

*"There is a future
in the bush"*

**INGLEWOOD MODEL -
A NEW MODEL FOR QUEENSLAND
LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Inglewood Qld
23 May, 2007

***PREAMBLE: Mayor of Inglewood
Councillor Joan White***

The Mayor of Inglewood, Councillor Joan White prepared a brief DVD to be viewed in conjunction with the formal submission. A transcript of the DVD is as follows:-

Thank you for the opportunity to put forward Inglewood Shire Council's case for the alternative model for Local Government Reform.

Our submission "There is a future in the bush" is attached. It gives details of the fresh approach we can deliver to Local Government services on a regional basis while retaining our local presence.

Chapter 1 – "A new model for Queensland Local Government"

This is where our model demonstrates how a "Regional" Council which draws from several smaller "District" Councils west of the Range operates and is extremely suited and ideal to present as a new model for smaller, more isolated Councils.

The "regional" level will consist of members elected internally from the "district" level. We would be doing all our strategic planning at a "regional" level. The "regional" level would do strategic corporate documentation and planning, set service delivery standards, prepare regional, economical and social economic plans, corporate financial planning, establish partnerships with other levels of government and the corporate sector and handle human resource recruitment and retention. The review of our strategic outcomes would be done on that "regional" level thus allowing some form of sustainability within our financial system.

Our "district" level would be our operational level. This is where we would be doing everything that happens locally – district management planning, operational functions and local service delivery. So this ensures that Local Government does not lose its local identity within its local area.

Chapter 2 “Big enough to matter and small enough to care”.

In this practical example the “District Councils” would consist of Inglewood district, Stanthorpe district, Goondiwindi and Waggamba district. These would be the “district” council level from which we would be able to deliver services locally.

The reason we’re using the term “Border Rivers” is because ours is also a water catchment based model. We’re unique to any other area in Queensland. We have a river system that is widely known as “Border Rivers”. We’re the only river system in the whole of Australia that is run by a Commission. The Commission is the “Border Rivers Commission” which has a Commissioner from New South Wales and a Commissioner from Queensland.

Our vegetation management plans were all identified as “Border Rivers” because of our region being different. This difference is what we need to be able to have recognized now at a local government level.

Our social economy and the social infrastructure all moves within our local primary industry infrastructure. Our primary industries and the associated value adding is all done very much as part of this “Border Rivers” concept. We have a unique ability of being able to produce a very diverse range of products from forestry, value added, animal production, fruit, vegetables and down towards our western area boundary there is broad-acre farming opportunities many of which are now value adding as well, as far as stock feed goes.

So that’s what makes us unique but it gives us a commonality and this is why I’d like to push for Inglewood Shire to be a part of this “regional” model.

Chapter 3 – “Room for resizing, creating a corporative environment for change”

You would well realize that this is a new direction for local government. We’ve taken this concept to all of our community. We’ve taken it to our Heads of Department from each state agency they all see the model is very simple and less obtrusive to our staffing. It will enable us to be able to make changes practically. The only ones who will be losing positions in this whole change would be Mayors, CEOs and Councillors. As you can see from the model, the council numbers are less than what we already have. This model also identifies with every area of the reform criteria. We believe it has everything that the commission is looking for in Local Government Reform.

As you would appreciate, we have had a very short period of time to prepare our concept. We have been fortunate enough to have Professor Brian Dollery, Centre of Local Government, University of New England at Armidale collaborate with us in preparation of this submission.

We would only be too pleased to expand on any or all aspects of the model if afforded the opportunity to do so.

Thank you.

Councillor Joan White
Mayor, Inglewood Shire Council.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:-

Inglewood Shire Council wishes to acknowledge the efforts of Inglewood Shire Chief Executive Officer Mr Don Ramsland in the compilation of this submission.

It also expresses appreciation to Professor Brian Dollery, Centre for Local Government, University of New England (Armidale) for his collaboration in preparing the model outlined in Chapter 1.

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EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW:-

Inglewood Shire believes that the major issues facing Queensland Local Government are related to funding rather than structure. As such it is in administrative consolidation and not political amalgamation that solutions will be found.

Chapter 1 outlines a new regional model for Local Government in Queensland's lower populated, more isolated areas.

Chapter 2 details the impact the model would have if introduced into the Border Rivers Region and the town of Goondiwindi and neighbouring Shires of Waggamba, Inglewood and Stanthorpe.

Chapter 3 contains recommendations for the establishment of the Border Rivers Regional Council concept.

Council representatives would be only too willing to expand or provide further information or clarification in respect of any part of this submission if afforded the opportunity to do so.

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CHAPTER 1

A NEW REGIONAL MODEL FOR QUEENSLAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Numerous recent state-based and national inquiries into the state of play in Australian local government have demonstrated conclusively that a great many local councils across the country find themselves in financially strained circumstances. Moreover, the burden of this financial crisis has fallen most heavily on infrastructure maintenance and replacement (Dollery, Byrnes and Crase, 2006). At the national level, the Commonwealth Grants Commission Report (CGC) (2001), the Commonwealth House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration ('Hawker Report') (2004) *Rates and Taxes: A Fair Share for Responsible Local Government*, and the recent PriceWaterhouseCoopers Report (PWC) (2006) *National Financial Sustainability Study of Local Government* all stressed the acute degree of financial distress in Australian local government and its impact on local infrastructure.

In a similar vein, several state-based inquiries initiated by state local government associations have arrived at analogous conclusions. While their emphasis sometimes differed, the South Australian Financial Sustainability Review Board Report (2005) *Rising to the Challenge*, the Independent Inquiry into the Financial Sustainability of NSW Local Government ('Allan Report') (2006) *Are Councils Sustainable*, the now defunct Queensland Local Government Association's (LGAQ) (2006) *Size, Shape and Sustainability* (SSS), the Western Australian Local Government Association Report (2006) *Systemic Sustainability Study: In Your Hands - Shaping the Future of Local Government in Western Australia* and the Tasmanian Local Government Association Report (2007) *A Review of the Financial Sustainability of Local Government in Tasmania* concluded unanimously that a large number of councils were financially unsustainable and local infrastructure had borne the brunt of the funding crisis.

Although primarily concerned with the question of financial sustainability, these inquiries also considered various methods of improving the operational efficiency of local councils. Almost without exception, they have concluded that structural reform under the guise of forced amalgamation had not met its intended aims (Dollery, Byrnes and Crase, 2007). By contrast, shared services arrangements were seen as offering great promise by all report authors¹. It is thus critically important that the Queensland Local Government Reform program and its Reform Commission consider these conclusions seriously and embody the findings of these inquiries into its recommendations for local government reform in Queensland.

The establishment of the Local Government Reform Commission and the deliberations of the Reform Commission present local government in Queensland with a unique opportunity to not only fix past problems, but also to create new opportunities for the future. There is a need to be both bold and imaginative and to learn from the mistakes of local government reform in other Australian states.

¹ Although empirical evidence on shared services has been badly neglected in these inquiries, an embryonic Australian academic literature does exist which includes the New England Regional Alliance of Councils (NERAC) (Dollery, Burns and Johnson, 2005), joint board models (Dollery and Johnson, 2007), the Walkerville model (Dollery and Byrnes, 2006), the Gilgandra model (Dollery, Moppett and Crase, 2006) and the Riverina East Regional Organization of Councils (REROC) (Dollery, Johnson, Marshall and Witherby, 2005). In general, this literature provides useful 'case studies' of shared service models but does not systematically evaluate their economic outcomes nor present a widely applicable generic model.

The central lesson that has emerged from the various national and state-based inquiries is that the financial difficulties troubling local councils across the country cannot be solved by structural changes alone. Revenue constraints and cost pressures on local councils are so acute that only additional sources of funding and improved methods of tackling rising expenditure can comprehensively resolve the current financial crisis. A second crucial lesson is that the forced amalgamation of local councils, especially in regional, rural and remote areas, has not improved financial sustainability. A much more promising approach to enhancing the operational efficiency of local councils resides in shared service models. However, the as yet unanswered question is what form should shared service arrangements take? This Report seeks to provide a definitive answer to this question by means of a simple model capable of implementation across non-metropolitan Queensland.

This chapter of the Report presents a generic model of governance and management arrangements that would allow local councils to harness the benefits that can accrue from resource sharing between relatively small groups of councils while at the same time preserving local democratic autonomy and local representation that are greatly valued by country Queenslanders.

The chapter is divided into five main parts. Section 1.2 briefly outlines the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Reform Commission and the main issues the Reform Commission has to confront in designing the architecture of new structural arrangements in Queensland local government. Section 1.2 presents a model of local governance that embodies the lessons of local government reform in other Australian states by combining regional governance, effective resource sharing and local autonomy. Section 1.3 considers the problem of the allocation of functions between the regional authorities and local councils in the model. Section 1.4 examines the human resource question in terms of the model. The chapter ends with some brief conclusions in section 1.4.

1.2. REALITIES FACING THE REFORM COMMISSION

The TOR for the deliberations and recommendations of the Queensland Reform Commission were published under section 159U of the legislation on 19 April 2007: Section 159U reads as follows:

'159U Terms of reference

- '(1) This section states terms of reference for the reform commission in performing its functions.
- '(2) The reform commission must consider the grouping of like communities of interest to maintain the social fabric and character of communities and areas of the State, and in particular, must consider – (a) review areas established under SSS review processes; and (b) boundaries of areas covered by the regions for which regional planning advisory committees have been established under the Integrated Planning Act 1997.
- '(3) The reform commission's recommendations must be directed at – (a) consolidating, to the extent practicable, regional natural resource management areas, including for example water catchment areas, and environmental areas, including for example, coastal wetlands; and (b) creating local governments with improved financial sustainability.
- '(4) In making a recommendation for creating a new local government area from 2 or more existing local government areas, the reform commission must give preference, to the extent practicable, to including all of the existing local government areas in the new area rather than parts of the existing areas.

- (5) The reform commission must identify options for community representation that reflect the diversity of the State's regions and that promote representation of discrete communities.
- (6) In making its recommendations for new arrangements, the reform commission must identify any issues requiring further consideration for successfully establishing the new arrangements'.

Against this background, the Reform Commission must consider the essential requirements of efficacious local government reform in order to make sound recommendations for structural reform of the existing institutional pattern of local government in Queensland.

Three basic assumptions must guide the recommendations of the Reform Commission:

(i) In the first place, as the various national and state-based inquiries have demonstrated, the financial difficulties facing many small local authorities are so severe that, by itself, no structural reform program can ensure ongoing financial sustainability. In other words, comprehensive reform must deal with the underlying revenue and cost causes of the present financial crisis, if local infrastructure is to be restored to a satisfactory condition.

(ii) Secondly, carefully planned structural reform can make a significant contribution if it is primarily aimed at achieving greater administrative and operational efficiencies which accommodate the realities of contemporary local government in non-metropolitan Queensland. Put differently, structural reform must combine cost savings that can accrue from the judicious resource sharing at the regional level with continued local control of local responsibilities that are best tackled by individual local councils.

(iii) Thirdly, the continued operation of local democracy with local representation is essential on both equity grounds and for efficiency reasons. The disenfranchisement of small communities is not only undesirable in its own right in a democratic country, but also leads to local resistance and local bitterness that experience with forced amalgamation elsewhere has shown can last for decades. Thus disenfranchisement by itself can undermine the very aims of structural reform and result in its failure. Local democracy is also important on efficiency grounds. Local communities have local preferences for local services. The cost effectiveness of the provision of these local services depends on local knowledge that can only arise from the close interplay between local communities, local elected representatives and local council managers. The equity and efficiency attributes of local democracy have been vividly illustrated recently in the final report of the landmark Lyons Commission (2007) in the United Kingdom; a document that emphasises the importance of local 'place-shaping' and which will surely play a pivotal role in the deliberations of the Queensland Reform Commission

With these three principles in mind, there is thus a need for Queensland local government to operate at two levels to be effective:

- Basic democratic principles and the efficiency-driven need for expert local knowledge call for district communities to have their own political identity.
- A second tier or structure is needed to accommodate broader, regional issues that local communities have in common.

These two structural principles must be embodied in structural design to ensure that since local government is recognised as the tier of government 'closest to the people' there is a need to approach local government issues from the 'bottom-up' rather than the 'top-down'. If structural reform is simply imposed on hostile and resistant local

communities, as it has often been in other Australian states, then the Reform Commission can expect reform to fail.

The model presented in this chapter of the Report has been constructed to encompass these realities of contemporary local government in non-metropolitan Queensland. It has also been designed with the TOR of the Reform Commission in mind and it is perfectly compatible with the implementation of these TOR. The nature of the two-tier model is outlined in section 1.3

1.3 A TWO-TIER MODEL OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1.3.1 Formal structure of the model

In essence, the two-tier model of local government is based on the presumption that one regional administrative structure could serve a number of 'district councils' or local councils that are defined by common social, economic and geographical features. In this way, existing shire council functions could be merged or mixed to achieve sufficient critical mass to establish a skill base necessary to provide the required administrative systems and processes to more effectively manage the assets and services of a number of smaller district communities.

The key to the model is its recognition of the need to function simultaneously at two different levels:

- (i) A local institutional component or 'district council' that serves each district council area and its local communities.
- (ii) A regional institutional component or 'regional council' that provides for overarching administrative, professional and technical services to the regional grouping of district councils.

The opportunity to pool and, where appropriate, to reallocate resources offers the following potential benefits to local government in non-metropolitan Queensland:

- A higher level and quality of community services;
- More effective cross district co-operation;
- Better environmental planning as well as improved social and economic outcomes;
- Broader depth of technical expertise, particularly in those skills presently in chronically short supply in country Queensland councils; and
- Improved financial outcomes.

A critical advantage of this new two-tier model of local government resides in the fact that it is perfectly compatible with the amended Queensland *Local Government Act 1993*. New Section 159S of the *Local Government Act 1993* (as amended) outlines the functions of the Local Government Reform Commission and, in particular, its power under Section 159S (1) (b) (iii) to make recommendations to the Minister for:

"Any class of local government area that there should be in addition to the classes of city, town and shire, and the criteria that should apply for declaring a local government to be of that class".

As we have seen, and congruent with the amended Queensland *Local Government Act 1993*, the model presented in this chapter provides for the establishment two new classes of local government: 'District councils' and 'regional councils' differentiated on the basis of population and functional roles.

How does this model fit into the broader structure of Queensland local government as a whole? It is suggested that the Reform Commission delineate non-metropolitan local government into four main categories based on population size: Cities, towns/shires,

regional councils; and district councils. Only cities and towns/shires would need to reach some minimum population threshold. This quadrilateral structure would be based on the following population criteria:

- Cities – a population of more than 30,000
- Towns/Shires – a population of more than 15,000
- Regional Councils – a population of less than 25,000
- District Councils – a population of less than 12,000

In accordance with the third fundamental principle outlined in section 1.2, all four governmental structures would operate under democratically elected representatives for the equity and efficiency reasons elaborated in section 1.2. In terms of the application of the democratic principle to District Councils and Regional Councils, it is suggested that a half election of Councillors be held for District Councillors every two (2) years. The rationale underlying this suggestion is that a rolling four (4) year term for elected representatives would see a greater emphasis placed on key strategic areas and sustainability elements. It would also provide for the retention of 'institutional memory' amongst elected representatives. New Councillors would bring fresh perspectives and at the same time benefit from the experience gained by Councillors already at least two years into their period of office.

1.3.2 Political structure of the model

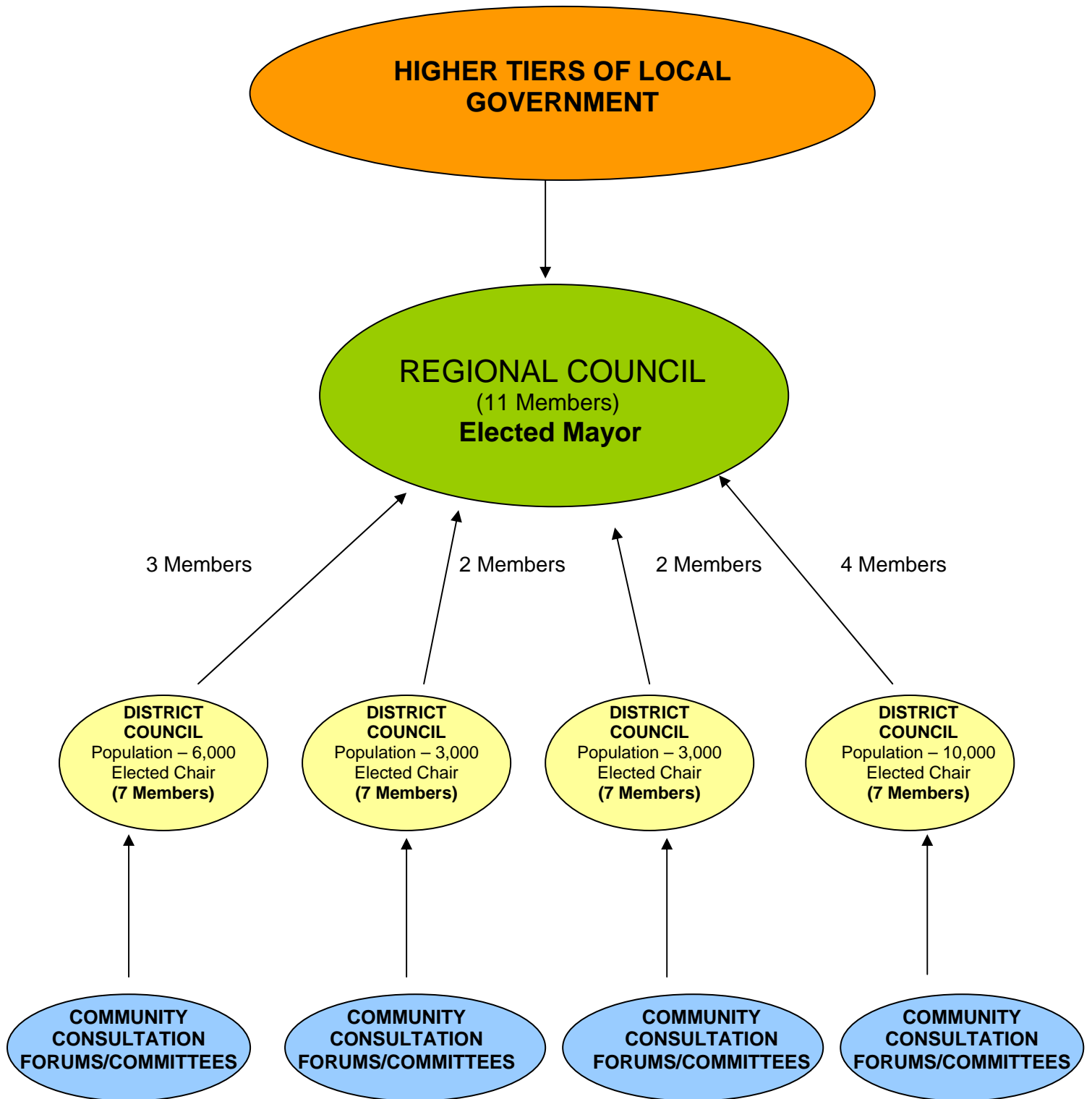
District Councils would be based on the spatial boundaries of existing small shires and have a maximum of seven (7) Councillors each elected by these local communities from an undivided area. In addition, one of the seven elected Councillors would be elected Chairperson by the seven elected Councillors. A By-Election would be required to fill any vacancies that might arise for District Councillors.

Regional Councils would be based on the grouping of a number of adjoining District Councils having like 'communities of interest' that enabled the social fabric and character of those communities to be maintained. Based on proportional representation principles, Regional Councillors would be elected by the Councillors of each District Council to serve in the Regional Council for the full four-year term. A Regional Mayor (and Deputy Mayors as required) would be elected by the regional Councillors on an annual basis. District Council groupings under a Regional Council should include at least three (3), but preferably no more than five (5) District Councils. Any vacancy for a Regional Councillor would be filled by an election at the District Council level.

Community Consultative Forums. Further community consultation could be injected into the process by each District Council establishing an appropriate number of Community Consultative Forums which meet at least three times each year (in the Management Planning process, following the adoption of the Management Plan and prior to the commencement of each Management Planning cycle to review the actions of the previous plan).

Figure 1 illustrates the formal and political structure of the two-tier model of local government:

FIGURE 1: STRUCTURE OF TWO-TIER MODEL OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT



1.4 ALLOCATION FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1.4.1 General principles

There are a range of functions that can be performed either in common or collectively at a 'regional' or 'district' level and each Regional Council would be responsible for determining and allocating functional activities according to local circumstances.

Most of these are 'back-office' functions and thus would have little direct relevance to the primary political/policy functions of Regional Councils and District Councils and to the services physically provided at either level. For example, the following allocation of functions could be made between Regional and District Councils.

Regional level

- Strategic/Corporate Governance and Planning
- Service Delivery Standards
- Regional Environmental, Social and Economic Planning
- Corporate Financial Planning
- Establishment of partnerships with other levels of government and corporate sector
- Human Resources Recruitment and Retention
- Review of Strategic Outcomes

District level

- District Management Planning and Operations
- Local Service Delivery
- Local Community Representation and Advocacy
- Customer Action Requests
- Review of Operational Outcomes

1.4.2 Empirical evidence

The actual allocation of functions between Regional Councils and District Councils would depend on a number of factors, not least the physical distances between District Councils and the Regional Council, transport networks and numerous other local conditions. However, allocation decisions can be informed by available Australian evidence on shared services in local government.

Relevant Australian empirical studies on shared services provide at least some clues on which services could be undertaken by Regional councils. For instance, Lawson (2007) analysed the responses of 34 South Australian local councils in relation to their participation in joint local service delivery arrangements. The responses indicated the six most common areas for resource sharing arrangements between local councils. These were (i) waste management; (ii) environmental health/development assessment and town planning; (iii) shared use and purchase of physical assets; (iv) back-office operations; (v) access to IT services; and (vi) governance, compliance and audit services.

A second survey of local councils in Western Australia was conducted by Burow Jorgensen and Associates (BJA) (2006). 55 out of 142 councils responded to their

survey, including those in rural and metropolitan WA. 92 per cent of respondent councils indicated that they have had experience with resource sharing. Notably high rates of participation in resource sharing were observed in regional, and especially remote, areas. The most commonly shared services included: (i) waste disposal/collection and recycling; (ii) road works; (iii) shared equipment; (iv) IT services; (v) human resources; (vi) health and planning; (vii) shared library facilities and (viii) bush land management.

A third similar survey was conducted in the NSW by Byrnes (2005). Eight services suitable for shared delivery were identified. They included: (i) fire protection; (ii) emergency services; (iii) health administration and planning; (iv) noxious plants; (v) museums; (vi) water and wastewater; (vii) tourism and regional promotion; and (viii) sale yards and markets. In addition, Byrnes (2005) identified on seven areas that respondents believed were better offered exclusively 'in-house' by local councils themselves. These included: (i) public cemeteries; (ii) public conveniences; (iii) public halls; (iv) swimming pools; (v) sporting grounds; (vi) parks and gardens; and (vii) real estate development.

In addition, four Australian studies have provided tangible examples of the successful implementation of resource sharing arrangements between local councils, with specific reference to the savings and other benefits that resulted from these initiatives. For example, Dollery and Byrnes (2005) examined the case of the Walkerville Council in South Australia and its experience with shared service delivery involving neighbouring municipalities. The Council entered into nine agreements with various councils to jointly deliver the following services: (i) waste collection and recovery; (ii) home care; (iii) crime prevention; (iv) library facilities; (v) environmental protection and health; and (vi) joint inspection services. All agreements proved to be beneficial for the council either in terms of cost savings or improvement in the range and quality of services.

A second study by Dollery, Burns and Johnson (2005) examined the Strategic Alliance Model implemented by the Armidale, Dumaresq, Guyra, Uralla and Walcha councils. This paper provided an outline of both projected savings targets and the areas in which these savings are expected to be realised. These areas included: joint plant utilization, GIS services, IT, finance, human resources, payroll, records, supplies and stores. However, the paper has a major shortcoming; it only presents estimated savings in various areas and not actual realised savings.

LGAQ (2005) *Size, Shape and Sustainability of Queensland Local Government* Discussion Paper cited an example of another successful strategic alliance of three NSW rural councils – Wellington, Blayney and Cabonne. The authors argued that the councils had achieved \$720,000 in savings during the first ten months of cooperation. The major areas in which savings were recorded were records storage, road maintenance administration, OHS & Risk Management training, plant purchases, staff secondment, promotion and tourism, and printing and stationery.

A final case study of resource sharing arrangement in Australian local government was conducted by Dollery, Johnson, Marshall and Witherby (2005) into the thirteen-council Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils (REROC) in southern NSW. REROC has implemented resource sharing since 1998. It was able to achieve savings of \$4.5million over five and half years 1998 to 2003. Areas in which resource sharing was the most beneficial included: (i) waste management; (ii) joint purchases and tenders; (iii) IT; (iv) administration and compliance; and (v) lobbying activity.

The last study in this synoptic review of the empirical literature is the *Shared Services: Queensland Local Government* report prepared by KMMC (2005) for the LGAQ. This paper argued strongly in favour of the shared provision of services by local governments and based its opinions on theoretical arguments and a review of various research reports. However, it failed to draw the crucial distinction between shared service models

in local government *per se* and all levels of government and thus included a large number of irrelevant references and a distinct lack of specific empirical examples of the benefits of shared service arrangements in local councils.

A summary of Australian empirical evidence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Australian Empirical Evidence on Shared Local Service Arrangements

Publication	Basis for argument	Sample	Key Findings
Australia			
Lawson (2007)	Survey	34 SA Local Councils	Identified six service areas with the greatest resource sharing opportunities, as well as some impediments to implementation of shared services.
Burow Jorgensen and Associates (2006)	Survey	55 WA Local Councils	92% of councils were engaged in resource sharing in various areas, including waste collection, recycling and disposal, HR, IT , road works, library facility, etc.
Byrnes (2005)	Survey	19 NSW Metropolitan and Regional Councils	Identified eight services most suitable for resource sharing and seven services that should be provided locally.
Dollery and Byrnes (2005)	Case study	Walkerville Council, SA	Listed nine regional co-operative agreements Walkerville had entered into and provided estimates of benefits.
Dollery, Burns and Johnson (2005)	Case study	Armidale, Dumaresq, Uralla, Guyra and Walcha Councils, NSW	Strategic Alliance of the Councils brought substantial benefits/savings through collaboration in the number of areas. The beneficiary areas are listed.
KMMC (2005)	Literature Review	Not applicable	Identified six services most able to be successfully delivered through regional services units and three services most suited to delivery on a shared regional basis
Local Government Association of Queensland (2005)	Case study	Wellington, Blayney and Cabonne Strategic Alliance, NSW	The Alliance achieved \$720,000 savings in the first ten months of operation through co-operative arrangements, joint purchases and staff and resource sharing.
Dollery et al. (2004)	Case study	Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils (REROC), NSW	REROC achieved savings of \$4.5million through reduced duplication, joint tendering, regional lobbying and co-operative sharing of resources.

1.5 HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES

It must be acknowledged that the implementation of the two-tier model proposed in this Report cannot occur without the displacement of local council employees. However, any staff made surplus from the restaffing of some functions could be effectively applied to introducing new systems for asset management and administration, long-term environmental planning, the development of strategic plans, and other important tasks. The net loss of employment thus need not be great. Moreover, through time natural attrition would allow for staff reductions, but in the shorter term there would be more than enough work for any spare staff, particularly those with middle to higher level management or technical skills.

The determination of human resources recruitment and retention at a regional level would allow the establishment of specialist technical/professional units that could be based at specific locations within the regional area, but utilised across and service the whole region. Where economies of scale made redeployment appropriate, such redeployment issues could be determined at a regional management level to preserve employment opportunities at individual District Councils at pre-regionalisation numbers.

Day-to-day operations would be overseen by a Regional CEO who would need appropriate formal qualifications and extensive local government experience. District Managers would oversee District operations under the supervision of the Regional CEO. Together they would form a multi-disciplinary Management Executive.

By adopting this approach it will be possible to re-introduce appropriate career paths back into local government and in part address the issue of skilled staff shortages which is especially acute in Queensland local government.

1.6 CONCLUSION

As the various national and state-based inquiries have conclusively demonstrated, in all Australian local government jurisdictions a large number of local councils are under severe financial distress. The funding crisis in these local councils has been mostly manifested in chronic under-investment in infrastructure, with a widespread local infrastructure backlog now obvious. Some of these state systems have undergone extensive amalgamation in the recent past, most notably Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales, but widespread problems of financial unsustainability nonetheless remain amongst their local councils. This indicates decisively that lack of adequate funding and defects in the actual local government funding process are the source of the financial crisis. The principal problem is thus one of funding rather than of structure.

This does not imply that structural change cannot improve the effectiveness and operational efficiency of local councils. However, it does demonstrate that amalgamation is not a 'silver bullet' that can cure all the ills afflicting local councils. Moreover, the bleak experience with amalgamation in other states, especially its social divisiveness and conflictual nature, together with its damaging economic effects on small local communities, does not offer a solution to the problems in contemporary Queensland local government.

The two-tier model proposed in this Report is designed to capture the gains that can accrue from the regional provision of local government functions while at the same time preserving local democracy and local communities. In this way, the crucial 'place-shaping' role of local councils empowered with local knowledge on local circumstances and local preferences is maintained.

The two-tier model has the significant additional advantage of falling squarely within the amended Queensland *Local Government Act 1993* under new Section 159S of the *Local Government Act 1993* (as amended) which specifies the functions of the Local Government Reform Commission and, in particular, its powers under Section 159S (1) (b) (iii) to make recommendations to the Minister.

It also embodies many of the aims of the Reform Commission as stated in its TOR. For example, it clearly meets TOR (2) where the Reform Commission 'must consider the grouping of like communities of interest to maintain the social fabric and character of communities and areas of the State, and in particular, must consider – (a) review areas established under SSS review processes; and (b) boundaries of areas covered by the regions for which regional planning advisory committees have been established under the Integrated Planning Act 1997'. The creation of Regional Councils will allow for the fulfilment of TOR (3), particularly regarding the consolidation of 'regional natural resource management areas, including for example water catchment areas, and environmental areas, including for example, coastal wetlands'. Furthermore, the two-tier model facilitates TOR (4) 'making a recommendation for creating a new local government area from 2 or more existing local government areas, the reform commission must give preference, to the extent practicable, to including all of the existing local government areas in the new area rather than parts of the existing areas'. The maintenance of District Councils in the model also allows the Reform Commission to meet TOR (5) by identifying 'options for community representation that reflect the diversity of the State's regions and that promote representation of discrete communities'.

References

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CHAPTER 2

BIG ENOUGH TO MATTER SMALL ENOUGH TO CARE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This proposal describes a model for a new Border Rivers Regional Local Government Area that would include the whole of the current Town of Goondiwindi and Shires of Inglewood, Stanthorpe and Waggamba.

The proposed regional area currently has an estimated population in the order of 22,000 people, an area of some 21,976 sq km and a consolidated expenditure exceeding \$38.5 million.

The proposal outlines the advantages and disadvantages of the suggested change with reference to the factors detailed in Section 159U of the Local Government Act 1993 (as amended). The Local Government Reform Commission is required to consider these factors when examining and reporting on proposed changes to existing council structures.

One issue considered when drafting this model was whether local government area boundaries should be brought into line with the water catchment boundaries established in 1995. However, it was considered that in light of the Terms of Reference (number 3(a)) it was not practical to try to align these boundaries completely at this stage although there was quite valid reasoning for moving in this direction in the future.

In determining the structure of the model it was concluded that although resource sharing and strategic alliances can have benefits for service delivery in a region, they are not a substitute for comprehensive local government reform.

2.2 DESCRIPTION

This model is in essence a two tier model of local government based on the presumption that one regional administrative structure could serve a number of “district councils” or local councils that are defined by common social, economic and geographical feature. In this way, existing shire council functions could be merged or mixed to achieve sufficient critical mass to establish a skill base necessary to provide the required administrative systems and processes to more effectively manage the assets and services of a number of smaller district communities.

The key to the model is its recognition of the need to function simultaneously at two different levels:

- i. A local institutional component or “district council” that serves each existing shire council area and its local communities.
- ii. A regional institutional component or “regional council” that provides for over-arching administrative, professional and technical services to the regional grouping of district councils.

The opportunity to pool and, where appropriate, to reallocate resources offers the following potential benefits from the establishment of the Border Rivers Regional Council:

- A higher level and quality of community services
- More effective cross district co-operation

- Better environmental planning as well as improved social and economic outcomes
- Broader depth of technical expertise, particularly in those skills presently in chronically short supply in the region
- Improved financial outcomes and
- More effective utilisation of built assets, plant and machinery and human resources.

The new regional council area would have an estimated population of 22,000, thus achieving the critical mass needed to develop as a self supporting identity.

Arguably the second tier in this model replaces the second tier already in place in many parts of the State in the form of various voluntary, and at times poorly structured and ineffective, regional organisations of councils.

2.3 *ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES*

Preliminary analysis has identified the following main advantages and disadvantages that could flow to the communities of the relevant existing council areas as a result of the establishment of the Border Rivers Regional Council concept.

The main difference between this regional model and traditional amalgamation models is that here the changes can be readily unscrambled or fine tuned without any great difficulty.

With an amalgamation the egg is scrambled and stays scrambled.

Advantages

The main advantage would be the more effective and efficient use of the combined resources of the constituent councils in providing local government services both across the region and to other areas where the establishment of centre of excellence allowed access to this additional source of revenue. This would be achieved through:

- An improved ability to control and manage the increasing pressure being placed on the built and natural environments identified within the region.
- An enhanced ability for the new entity to employ and utilise the additional environmental science and other skills needed to manage the water catchment systems effectively. In addition, the regional focus would encourage a more systematic approach to natural resource management within the expanded area.
- The creation of a more sustainable and even stronger resource base to deal with the protection of biodiversity, weed management, erosion controls, clearing controls and ground cover.
- The development of strategic planning systems for the whole region to ensure that sufficient residential and industrial land is available with appropriate infrastructure, preserve community structures, encourage suitable residential, commercial and industrial development, protect village environments, protect the agricultural base of the region and conserve and enhance natural systems.
- The region being able to realise its considerable economic potential through increasing selected activities including sustainable, innovative value adding, primary industry and forestry, niche organic farming, viticulture and tourism.

- The establishment of agreements with surrounding regions, including cross border state agreements, ensuring that the social, cultural economic infrastructure, energy and bio-security interests of the region are significantly and properly developed in an orderly fashion.
- The reduction in costs of existing local government operations (ie records information technology, purchasing, tendering, plant utilisation and financial management) through economies of scale and the utilisation of ever improving technologies and equipment.
- Reducing costs of organisational reporting and regulatory procedures such as corporate and management plans, common local laws and policies, and common environmental reporting. Reductions in costs would also be achieved in the production of the many statistical reports and other material which local government identities are required to provide State and Federal Governments.
- Reducing the cost of governance (less councillors) and of administration through a reduction in the number of senior staff positions.
- The attraction of specialist skills that cannot be attracted by smaller entities which will improve the quality of professional advice and service to the enhanced entity. The reintroduction of the need for specialist local government qualifications would also enable the re-establishment of professional career paths throughout the local government industry.
- Building efficiencies in plant maintenance, workshops, store and plant utilisation.
- The creation of a larger rate base to ensure a consistent flow of income to provide services and fund capital improvement without necessarily increasing the level of rates paid by residential property owners through the establishment of a regionally based system of differential rating. The pool of funds available to the regional identity would be larger and provide a more effective base to support service delivery across the whole area.
- The ability of a new, larger entity to establish more opportunities for the Council to boost revenue through business enterprises and other means. As an example, bidding for Auslink/Roads to Recovery funding (particularly the regional component) may become easier.
- The establishment of partnerships with other levels of government and the corporate sector to achieve regional outcomes.

Disadvantages

It is believed that the main disadvantage of the concept would flow from the transitional costs for the integration of the organisation. These costs include:

- The management of the integration process.
- Integrating the organisational structures and fitting staff into appropriate positions.
- Systems integration.
- Any voluntary/forced redundancy costs. At present there is no government commitment which prohibits forced redundancy.

There would also be the establishment costs of setting up place management systems, community forums/committees and creating specialist units (centre of excellence) to deliver the enhanced range of services that the larger, regional council would be able to provide.

2.4 COST BENEFIT APPRAISAL

The short lead time allowed for the lodgement of this submission has prevented the preparation of a detailed cost benefit analysis.

Some detailed information may be available to the Local Government Reform Commission from the incomplete SSS review process for the Southern Downs group of Councils. However, both the accuracy and currency of that data which was still in draft form when the SSS process was shutdown on 17 April, 2007 remains highly suspect and would need to be properly vetted before being used as a basis for determining changes to local government boundaries.

However, it is believed that there will be limited one-off savings generated from better plant utilisation and the disposal of any surplus plant and equipment or reduced office or depot space.

Ongoing savings will be available from changes to the staff structure, a reduction in duplicated activities and administrative systems, economies from the integration of operating systems, savings in councillor numbers, insurance, advertising, reporting and streamlining of the governance function.

An educated but preliminary estimate is that these savings could be as much as 7% to 10%, with minimum annual savings in the order of \$500,000 - \$700,000.

On balance it would appear that the cost benefit of a regional council would be increasingly positive over a five to ten year period.

2.5 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The organisational structure for the regional council would need to be agreed to before or soon after the proclamation of that Council.

Whilst the Government has yet to rule out forced redundancies (including for CEOs) the various unions are concerned about job losses in both the short and longer term.

There may be a need for the cost of any forced redundancies to be fully funded by the State Government otherwise the financial integrity of the new council may be adversely impacted from the outset.

Appropriate local laws, policies, procedures and standard operating procedures for the new council will have to be established and a single industrial agreement negotiated. Awards and enterprise bargaining agreements applicable to the same types of staff at some the constituent councils will differ markedly. One of the challenges of any new council is to meld together the staff structure and award rates of pay and conditions.

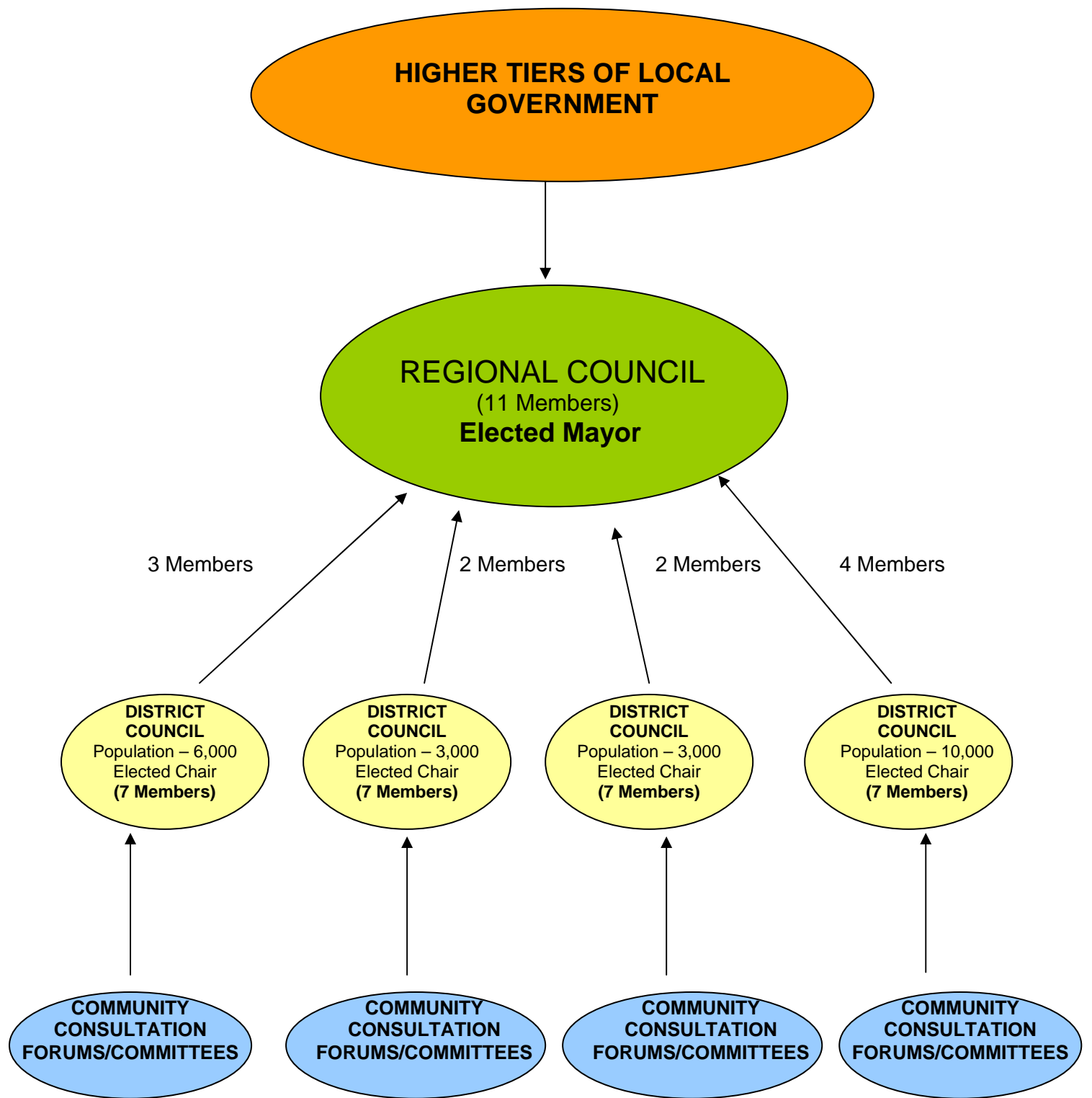
2.6 FINANCE RESOURCING IMPACTS

It is considered that the main financial resourcing impacts of the creation of a regional council would include:

- Larger rating and capital base - which makes the new council more flexible and more able to cope with unforeseen change.
- Reduced financial business risks - the larger capital base will spread any risks associated with business operations and allow greater operational flexibility.
- Reduced costs of operations and the like – a larger council will be able to create more effective partnerships with State and Federal governments and, in turn, provide better and more cost effective services to the community.
- Spreading of overheads – a larger council will be able to spread the costs of overheads including OH&S, governance, financial, management and environmental reporting.
- Better use of resources, especially staff – duplicated resources can be deployed elsewhere opening up new areas of servicing as well as improved levels of services. The need for additional staff in the future may also be reduced.
- Rationalisation of operating assets – funds may be generated by the sale of surplus office, depot and other operating assets.
- Lowering of costs by the reduction of the use of consultants through the establishment of Centres of Excellence staffed by existing staff deployed to undertake more specialised and/or strategic tasks. Opening up of possible new revenue source through being able to offer specialised local government services to other councils.
- Loss of Grants – the Queensland Local Government Grants Commission has the opportunity to be sympathetic to councils that are amalgamated or that have undergone boundary changes. It is anticipated that there should be little, if any, effect on the level of grants received as a result of the proclamation of a new council. It is recommended that, at least, the level of existing grants should be maintained for a five-year period.
- Cost of integration – there will be costs associated with the creation of a new council but these are not expected to be significant. It is recommended that any major set up expenses be offset by a one-off State Government “marriage” grant.

2.7 BUDGETING

It is proposed that a budget for the operational activities of each district would be prepared and recommended from a district level. These “district budgets” would then be incorporated into a consolidated budget for the entire regional area.



2.8 REPRESENTATION – MAYOR AND ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

In considering this clause, reference should be made to the figure 1 on the previous page.

The number of councillors on the regional council should be based on the levels of representation and on the effectiveness of council as a policy and decision making body. Generally speaking the larger the number of people appointed to a board or committee, the less effective that body is in making decisions.

The proposal to establish a new regional council is designed to bring about more effective local government services and representation for the region as a whole, as well as for the various towns within the region.

There are strong fears expressed by smaller communities throughout the Border Rivers region that they would not have a sufficiently strong enough voice on an amalgamated council because of the tyrannies of distance and wide spread sparse population. The council could be dominated by the larger centres within the region. The population split between Stanthorpe in the east and Goondiwindi in the west lends support to this argument.

It is clear from legislation that elected representatives are on a council to exercise community leadership for the whole of a council area and the subject model re-enforces this concept.

The recommendation is that the regional council should have 11 councillors elected on a proportional representation basis by the constituent district councils.

Similarly, it is recommended that the district councils should have 7 elected councillors each.

It is recommended that the councillors at each tier elect the chairperson to be known as the “Mayor” in the case of the regional council and the “Chairperson” in the case of the district council.

2.9 NAME OF REGIONAL COUNCIL

It is recommended that the new regional council be named the “Border Rivers Regional Council” and the existing shire councils become “District Councils”.

This would reflect the unique nature of the region being serviced which includes parts of Northern NSW.

Many existing organisations already align themselves with the terminology “Border Rivers” including the Border Rivers Water Commission which has appointed Commissioners from both New South Wales and Queensland.

Following the establishment of the Border Rivers Regional Council it is believed that it may be appropriate to redefine the eastern and western boundaries of the Inglewood District Council to add to that district the town and area surrounding Yelarbon and parts of the western side of Stanthorpe Shire as this would rationalise communities of interest that already flow to Inglewood and Texas. It could also serve to address possible later proportional representation issues.

From perusal of the following map of the Border Rivers Catchment, the justification for adding that part of Millmerran Shire that lies with the Border Rivers Water Catchment

Area to the proposed Inglewood District may become an issue that could be considered by the Local Government Reform Commission in light of boundary adjustments in other adjoining areas to the north.

2.10 COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST

It is difficult to identify common communities of interest within a region as large as the one under consideration. Any commonality would be focused towards either Toowoomba or Brisbane and alternatively across the border into northern NSW.

However, the establishment of the proposed combined local government area would strengthen individual local communities of interest. The likelihood of improved planning and local government services provided by the proposed regional council could protect and strengthen these predominantly rural communities.

2.11 COMMUNITY VIEWS

The concept has only been developed in recent weeks and there hasn't been the time to canvass the concept widely across the proposed region.

At this stage the concept has been canvassed across the Inglewood Shire only, although preliminary discussions have been held with the Stanthorpe and Waggamba Shires and Goondiwindi Town.

The general public within Inglewood and Texas have received the concept very warmly.

It is believed that a substantially improved level of support from other Councils would flow following the completion of a cost benefit analysis that would address any of the concerns neighbouring Councils may have initially.

However, at this stage it is understood a joint Waggamba/Goondiwindi Town Council submission may seek to have the Inglewood Town/Coolmunda Dam section of the Inglewood Shire added to an amalgamated Goondiwindi Town/Waggamba Shire area.

This is the proposal that both Inglewood and Texas residents would resist most strongly as it creates a scenario where both towns would be in the order of 100 km from the main administration centre. The widespread community fear is that such an outcome would lead to both towns losing their identity and becoming little more than welfare towns. This would lead to a dramatic down turn in property values at both Inglewood and Texas with the subsequent loss of access to viable service centres.

The Inglewood/Texas communities firmly believe amalgamation to be a very last resort and should this be the only remaining outcome possible, then joining with Stanthorpe would be the only viable option in this regard.

2.12 OTHER FACTORS

In many ways Inglewood Shire seems to be at the dawn of a major resurgence of business activity which would see the Shire's financial position upgraded to at least "moderate" within five years.

Recently, private enterprise has given a vote of confidence in our shire by establishing multi million dollar businesses in our area

- Whyalla Feedlot (cattle) the second largest in Australia (85,000 head)
- Inglewood Farms - organic chicken production and processing facility, the largest in Australia (700,000 birds p/a).

- Yarranbrook Feedlot (cattle) and farming operation (25,000 head)
- Brooklyn Park olive plantation
- Macmin Silver Mine
- Traprock Wool value adding – from sheep to garment
- 3 Rivers Lucerne \$10 million processing plant to value add local produce (first in Australia)
- Barkworth Olives grove and processing plant
- numerous engineering, building and contracting services and associated businesses beginning to develop to service the above industries and outsource to both Queensland and New South Wales mining operations.

The Shire is serviced by two (2) reliable dams (Coolmunda and Glen Lyon) giving the area a water reliability that is second to none and the envy of most of eastern Australia.

There is no doubt that this water reliability is going to continue to lead an upsurge in both intensive farming and grazing activities in the short to medium term.

2.13 CONCLUSION

Whilst the residents of Inglewood Shire would see the area of the Inglewood Shire (5,879 sq km) and associated tyrannies of distance as being valid reasons to remain standing alone, there is a recognition that an over-arching Regional Council would be a far better solution to Local Government Reform should it be deemed necessary to consolidate with any of the neighbouring shires.

CHAPTER 3

ROOM FOR RESIZING – CREATING A CO-OPERATIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHANGE.

Council supports the need for change to the existing local government administrative process to free up funding for infrastructure maintenance development in particular.

Our Regional Model will allow the District Council's within our proposed Regional Council to grow and develop without the additional financial, economic and social burdens of a full scale traditional amalgamation.

We respectfully make the following recommendations

3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Regional/District Councils

1. That pursuant to Section 159S of the Local Government Act 1993 new categories of "Regional" and "District" Councils be created.
2. That a new regional council be named the "Border Rivers Regional Council" and the existing councils of Goondiwindi Town, Waggamba, Stanthorpe and Inglewood become "District Councils".

Councillor/Mayor/Chairpersons

3. That the Regional Council should have 11 councillors elected on a proportional representation basis by the constituent "District Councils."
4. That the "District Councils" should have 7 elected councillors each.
5. That the councillors at each tier elect the chairperson to be known as the "Mayor" in the case of the Regional Council and the "Chairperson" in the case of the District Council.

Redefinition of District Boundaries

6. Following the establishment of the Border Rivers Regional Council it is believed that it may be appropriate to redefine the eastern and western boundaries of the Inglewood District Council to add to that district the town and area surrounding Yelarbon and parts of the western side of Stanthorpe Shire as this would rationalise communities of interest that already flow to Inglewood and Texas. It could also serve to address possible later proportional representation issues.
7. From perusal of the map of the Border Rivers Catchment, the justification for adding that part of Millmerran Shire that lies with the Border Rivers Water Catchment Area to the proposed Inglewood District may become an issue that could be considered by the Local Government Reform Commission in light of boundary adjustments in other adjoining areas to the north.

Grants

8. Loss of Grants – the Queensland Local Government Grants Commission has the opportunity to be sympathetic to councils that are amalgamated or that have undergone boundary changes. It is anticipated that there should be little, if any, effect on the level of grants received as a result of the proclamation of a new council. It is recommended that, at least, the level of existing grants should be maintained for a five-year period.

Marriage Grants

- 9 Cost of integration – there will be costs associated with the creation of a new council but these are not expected to be significant. It is recommended that any major set up expenses be offset by a one-off State Government “marriage” grant.

Forced Redundancies

- 10 That the cost of any forced redundancies be fully funded by the State Government otherwise the financial integrity of the new council may be adversely impacted from the outset.
- 11 That appropriate legislation be passed to preserve existing employment for a period of at least 2 years.

Formal Technical Qualifications

- 12 That a formal system of certification be re-introduced in respect of all relevant Technical/Professional strands of Local Government to re-establish career paths within the Local Government industry.