

Gympie 'hot spot' of concerns

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Colin Hewett

GYMPIE and Fraser Coast regions are "hot spots" for public concern about council performance and accountability, according to a peak ratepayers' group campaigning for reform.

And that concern will be given focus in Gympie at the Queensland Local Government Reform Alliance's annual general meeting and public forum to be held in Gympie on the first weekend in September.

The alliance says council amalgamations have been a failure in many cases and have curbed accountability to the public.

QLGRA president Colin Hewett told The Gympie Times yesterday he believed the state Local Government Department was presiding over a council system which was "on the verge of collapse".

The Gympie meeting on September 2 and 3, at the Freemason's Hall in Channon St, will be open to the public.

Mr Hewett said there were mounting concerns about the "strong mayor syndrome" in which changes introduced by the former Newman government had concentrated council power in Chief Executive Officers and mayors.

"Councillors are on the outer and do not have to be involved in anything much," he said.

Mr Hewitt acknowledged the campaign comes at a time when there is political pressure for reform from In-

dependent Queensland MP Rob Pyne and Queensland Greens' candidate Amy McMahon.

Ms McMahon will stand against Deputy Premier Jackie Trad in her electorate of South Brisbane at the next state election.

Ms Trad has admitted there is concern in the community about the role of council CEOs investigating complaints, along with mayors, when they may be the subject of those complaints.

Mr Hewett said the failure of accountability bodies to function with any real independence had created a system of complaints handling that amounted to "Caesar investigating the conduct of Caesar and coming up with findings in favour of Caesar".

