

Hon Jay Weatherill MP
Premier
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Dear Premier

Thank you for your email dated 8 July in which you informed COTA SA about the state government's review of boards and committees.

My understanding is that it is the government's intention to abolish its statutory, advisory, commercial, regulatory and decision-making boards and committees, unless it can be demonstrated they have an essential purpose that cannot be met through other means. Exemption will be considered on the basis of efficiency and independence.

It is also my understanding that the government believes that new means of technology and mechanisms such as citizens' juries can in the main adequately replace the current board and committee system.

The COTA SA Board discussed your correspondence at its meeting of 21 August and concluded that the issue was of sufficient importance to write to you.

As you may be aware, participation in state government committees and boards is central to COTA SA's work as an advocacy body representing the interests, rights and needs of older South Australians. Through our participation we can provide the government with systematic and sector-wide views and, in turn, communicate the issues of the day to our extensive member and stakeholder groups.

A rationalisation of the number of state government boards and committees is in itself welcome, especially in those cases in which a body's effectiveness and engagement with the community are low or where it has outlived its lifespan. COTA SA is also aware of the government's cost-benefit considerations where significant financial and other resources are expended in supporting advisory bodies.

The review could therefore usefully review not just the existence of individual advisory boards and committees, but how to improve the effectiveness of those bodies which may not now be performing well but whose ongoing operation is of critical importance to the state.

COTA SA has been pleased to be part of a number of excellent consumer advisory groups, such as the Consumer Advisory Committee of the Essential Services Commission of SA, which the government could look to as models of best practice.

The proposed wholesale shift from the current board and committee system, however, fails to take up this opportunity as well as to recognise the multitude of benefits that consumer and advisory bodies deliver to government and to the community more broadly.

For consumer representatives and peak body organisations, as for government, advisory bodies provide important advantages, including:

- the level and breadth of information exchanged
- mutual understanding of the factors and concerns within the public, private and not-for-profit (NFP) sectors
- the relationships established between the public, private and NFP sectors, which in turn feed into a range of collaborative activities
- the synergy of ideas which derives from face-to-face discussion
- responsiveness to the government's strategic aims and therefore delivery of targeted programs and innovation.

Importantly, through extensive community connections, peak body representatives deliver to government highly efficient and cost-effective access to a broad range of community views.

The board and committee system has other important benefits which the state government should consider.

It allows for coordinated, sector-based input into government policy, as opposed to particular and *ad hoc* consultation which may be at the behest of the government.

It provides a mechanism to ensure government transparency and accountability.

And it provides a platform for systemic advocacy by giving a voice to those who are vulnerable or marginalised, many of whom are less likely or able to take up engagement through social media, new technology or citizens' juries.

COTA SA believes that the government's engagement with the community is strongest when it is multi-faceted. The more channels to government, the richer our democracy. The new forms of social media and participatory democracy proposed are therefore welcome and should enhance the current advisory body system, but should not replace it.

COTA SA would be pleased to be part of any further consideration by the government of its engagement with the community, and in particular with older South Australians.

In addition, if you are interested in discussing any of the issues I have raised in this letter, I would be happy to do so at any time.

Yours sincerely



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