

# Call for local government reform valid

**W**EST Tamar Mayor Barry Easter's dismissal of a campaign for local government reform that involves 21 key state organisations is not assisting a healthy community debate.

On Sunday the Tasmanians for Reform Coalition held a public protest calling for reform and council rate reduction, in a state that it sees as having too many different planning models and processes.

In response, Mr Easter branded them as "self-interested" because the Property Council was a co-ordinator.

If Mr Easter is suggesting that organisations such as the Master Builders Association; Retail Traders Association; Small Business Council, Launceston, Burnie and Hobart chambers of commerce; Pharmacy Guild; Master Plumbers Association and others are somehow clones of one interest group — the Property Council — he probably just lost a host of friends.

He may also have to mend fences with EMRS pollsters after questioning the value of its surveys.

It is perfectly legitimate to ask why a state with a small population has 29 municipalities with 281 councillors, costing millions of dollars a year.

The Local Government Association of Tasmania, which represents councils, and which Mr Easter is also president, has for years allowed a hodge podge of planning laws to play havoc with development in Tasmania.

Business has been complaining for years about our ad hoc planning laws but it took until 2011 for a uniform set of planning rules to emerge.

If there wasn't a problem but just pure self-interest, as Mr Easter contends, then why are so many organisations combining to complain.

The LGAT usually argues that resource sharing between councils is a legitimate saving, and a suitable substitute for amalgamation.

Resource sharing may be a welcome efficiency, but it does not deal with the fact that we have a cumbersome array of expensive councils, like mini kingdoms, for such a small population.

Given that other states and the Commonwealth are reviewing the way GST receipts and other funding is distributed throughout Australia, Mr Easter and his association may need to plan a more sophisticated case for survival, than to merely brand critics as self-interested.

— BARRY PRISMALL, deputy editor.