

Goondiwindi Regional Council



1. Recommendation

The Commission recommends:

- (i) the existing local governments of Goondiwindi Town, Waggamba Shire and Inglewood Shire Councils be abolished and a new local government formed based on the combined area of the three existing local governments;
- (ii) the new local government be called Goondiwindi Regional Council;
- (iii) the new local government be undivided with six councillors and a mayor; and
- (iv) the new local government be classed as a regional local government.

2. Comparison of new and previous local governments

NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT	PREVIOUS LOCAL GOVERNMENTS			
Name	Goondiwindi Regional Council	Goondiwindi Town Council	Waggamba Shire Council	Inglewood Shire Council
Class	Regional	Town	Shire	Shire
Size	19,294 sq km	15 sq km	13,400 sq km	5,879 sq km
Population 2006	10,720	5,050	3,019	2,651
Population 2026	12,340	5,822	3,819	2,699
Electors 2007	6,923	3,059	2,001	1,863
Electoral arrangements	Undivided 6 councillors plus mayor	Undivided 6 councillors plus mayor	Divided (4 divisions) 8 councillors plus mayor	Undivided 8 councillors plus mayor
Electors per councillor excluding mayor	1,153	509	250	232
Total operating revenue financial year 2006	\$26.1 million (estimated)	\$6.4 million (estimated)	\$12.8 million (estimated)	\$6.9 (estimated)
Annual capital expenditure financial year 2007 - 2015	\$8.6 million (estimated)	\$2.5 million	\$3.5 million	\$2.6 million
Total assets at 30 June 2006	\$214.8 million (estimated)	\$56.7 million	\$103.1 million (estimated)	\$55 million (estimated)
Debt at 30 June 2006	\$2.1 million (estimated)	\$2 million	Nil	\$0.1 million (estimated)
Community equity at 30 June 2006	\$209.5 million (estimated)	\$53.8 million	\$101.7 million (estimated)	\$54 million (estimated)

3. Rationale for the new local government

3.1 Service delivery, operations and management

- Service delivery improved through economies of scale by bringing together:
 - planning;
 - managing water, waste and sewerage;
 - managing and maintaining road networks;
 - utilising plant;
 - managing waste; and
 - undertaking core corporate activities including executive and administrative functions, finance, and information technology.
- Increased capacity of the local government through a larger revenue and asset base with the prospect of attracting, developing and retaining the skills base required to undertake planning for, and actively managing the social, economic development and environmental issues across the region.
- The amalgamated local government should have greater capacity to institutionalise knowledge, build pools of skills around core functions and undertake succession planning.
- Providing the potential for improved governance of the regional communities which form the Regional Council.
- Enhance the capacity of the new local government to engage with industry and State and Federal Governments in relation to development and management of the region.
- A significant proportion of Waggamba's population is an overflow of the town of Goondiwindi.
- Goondiwindi Town and Waggamba Shire Councils currently share a number of services.
- Goondiwindi Town and Waggamba Shire Councils were significantly advanced under the SSS process and had reached agreement to amalgamate.

3.2 Communities of interest

- Goondiwindi is the major service centre for Waggamba Shire and a reasonable proportion of Inglewood Shire's population also utilise Goondiwindi as a service centre.

- Goondiwindi provides educational, health, commercial and financial services to the rural communities of Waggamba, the far northern rural area of New South Wales and to a lesser extent Inglewood Shire.
- Waggamba almost completely surrounds Goondiwindi, however there is increasing development from Goondiwindi Town into Waggamba Shire.
- A shared community of interest based on strong social and economic linkages.
- The large number of people living in Waggamba work in Goondiwindi.
- Strong transportation linkages as Goondiwindi sits at the intersection of the Newell Highway/Leichhardt Highway (Australia's major inland highway running north south), the Cunningham Highway (from Brisbane), the Barwon Highway (to St George), the Gore Highway (to Toowoomba) and the Bruxner Highway (to Tenterfield to link with the New England Highway). As a consequence all communities within the region have easy access to Goondiwindi.
- No natural barriers between the communities.

3.3 Other

- Inglewood Shire Council is rated very weak with a negative outlook in the Financial Sustainability Review by Queensland Treasury Corporation. Based on this rating and outlook there is potential for Inglewood Shire Council to be rated as distressed in the short to medium-term. However, its inclusion in an amalgamated local government should not significantly weaken the new local government.
- Goondiwindi Town and Waggamba Shire Councils in their joint suggestion to the Commission expressed a willingness to amalgamate with Inglewood Shire Council based on communities of interest and a natural geographic area.
- While Inglewood Shire's inclusion in the amalgamated local government area will not significantly weaken the Goondiwindi Regional Council, consideration needs to be given as to whether any assistance will be necessary.

4. Financial sustainability

Each local government is rated in the Financial Sustainability Review by Queensland Treasury Corporation as follows:

- Goondiwindi Town Council – moderate (neutral);
- Waggamba Shire Council – moderate (neutral); and
- Inglewood Shire Council – very weak (negative).

Amalgamating these local governments removes structural inefficiencies (particularly with respect to Goondiwindi Town and Waggamba Shire). It is likely that the amalgamated local government would be rated as moderate with a developing outlook.

5. Implementation issues

The Commission recommends the Goondiwindi-Waggamba Aerodrome Board and the Goondiwindi-Waggamba Cultural Centre Board, which are separate legal entities under the *Local Government Act 1993*, be abolished and their functions assumed by the amalgamated local government.

6. Boundary issues

The Commission did not identify any major ongoing boundary issues.

7. Suggestions

The Commission gave consideration to the 28 suggestions it received relating to the area proposed for the new Regional Council.

7.1 Details of suggestions

- Goondiwindi Shire and Waggamba Shire Councils prepared a joint suggestion recommending their amalgamation with Inglewood Shire Council. It also recommended the amalgamated local government be named the Goondiwindi Shire Council based on the name being well known.

The proposed amalgamation is based on:

- like communities of interest;
- the local government area is contained within the Border Rivers catchment area thereby facilitating natural resource management;
- Goondiwindi Town and Waggamba Shire Council's moderate positions should be able to absorb the very weak financial position of Inglewood Shire Council through improved economies of scale, removal of duplicated assets, reduced councillor and staff expenses and increased purchasing power; and
- improved regional economic development.

This suggestion also resisted the following amalgamation options:

- Goondiwindi, Waggamba, Balonne, Tara and/or Millmerran based on an absence of communities of interest and different natural resource management areas;
- Inglewood and Warwick based on different natural resource management areas, distance issues and limited representation for Inglewood Shire;
- Inglewood Shire and Stanthorpe Shire Councils, based on community of interest differences and Stanthorpe Shire not being a regional centre for most residents of the current Inglewood Shire;
- Goondiwindi Town, Stanthorpe Shire, Inglewood Shire and Waggamba Shire Councils, based on distances and absence of communities of interest with Stanthorpe Shire; and
- Warwick Shire, Goondiwindi Town, Stanthorpe Shire, Inglewood Shire and Waggamba Shire Councils, based on distance to Warwick, different natural resource management areas, different communities of interest and Warwick not being a common service centre for the region.

- Inglewood Shire Council recommended a two-tier model be developed by overlaying a regional local government over the four current 'district' local governments of Goondiwindi Town, Waggamba Shire, Inglewood Shire and Stanthorpe Shire thereby ensuring local representation. Other benefits claimed for this model include:
 - developing a regional strategy and plan;
 - strengthening resource base;

- reducing the cost of local government operations through shared services;
- attracting specialist skills; and
- developing business opportunities.

The negatives council sees with its proposal included:

- managing the integration processes; and
- the cost of redundancies.

7.2 Commission’s comments on suggestions

The Commission considered a number of amalgamation options including larger amalgamation options. It also considered the proposal from Inglewood Shire Council to establish a two-tiered local government structure.

With respect to larger amalgamation options, the Commission is of the view that a larger local government area:

- would lack a common community of interest; and
- distances, particularly east to west, are significant (approximately 4.5 hours travelling time).

The Commission also considered the amalgamation of Goondiwindi Town and Waggamba Shire Councils which the Commission agreed fitted all criteria for amalgamation. However, this would result in Inglewood Shire being recommended for amalgamation with Warwick Shire and Stanthorpe Shire Councils. On balance this option is considered less favourable based on communities of interest, natural resource management and community representation. In addition, the Commission was guided by the joint suggestion it received from Goondiwindi Town and Waggamba Shire Councils proposing the inclusion of Inglewood Shire as part of the amalgamated council.

A two-tiered local government system is not considered to have any merit as it would only lead to additional bureaucracy and cost increases, particularly if there is not the necessary continuous commitment by individual local governments. The Commission’s more detailed assessment of shared services and alliances, including those involving an additional tier of local government can be found at Part 4.5 of the Commission’s report.

8. Other Commission considerations

- The Commission also considered the possibility Goondiwindi Town, Waggamba Shire and Inglewood Shires remaining as individual local governments. However, the Commission considers the continuation of separate local governments will not facilitate optimum service delivery for the region and will impair the local government’s ability to develop capacity to address social, environmental and economic development planning issues facing the region.
- The Commission acknowledges Goondiwindi Town’s and Waggamba Shire’s naming preference. The Commission considers the name Goondiwindi Regional Council is representative of the region.

9. Objectives set for Commission

OBJECTIVES	OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED
Facilitates optimum service delivery to Queensland communities.	Yes.
Ensure local government effectively contributes to and participates in Queensland’s regional economies.	Yes.
Manages economic, environmental and social planning consistently with regional communities of interest.	Yes.
Effectively partners local government with other levels of government to ensure sustainable and viable communities.	Yes.