

Welcome to our third newsletter.

Two big events this month – a well attended forum at Caboolture and the presentation of the petition to Laurence Springborg. Here are the reports – some reading for you but we hope you find it informative.

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REPORT FROM THE CABOOLTURE FORUM

Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2013

The Reclaim Caboolture Shire (RCS) group organised the Caboolture Local Government Forum where both the academic and anecdotal evidence **does not stop rolling in** that the amalgamations have been a massive failure.

Speakers included:

**Chairs of the Reclaim Caboolture Shire (RCS), Basil Jeffreys, and QLGRA, Bob Johnson, also spoke about the aims of their organisations and progress so far. Basil explained that RCS wanted to ‘right the wrong’ that is amalgamation without consultation which has impacted ratepayers negatively (rates have doubled and in Victoria, trebled). As well, amalgamation is associated with greed (think salaries of Councillors) and waste (inefficient service delivery). Some may argue that it is difficult to ‘unscramble the egg’ because of costs associated with de-amalgamation but the alternative means more of the current structures with their innate difficulties. Bob gave a brief review of events leading to the formation of QLGRA; its goal of ‘people power’, its growth in membership since March with 21 former shires now represented; a parliamentary petition seeking redress on this issue; that strength in numbers is likely to outweigh those seeking re-dress on an individual council basis.**

In a speech entitled “Council Amalgamations: A road to nowhere” **Dr Michael Kortt** from Southern Cross University reported that in collaboration with colleagues from the University of New England their latest research on Queensland councils **found that compulsory mergers increased proportion of councils with diseconomies of scale to 84%**. He also drew attention to a Price Waterhouse Cooper Review completed in 2006 which showed that the amalgamations in other states such as Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and New South Wales and (at that time) the non-merged QLD & WA councils **had no differences in financial viability. It would appear then logically that since the amalgamations in Queensland have worsened the circumstances of our Councils.** Interestingly he noted that the proponents of amalgamations no longer refer to cost savings but now promote the ‘Enhanced Capacity’ of the amalgamated councils. Enhanced capacity is obviously the new political speak for increasing rates, reduced services, increased borrowings and centralised bureaucracy.

QLGRA

Primary goals:

I. To promote community acceptable natural Local Government boundaries that reflect locally held beliefs about community and identity, and provide local amenity and service;

II. Recognition in the State Constitution of Local Government as a legal entity with a clearly articulated role in governing, such that it can only be changed after a majority vote in a properly constituted referendum;

III. Retention and maintenance of reasonable levels of State and Federal Grants and Subsidies to support the necessary and important role of Local Government in providing and supporting rural and regional infrastructure serving not only local communities but also the state and the nation.

Strategic goals:

IV. To promote the benefits of effective, community based ‘local’ government throughout the general public and as an area of learning and study in tertiary institutions;

V. To share the commonality of our cause with all amalgamated shires and promote the sharing of strategy and resources to overcome barriers to de-amalgamation and boundary changes.

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However we (members of QLGRA) have to be ready for this argument . ‘Enhanced Capacity’ appears in the minds of proponents to refer mostly to an increased ability to use political power because the Councils are bigger. They argue that we get increased representation at the political level. We would welcome your views on this subject .....  
what do you think are the responses to this idea??

(If you would like to access the full power point presentations from Dr Kortt please email Joanna Kesteven on [joeandjoanna@bigpond.com](mailto:joeandjoanna@bigpond.com) or ring on 07 54635304)

**Other speakers** included local business identity and RCS supporter, **Ian Morrison**, who argued passionately that Councils should serve their local community; **Heather Loader** whose local marine service business was destroyed by new Moreton Shire Council regulations; **Joy Leishman**, former Caboolture Shire Mayor for 10 years, who argued for integrity in Council and savings in returning to a Board system of paying Councillors; **Clem van der Weegan** (Palmer United Party candidate) whose Party supports de-amalgamation; RCS spokesperson, **Rod Hansen** who spoke authoritatively on the dramatic increase in rates, particularly water rates, under the amalgamated council; **and Ken Park** (RCS) who explained, in very clear language, that de-amalgamation will succeed with logic in the de-merger debate, pressure on marginal candidates in the upcoming State elections, demonstrations to gain media attention, and stand and support de-merger candidates at Council elections. With Ken’s permission the highlights of his inspiring speech is reproduced below.

(Thanks to Dan McCabe for providing notes to inform the above comment).

**Ken Park’s Inspiring Speech:**

**WHERE TO NOW?**

(Ken humorously referred to the Colonel who gave Maggie Thatcher the plan to take back the Falkland Islands in the early 1980’s.) I am a Colonel [or was] and I have the plan to take back our local councils. In fact I have four plans!

**PLAN A. LOGIC.** Perhaps we could convince the Minister to give us a referendum because of [1] the undemocratic process that we have had, or [2] because of the broken election promises that they gave, or [3] because of the unfairness of the Crisafulli process or [4] because of the expensive failures by the amalgamated regional councils. A waste of time ladies and gentlemen. They won’t listen, they don’t care, and they no longer pretend to believe in democracy. **BUT**, although logic is wasted on the government, we do need to continue to focus sound logical arguments on the ratepayers of this state. At all costs the voters must never be allowed to become complacent, to accept the current situation as the status quo: something permanent and unchangeable.

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**Ken Park's Speech continued:**

**PLAN B. STATE ELECTIONS.** We could field a bunch of candidates at the next state election. This has problems: we don't have the resources to match the government or the opposition and we would be a single issue party. We could endorse and campaign for a party that promotes our policy. We have heard from one party today, and there could be more before the election.

There is possibly one exception, Redcliffe. Sitting member Scott Driscoll single handed, when he was an LNP member, thwarted the de-amalgamation aspirations of 85% of the voters of Redcliffe. He has galvanised the de-amalgamation cause in Redcliffe. If he is sacked or resigns in time for a by-election prior to the next full election, then that could be sold as a de-facto referendum on the de-amalgamation of Redcliffe City. This is a definite possibility, using either our own candidate or supporting a sympathetic minor party. The LNP brand has been so tarnished in Redcliffe that any result could occur in a by-election.

**PLAN C. DEMONSTRATIONS.** We can take a leaf out of the book of the unions, the parents who are losing their local schools, the radical green movement and the more strident aborigine elements. Marches, demos, sit-ins, pickets, sit-downs, and tent embassies never of themselves convinced a single politician. These noisy and colourful confrontations are however just what the media wants. It thrusts a cause into public view. I do know that we are not a group that would relish a night in the cells but it may be the only way. On 9th November, Noosa (..etc) go to the polls to again elect their own councils and the question needs to be asked in a very public way: why not us? After all, Redcliffe and Caboolture rated higher than those four on all criteria of viability and sustainability. I plan to be at Noosa on this election day with our banner, searching for every TV camera I can find.

**PLAN D. YOUR LOCAL CANDIDATES.** At the next council elections, and regrettably they are a long way off, I propose that in Moreton Bay Regional Council we endorse one LOCAL candidate in each division. We have 12 divisions plus the Mayor. Around here it cost \$0.5M and the sponsorship of some well heeled developers to be elected as Mayor so we probably won't contest that position. If we can get 7 of our people up, we control the council and the Mayor's casting vote is neutralised. The first item on the agenda of the council would then be that the council will hold a referendum on de-amalgamation. Councils can now authorise their own referenda.

*(Ken asked everyone to look at his handout: 10 common polices for LOCAL councillors*

It embodies everything that your councillors should have been doing and it embodies everything that your regional councils have been failing to do. I do believe that we would win by a huge majority. Our printing costs would be low because all candidates have identical platforms. Indeed, right throughout the state, we would plan to field candidates in every amalgamated council where there is a desire to return to the good old days. Like Labor threatened in 2007, to sack any council that proposes a de-amalgamation referendum, no doubt the present state government will likewise threaten us. **BRING IT ON.** The day you sack one council is the day you lost the war. So there are four strategies for WHERE TO NOW.

We need to maintain local sustained pressure on the people with sound logical argument on how they were sold a pup, a very expensive pup, a disobedient pup by both brands of state government. We need to make the point more stridently, more aggressively and more colourfully because that is the only way to interest the media. Then we need to consider the next state elections. Perhaps there is a party that we can endorse and support. Perhaps there is a potential to greatly embarrass the state government at Redcliffe if that seat becomes vacant.

However, the strategy that I recommend, that Crisafulli will be powerless to stop, is to contest all divisions in all the dissatisfied regional councils across the state; win control of those councils with LOCAL people power and then, at last, to have the referenda that we should have had in 2008. I suggest that all areas think about that proposition. I suggest that we look at it more closely within QLGRA. We do have time to consider it and to plan and fine-tune our strategy.

#### **Ken's long term strategy**

Ken's strategy has been endorsed 'in principal' by the QLGRA. His plan has four major points:

- a) That we continue with logically argument in our local environment
- b) That we support political parties that endorse de-amalgamation
- c) That we hold media events to increase our coverage and
- d) We support candidates in the next local elections that adhere to the 10 common policies as outlined above.

This means that once we have gathered membership feedback we will formalise the goals into our ongoing agenda. Your formal feedback will be sought in the near future.

## **DAY OF ACTION**

November 9<sup>th</sup> – what day is? You might ask? Saturday the 9<sup>th</sup> November is the day that 35,550 Noosa voters, 7045 Port Douglas voters, 12780 Mareeba Voters and 22960 Mareeba voters get to elect their new councils. LUCKY THEM! It is highly likely that if you are getting this newsletter you wanted a vote but did not get it. We also know that due to the rushed and ill thought out process put in place by the LNP government that there are some small communities who would prefer not to have the vote. So on the 9<sup>th</sup> November we ask you to join us at Noosa if you are in that region, or organise your group to do something locally and involve your local media so the issue gets local press coverage. Please contact Joanna on 07 54635304 or 0413242893 if you would like to attend the Noosa event.

## **The Petition**

On Friday 25<sup>th</sup> October Sue Johnson handed the completed petition and a letter for the Speaker of Parliament to the Hon. Lawrence Springborg who has offered to sponsor it. It will be considered in Parliament this week. We collected 550 signatures on the petition and 160 on the E petition totalling 710 signatures. A copy of the letter is included below to indicate that this petition should be considered in conjunction with the previous petitions on the de-merger issue.

A BIG THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO SIGNED OUR PETITION.

**Queensland Local Government Reform Alliance**  
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LETTER ACCOMPANYING THE PETITION

The Speaker  
House of Representatives  
Queensland Parliament  
BRISBANE.  
23<sup>rd</sup> October 2013.

Dear Madam

These petitions tabled today should be read in conjunction with the Parliamentary Petition No. 2112 and more than 50000 petitions which were presented with de-merger proposals in August 2012 and the later petitions presented to the Minister for Local Government from other groups wishing to de-merge since that time and which were ignored by the Minister.

Many thousands of people had signed their undivided council de-merger petitions and felt that they did not have to sign again. Thousands more stated that the Minister had indicated his intransigence quite clearly so their only recourse would be to vote against him and the government at the next state election and vote for a new council at the next council election.

All of us feel the serious breaches of natural justice carried out on us by both by the former ALP government and the current LNP government. We fought mightily against the amalgamations in 2007/08 and were ignored and never entertained the notion that we would have to fight the LNP government too. The fact that four councils were allowed a referendum and will be having new council elections in November is discriminatory and flies in the face of democracy. We are still angry and are mindful of the cost to our communities.

We beseech the House to hear the small voice of rural and regional Queensland, to let us exercise our democratic right to be heard and have a referendum on the matter of boundary change and uphold democracy.

Yours faithfully,

Susan J Johnson, Principal Petitioner  
Membership Secretary, QLGRA  
On behalf of the concerned citizens of Queensland