

The Chairman  
Senate Finance and Public Administration Standing Committee

**Re: Local Government Plebiscites Inquiry**

I am currently, and have been for more than twelve years, living in the present Eacham Shire Council area in Far North Queensland where I was raised and completed all my schooling.

As you would be aware, Eacham Shire Council, under the Beattie Government, is to be amalgamated with the Herberton, Atherton and Mareeba Shire Councils to form the Tableland Regional Council.

For the last three years, the three southern shires have been negotiating a quasi amalgamation wherein they would each retain their own identity, administration, councilors etc but would share their other assets such as plant, machinery, workforce and so on. In fact, it was commonly thought by those in these communities that the three shires would, in due course, formally amalgamate anyway and that this would be not such a bad idea.

To force the three southern shires to unite with the Mareeba shire (as in the Beattie plan) however, is abhorrent to most residents in all four shires. Not because residents of individual shires don't like one another or don't inter-visit because they do. Its just that Mareeba shire just doesn't have anything in common (such as primary or secondary production, commerce, shopping etc) with the other three shires. In addition, this would place an extremely large area of land under the one administration causing residents from one extremity to travel to the other extremity to conduct business. With the high population base of Mareeba, it is highly likely the seat of administration of the new council will be in Mareeba...one of the extremities.

This forced amalgamation is regarded as most unpopular by the residents of all four shires equally.

The Mayors of all four shires have indicated they will not be standing for reelection in the coming year as have most of the councilors of Eacham Shire and, except for Mareeba shire, it seems that the elected councilors have accepted that which has been dealt, probably for fear of loosing the last six months of their tenure. Public pressure and very recent statements by both Peter Beattie and John Howard may yet change that.

The crux of my submission is that should Plebiscites be conducted on forced amalgamations of councils...particularly in the proposed Tableland Regional Council area, care should be taken not to ask a very blunt question such as, "Are you in favour of forced Council amalgamations?". If that was the question asked, the most likely outcome would be a majority "yes". If a question along the lines, "Are you in favour of the forced amalgamation of the four shires in your district as proposed by the Beattie Government?", a very different answer is the most likely outcome.

Robin Potter