

23 August 2007

Mr Stephen Palethorpe
Secretary
Finance & PA Committee

SENATE INQUIRY ON FORCED COUNCIL AMALGAMATIONS IN QUEENSLAND

The purpose of this submission is to register our:

- Total opposition to a forced merger of the Noosa Council with those of Maroochy and Caloundra; and
- Deep disappointment with the way in which the Premier of Queensland has gone about this whole issue – a jackboot and shotgun approach carried out in inordinate haste with no public consultation – a disgrace and insult to the voters who elected the Labor government.

Issues

I seriously doubt whether the Size, Shape and Sustainability (SSS) initiative had sufficient clarity and performance indicators to develop consistent reporting formats – a joint error of both the State Government and the LGAQ. It should have been better prepared.

The Local Government Reform Commission was set up on the pretext of identifying Councils considered to be financially unsustainable. Noosa Council is among the top ten Councils in Queensland in both financial and development sustainability. If we are amalgamated, it is highly likely that our population cap and development guidelines that the people and council have fought so hard for over many years will be discarded.

What is behind the rush? The Premier points out that existing Council boundaries have been in place for over 100 years. Those boundaries and Councils have, for the large part, successfully carried out the local government role for those communities over that time. Why push so hard and so quickly? What are the motives, political or personal?

The Premier has already admitted that he and, by association, his Minister for Local Government were wrong in not allowing the people to have their say on the proposed amalgamations. They were wrong on the whole process!

Conclusion

We now look to the Federal Government and Opposition to continue and escalate the pressure on the Queensland Premier to reverse his legislation, and instead, take a more measured and considerate approach to the viability of local Government.

In annex 1 I have included some suggestions that may be worth considering in reviewing local government.

Thanks for your time.

Roy and Joy Wellington

SUGGESTIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW

Suggestions include:

- All Councils should have the same, consistent structure.
- Division/Department/Branch names should be consistent across all Councils.
- Similarly, managerial position names should all be consistent across all Councils.
- Councillors should not form or be involved in the selection panel for the CEO or senior managers – they are not qualified! Selection should be undertaken by a suitably qualified panel of perhaps their LGAQ peers, industry and State Government representatives. Councillors should then be given the opportunity for final approval or rejection of the successful applicant.
- Day to day running of the Business, that is, the Divisions, Branches and staff should remain the sole responsibility of the CEO and free from interference from Councillors. Equally, the CEO and his Senior Managers would be responsible for business reporting to the Councillors. This would include a standard range of (all Council) reports approved by the Queensland Audit office (QAO).
- All Councils should be provided with strict performance reporting requirements using KPI's based on consistent local government benchmarks.
- Finally, to properly review Council financial and other viability, a number of qualified teams should be established to visit each council to:
 - set up their structure
 - investigate their current performance
 - set up their standard performance and reporting requirements
 - assist struggling administrations
 - ensure ongoing performance monitoring.
- Amalgamation should only be considered as a last resort and in consultation with the community.