

22nd August 2007

SENATE 220807

The Chairman
Local Government Plebiscites Inquiry
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Dear Sir/Madam

I understood the main stated reason for the commission into Local Government amalgamation here in Queensland was to achieve stronger Councils so they could better manage future growth and provide services within their areas. However I am unconvinced that the Premier does not have some ulterior motive behind his indecent rush to force Council amalgamation. If some of the Councils were financially weak surely it would have made more sense to provide financial assistance to those Councils rather than burden all Queensland (except Brisbane) ratepayers and taxpayers with the massive costs, waste and disruption that will occur because of the drastic reduction in the number of Local Government authorities?

I currently live in the Beaudesert Shire and have done so for just over thirteen years. However it seems I will be transferred to the Logan City Local Government area as from next March. This prospect does not greatly appeal to me. If I had wanted to live in the Logan City Council controlled area I would have purchased land in that area. However we choose to live within the mainly rural scenic Beaudesert Shire controlled area.

I have printed the Commission's reports for both of these Local Government areas and have closely studied them. It appears 635 square kilometres of the existing Beaudesert Shire is going to be given to the Logan City Council. Granted some of this area adjoins the Logan City eg. Park Ridge etc but a lot doesn't eg. Jimboomba, Flagstone, Cedar Grove, Cedar Vale, North and South Maclean etc. It also appears the greater portion of the Beaudesert Shire residents live in this area being given to Logan City and this northern area is recognised as being the growth area of Beaudesert Shire.

I am unable to follow the logic involved in the argument that transferring a growth area of one shire to another Local Government area will somehow make the area being reduced in size and population a stronger Council. I have spoken to the Beaudesert Shire Council and whilst they agree a Financial Sustainability Review had not been completed, they claimed one had been requested. They also claim the Shire was considered financially viable before the proposed transfer but Boonah, the Council being merged with Beaudesert is considered to be financially weak. However it appears the combined Beaudesert Shire will now be rated as weak. The Beaudesert Council also did not agree with the Commission's statement that they have an aggressive depreciation policy.

Whilst the Commission states it gave consideration to the 164 suggestions it received in relation to Beaudesert, Boonah Shire I doubt that any of these submissions was given much credence. The Commission says it received thousands of suggestions overall but I doubt if any significance was given to any suggestion indicating the person sending the suggestions did not want any amalgamation in their area. In my opinion, the Commission could not have read and understood all submissions received in the short period of time it existed and basically spent its time cutting and pasting, reusing as much as possible the words of the first written report to justify its expected result. Why was there no individual break up of submissions into "for" and "against" amalgamation in each of the existing Council recommendations?

At the Local Government elections held in 2004, Beaudesert Shire had eight divisions and approximately 4,250 electors per division. I have held the opinion since that election that Beaudesert Shire is overburdened with Councillors as I understand Logan City Council had an average of

approximately 10,500 electors per division, the Gold Coast City Council had approximately 19,000 electors per division and Brisbane City Council had approximately 24,000 electors per ward. From the Commission's report for the new Beaudesert Regional Council they recommended six councillors each representing 3,746 electors per division. The new Logan City Council will have 15,279 electors per division. If each Logan City councillor is expected to represent such a large number of electors why should each Beaudesert Regional Councillor represent such a small number? I understand the "to be combined" Council of Pine Rivers, Caboolture and Redcliffe will have approximately 19,000 electors each up from approximately 9,500 in the current Pine Rivers. Surely there should be some equality of the actual cost of Local Government representation for Shires with "full time" Councillors?

I also notice very few of the new amalgamated Councils were recommended to be divided into divisions. This virtual blanket recommendation demonstrates how out of touch with reality the members of the Commission actually were. With no Councillor responsible for those electors within a set area, when an elector has a problem it could be well nigh impossible for the elector to have his problem resolved as each Councillor could easily claim that he assumed the other Councillor was the one actually working on resolving the initial problem. I am pleased to read that quite a number of the amalgamated Councils have decided in fact to have divisions so that this problem does not eventuate.

The last paragraph of the two reports I printed was headed "9. Objectives set for Commission". These objectives were all achieved according to the Commission. I am unable to agree with this conclusion. As far as I am concerned Objective 1 "Facilitates optimum service delivery to Queensland communities" will **not be achieved** by having Jimboomba become part of the Logan City Council area. Likewise for the other three objectives. We had no problem being serviced here in Jimboomba by the then Beaudesert Shire Council. However the Beaudesert Shire Council will lose the vast majority of its existing rates base for no apparent benefit to the ratepayers of the existing northern part of the shire.

Yours faithfully

Alex McDonald