

I caught up with the Circular Head Council General Manager this week on one of my regular visits to CIRCULAR HEAD to ask what the main matters occupying the time and energy of Circular Head Council are. I always appreciate the opportunity to chat with the Local Government GM's to ensure I am aware of the challenges and opportunities communities in my electorate are dealing with.

The main matter occupying the Circular Head GM relates to the proposed renewable projects and responding to the Government's Renewables Tasmania Draft Renewable Energy Coordination Framework which was released for comment early in the year – community consultation closed 3 March this year – a couple of weeks before the election was called - it can be access here: https://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/279531/Draft_Renewable_Energy_Coordination_Framework.pdf

There is a need for effective leadership in this area to ensure a well-formed community understanding of what renewable energy is and what options exist for NW Tasmania and Circular Head in particular. When the Draft Framework indicates that the North West region is likely to be asked to meet more than 50% of the State's renewable energy target much greater community engagement is needed.

The document suggests that approximately 5150 megawatts in new wind and solar generation will be needed in the NW to meet the 200% target now set in legislation. Thus, the NW region will be asked to do more than 50% of the load increase.

If wind energy alone was used for example, in Circular Head it would equate to going from the current 35 turbines to 300 turbines – a huge increase.

He also expressed some concern that the Draft Renewables Tasmania Framework has been released in a format many in the community would not be able to fully comprehend or even to find on the website – it did take some finding for me and that's why I included the link above.

There needs to be much more engagement and input from Government, preferably in person, to explain what this means and what this looks like to local residents of Circular Head. The GM is seeking ongoing engagement with Minister Barnett, Minister for Energy and Minister Ferguson as Minister for Infrastructure and State Development due to the potential size and scale of this expansion.

The second major matter relates to the housing shortage. This is not confined to the Circular Head region however this is creating problems for business and industry who need new employees but can't access accommodation for them to live locally.

The Council continues to look at available residential land and the Council's settlement strategy to identify suitable land, both public and privately owned to progress the construction of new homes.

The need for public/social housing is another key concern for Circular Head compounded by the underinvestment in the Circular Head region over many years. The State Government owns blocks of land inside the town boundary that could be developed now. These are fully serviced blocks and I will be encouraging Minister Ferguson to progress this. Of course all builders – whether building for public or private housing are struggling with supply of building materials, fittings and other essential items required. This is unlikely to change in the short term so there needs to be thorough consideration of the options to address what is a housing crisis in this area.

The GM informed me that approvals for houses are stronger than average which is good news, however the shortage of builders and materials is making it hard to deliver homes on the ground.

A change in dairy operations with more corporate ownership has increased need for housing as has an aging population with more retiring from the workforce but remaining in the community, as they should! This does add to the burden for new workers to access homes in the region.

If more workers have to travel to work from further east, this will add to the already heavy traffic on the Bass Highway and increase the worker health and safety risks associated with longer commute times, fatigue and other road safety risks.

We also discussed the ongoing need for investment in skills and training to support the many agricultural and construction sector demands, as well as aged and disability care, in the region.

We discussed the recently announced purchase of VDL dairy farms that are outside the main farm gate. There is an on-going need to ensure the Environmental Protection Notices (EPN's), animal welfare and worker health and safety issues continue to be addressed by the new owner when ownership changes. This remains a concern to me and to the GM and a matter I will also closely monitor to ensure our reputation as a prime dairy region is not harmed.