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Terry Brennan

File No. 213/50

24 August 2007

The Committee Secretary
Finance & Public Administration Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

The Stanthorpe Shire Council would like to make a submission to the Inquiry into the *Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Democratic Plebiscites) Bill 2007*.

The Council notes that the Bill seeks to amend the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* to enable the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to use and disclose information held by it for the purposes of conducting an activity such as a plebiscite, under the Act. The Bill also proposes to include provisions which would override a State or Territory law which prohibits, penalises or discriminates against a person or body that enters into an arrangement with the AEC to conduct such an activity.

The Stanthorpe Shire Council strongly supports the inclusion of the proposed amendments in the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* given the steps taken by the Queensland Government in the *Local Government Reform Implementation Act 2007* to prohibit the conduct of polls on a local government reform matter. The Queensland Government has tried to deny the opportunity for local communities to express their view on proposals for the amalgamation of local governments by suspending the operation of provisions contained in the Queensland Local Government Act relating to the conduct of referendums on major reviewable local government matters such as amalgamations. The Local Government Reform legislation has been rushed through State Parliament and includes provisions which penalise Councillors who support the conduct of polls, with the Minister also having the power to dismiss Councils that contravene the provisions of the legislation relating to the conduct of polls.

The provisions contained in the Bill will address this iniquitous situation and ensure that suitable legislative safeguards exist if a State or Territory government tries to adopt and implement similar legislative restrictions on the right to freedom of expression.

I have enclosed for your information a copy of the Executive Summary from the Council's submission to the Queensland Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC) in relation to its examination of local government boundaries in Queensland. The submission addressed the terms of reference set for the LGRC by the State Government but were largely ignored in the final recommendation made by the LGRC for the amalgamation of Stanthorpe and Warwick Shire Councils to form the Southern Downs Regional Council.

I trust that the abovementioned information and attachment is of assistance to the Finance and Public Administration Committee in its Inquiry into the *Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Democratic Plebiscites) Bill 2007*.

Yours sincerely



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Enc.



STANTHORPE SHIRE COUNCIL

Submission to the

Local Government Reform Commission

23 May 2007

Stanthorpe Shire Council
Submission to the Local Government Reform Commission
23 May 2007

2.0 Executive Summary

- Stanthorpe Shire has a growing population of 10,600 people that enjoys a rich and diverse lifestyle with steady population growth of approx 0.5% per annum projected over the next 20 years.
- Stanthorpe Shire Council provides a full range of services to its community and facilitates optimum service delivery.
- Stanthorpe Shire Council has a strong, committed and stable senior management team exhibiting a broad range of skills including specialist skills in governance, engineering, health, building, finance, planning and economic development. The Council's staff structure and workforce is broadly skilled, with high levels of expertise demonstrated in the delivery of local government services to the community.
- The Council's *2005-2010 Corporate Plan* is progressive and forward thinking, identifying *Innovation* as a key theme. The vision for innovation is Stanthorpe as a leading edge Shire providing a model for leadership, a catalyst for innovation and a Learning Community.
- Unlike many rural and remote communities, Stanthorpe has a vibrant and positive future. It is distinctly different from other areas in the Southern Downs or Darling Downs region and is the Centre of the Granite Belt, an official area with a unique geographical indicator.
- The Shire's proximity to rapidly expanding population centres at the Gold Coast, Ipswich/Brisbane, Toowoomba and Northern NSW are attractive to continued lifestyle and business migration.
- Stanthorpe is largely self-supporting, particularly in the areas of Education, Health, Aged Care and Commercial/Retail Services and also services a broader catchment area.
- Stanthorpe's location and unique physical characteristics makes it hard to link to a single regional group.
- Stanthorpe Shire Council is presently in a sound and sustainable long term financial position where planned service and infrastructure levels can be met without unplanned increases in rates or disruptive cuts to services.
- The outcome of the QTC Financial Sustainability Review indicates that Stanthorpe Shire Council has a moderate rating with a neutral outlook.
- Stanthorpe Shire Council is an active participant in the LGAQ Asset Management Program - *LGAsset*. Council is of the opinion that it is addressing most of the asset management issues raised by the Auditor-General, by virtue of its participation in this program
- Council cannot identify any improvements in financial sustainability associated with amalgamating with any of its neighbouring shires.

- Stanthorpe Shire has addressed land use planning in an efficient and effective manner that connects with the particular needs and aspirations of the local community.
- The growth of Stanthorpe Shire can be adequately and effectively managed within the boundaries of the Shire. A change in the boundaries of Stanthorpe Shire is not required to manage growth.
- Stanthorpe Shire is independent of all neighbouring Queensland Council's for all key local government infrastructure requirements.
- Stanthorpe Shire boundaries reflect logical, consistent natural resource management boundaries. The whole of the Shire is contained within the Border Rivers catchment as the existing Shire boundaries follow the watershed in the north and the east.
- Analysis of the Commission's Terms of Reference indicates that no basis exists to support any change being made to the existing boundaries of Stanthorpe Shire.
- The best option to improve the existing sustainability of Council's operations is the detailed investigation of resource sharing opportunities through formal service agreements and the development of strategic alliances.
- Possible options for amalgamation/boundary change involving Stanthorpe/Inglewood, Stanthorpe/Warwick and Stanthorpe/Inglewood/Warwick have been examined against the Terms of Reference and none of these options support a case for change.