program that will begin in March 2014.