

# Tourism Noosa

## **A Submission to the Senate Enquiry Regarding Queensland Referendums on Council Amalgamations**

**Date: 30 August 2007**

### ***Introduction***

Tourism Noosa was the lead industry group, to advocate and coordinate the sentiment, direction and “will” of the Noosa Tourism Industry, regarding the Noosa Shire and “Forced Amalgamations”.

That position was and remains, that the express desire of the Noosa Tourism Industry and Community were ignored through the “Reform” process and consequently has now been further denied the opportunity of free speech to further advocate its position and “will”.

From the outset this community sought to maintain its local government structure and realise the opportunity to realign the Noosa Shire Boundaries to incorporate surrounding communities of interest, including Doonan, Verridale, Eumundie and Peregian Springs.

To achieve this the Noosa Council lodged its Submission to the Local Government Reform Committee (LGRC), addressing, meeting and exceeding all aspects relating to the assessment criteria for sound commercial and sustainable Council operation. Despite this, the LGRC sought and found illogical rationale supporting the merger of Noosa Council into a wider Sunshine Coast “Super” Council, this was done despite the overwhelming majority of the Noosa Industry and Community supporting the Noosa Council proposition. There “will” was ignored.

### ***Recommendation Sought***

Tourism Noosa recommends that the Senate Committee support the passage of the Bill, enabling Queensland Councils to ask the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to undertake referendums regarding the forced amalgamation of local governments.

### ***Terms of Reference***

This submission addresses the provisions of the Bill and consequently the Committee’s Terms of Reference. The Bill seeks to allow the AEC to undertake any referendum on the amalgamation of any local governing body in any part of Australia.

This submission provides the context which has led to the need for the Bill and explicitly relates to a lack of “democracy” in respect to the will of the people of Noosa:

Specifically,

- the Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC), which made recommendations to the Queensland Government, acted undemocratically
- the Queensland Government acted undemocratically in accepting the LGRC's recommendations.
- The Queensland Government then compounded the above by legislating to prevent councils being associated with referendums which sought to allow communities to express their democratic views on the forced amalgamations.
- Current advice from the Queensland Government indicates their intention to rescind aspects of the legislation that previously outlawed public "plebiscites". The process to achieve this would at best be described as "confused" and "unworkable" in terms of repealing these aspects of the legislation.

## ***Background***

In order to ascertain and demonstrate the desire of the Noosa Tourism Industry and Community, the following activities provide first hand and intimate knowledge of the overwhelming "will" of the Shire, and of the ignorance demonstrated by the LGRC Committee and Process. This has created the necessity to further demonstrate this "will" in the form of Public Referendum.

- LGRC ignorance of the Tourism Industry Submission representing 420 businesses protesting against amalgamation
- Lodgment of 14,000 community submissions through 12 Submission Lodgment Booths
- Participation of 10,000 people at 3 separate Community Rallies held simultaneously and on the same day
- The production of a Peoples Charter and Giant Noosa Post Card with over 3,000 signatories from community
- Public action by nationally renowned and credentialed Australians demanding strong action against forced amalgamation, (names available upon request)
- An email communications campaign that lodged industry and community protest over the recommendation to amalgamate the Noosa Council. This created in excess of 15,000 email submissions to all Members of Queensland Cabinet and the Queensland Governor General
- Ignorance of the periodic Industry Forums held by community designed to express desire of industry, these were carried out with the following groups:
  - Hastings St Traders Association, representing 180 businesses
  - Noosaville Traders Group, representing 130 businesses
  - Tewantin Association, representing 80 businesses
  - The Noosa Junction Traders, representing over 120 business
  - The Commercial Boatman of Noosa, representing 25 Business
  - The Tewantin/Noosa RSL Club representing its community membership
  - The Tewantin Bowling Club representing its community membership
  - The Noosa Rowing and Yacht Club representing its community members

Tourism Noosa through its own submission advised the Reform Commissioners of the likely consequences of amalgamation should it recommend the integration of Noosa Shire into a wider Sunshine Coast Council, it advised of the real and damaging threat to the Noosa tourism industry and the economies of Noosa and Queensland.

In compiling the Tourism Noosa LGRC Submission it became obvious that there was no identifiable benefit for the Noosa tourism industry associated with amalgamation. To the contrary, the initiative generated a raft of unpopular, unintended and negative outcomes that have already started to divide the strong connection that the Noosa tourism industry and community share with industry colleagues along the entire Sunshine Coast.

It also places the Noosa brand at high risk, with industry in no doubt that the brand will be diminished and suffer as a consequence of the forced merger of councils and tourism entities. This situation will undoubtedly dilute the strong brand proposition that is held in such internationally high regard in Australia and around the world.

By far the most telling aspect to emerge from Tourism Noosa's involvement in conjunction with the well credentialed national economic forecast agency EMDA, was the evaluation and Economic Analysis of tourism in Noosa which identified the level of economic risk to the Noosa tourism industry should amalgamation occur with the more urbanised neighbors immediately south of Noosa.

This financial analysis demonstrated that forced amalgamation will result in a downturn in tourism expenditures in the order of \$70 million dollars per annum or \$350 million dollars in the immediate 5 year outlook. This, coupled with a consequent drop in Noosa employment opportunities ranging from 313 to 336 jobs per annum, is nothing short of catastrophic.

In deriving its conclusions, Tourism Noosa as the lead industry advocate ensured it was well represented at the community coal face in this entire debate with a demonstrated high level of "face to face" community involvement which has underpinned its strong opposition to the legislation, and even stronger opposition against a system that denies the voice and will of community through referendum.

It also urges close scrutiny of the Commissions process and scheduling, particularly regarding the startling quick time in which decisions were made and supported by the extensive range of printed collateral, and disturbingly the "generic" nature of content and material contained within the printed literature.

## ***Conclusion***

Tourism Noosa argues that the overwhelming will of the people has been ignored, creating the following outcomes:

- Dilution of the Noosa brand and identity in an already highly competitive market place, with its integration in to the wider Sunshine Coast
- The real potential for traditional and emerging international markets to find holiday alternatives to Noosa due the changing nature of Noosa under amalgamated governance
- The diminished capability to maintain Destination Management Practices which underpin a sustainable tourism industry

- Jeopardises the Noosa marketing, communications and industry development programs which provide for and compliment the pristine environment for which Noosa is renowned and for which this community fights to maintain
- Puts at high risk the UNESCO recognition of Noosa as Australia's next and Queensland's first "Biosphere"
- Diminishes and puts at risks the successful Noosa Tourism Levy which sustains the tourism and communications program for the iconic "**There's only one Noosa**" proposition
- Ushers in the irreversible risk associated with changing nature of Noosa visitation resulting from new planning regimes, creating deep and long lasting negative economic effects upon the Noosa economy

Tourism Noosa also argued on behalf of its constituents, that the reform process should also recognise generational opportunities to adjust boundaries to embrace genuine communities of interest with Noosa and underpin the already proven sound and commercial basis on which the Noosa Shire is run.

While outside the scope of the "Enquiry" it is pertinent to note the ignorance displayed towards the surrounding "communities of interest", who sought alignment with Noosa. The LGRC denied their expressed community desire to align their communities with other "like" communities is reflective of the poor outcomes resulting from this entire and poorly managed process.

Tourism Noosa still strongly supports the submission of the Eumundi community to join as community-of-interest of Noosa. Tourism Noosa also supports the proposal to align existing boundaries to incorporate Peregian Springs and other areas of Weyba Downs, Doonan and Verridale.

All of the above points are detailed within the Tourism Noosa LGRC Submission and provide compelling evidence to support the Noosa Council Submission regarding amalgamation.

Submitted by:  
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24 August 2007  
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