

ATTACHMENT D

Temora Shire Council

Community Engagement

Temora Shire Council has undertaken a range of community engagement activities to ensure that the stakeholders on the reform process, namely business, residents and ratepayers are fully informed of the details of the process and council position.

Additionally Council have sought by a variety of mechanisms, the views of our community to gauge initial thoughts of the stakeholders and ensure that the response of council is in line with community expectation.

The major community engagement actions are as follows:

Narraburra News

The Narraburra News is the monthly newsletter produced by Temora Shire Council, providing information on council issues and items of community interest. The newsletter is distributed to all premises within Temora Shire Council area, along with distribution through various businesses, community organisations and council premises. In distribution terms, it is estimated that in excess of 95% of the Temora Shire households receive the publication.

Local Press

Temora Shire Council is in the fortunate position of having a local newspaper, the Temora Independent, cover the entire local government area. This provides an ideal opportunity to advertise as a means of broad distribution. Additionally, reporters from the Temora Independent attend all council meetings providing regular updates to readers on the process. It is estimated that in excess of 50% of households and a significant number of ex citizens (many with strong family and business ties) read the Temora Independent.

Public Meeting

The process that has now evolved into Fit for the Future, had its genesis at the Destination 2036 conference held in Dubbo in 2011 and follows the release of the "Revitalising Local Government" report in October 2013, prepared by the Independent Local Government Review Panel (ILGRP).

The report, prepared for government, provided far reaching recommendations for the future of the industry across all facets of the industry including sustainability, finance, governance, structures, and boundaries. In all the report contained sixty five (65) recommendations, with a further ten (10) sub recommendations. Councils across the state were requested to make a submission on the report.

Temora Shire Council viewed it as appropriate to seek the views of the community on its submission and held a public meeting in February 2014. The meeting was attended by 526 residents who were provided with the details of the council submission. The submission was unanimously endorsed by the meeting.

The submission of Temora Shire Council agreed with in excess of 90% of the panel's recommendations.

Community Survey

In May 2015, council conducted an online survey of residents (Refer attachment E) to gauge the views of the community on matters relating to Fit for the Future. The survey received 656 responses, providing an excellent guide to the council on the issue.

The survey was advertised extensively locally in the Temora Independent & Narraburra News (copies of advertisements attached).

A full analysis of the survey is attached however there were several points that need to be highlighted, namely:

- Satisfaction levels with the performance of council (out of 5) ranged from 4.43 to 4.47
- More than half (53.61%) had contacted a council over the past year for a reason other than payment of rates
- 75.46% of respondents were aware of the Fit for the Future program, indicating the released publicity was successful
- 89.33% of respondents were either quite interested or very interested in local council reform issues
- 96.19% of respondents believed Temora Shire Council should not merge
- 74.54% of respondents indicated that they could see no benefit in merging
- 75.91% of respondents were aware of REROC
- 89.79% favoured being part of a Joint Organisation
- 91.47% indicated that they oppose amalgamations generally

Community Groups

Temora Shire Council has issued an open invitation to all community groups to provide speakers on any subject relating to local government or the community. It is a regular occurrence for staff or councillors to attend these meetings to give a presentation.

In the case of the ILGRP and FFTF, all major community organisations were advised of the availability of speakers and the following took advantage of the offer.

- Rotary Club of Temora
- Ariah Park Community Projects
- Temora Men's Shed
- Temora Senior Citizens
- Temora Lions Club
- Temora View Club
- Temora Quota Club
- Temora & District Sports Council
- Temora Youth Team
- Temora Historical Society

- Temora & District Education Fund
- Temora Probus Club

Social Media

Regular updates have been provided on the various social media facilities operated by Temora Shire Council. These include:

Webpage: www.temora.nsw.gov.au

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/temorashire>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/communityandyouth>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/temorashire>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TemoraBusinessEnterpriseGroup>

A cautious response to Fit for the Future plan

Edwina Sinclair

While details are yet to be confirmed, Temora Shire Council has responded with cautious optimism to the State Government's 'Fit for the Future' package which was released last week.

The Fit for the Future package, which was described by Premier Mike Baird as the "most significant investment the state has ever made" in the local government sector, was the State Government's long-awaited response to the Independent Local Government Review Panel (ILGRP) Report.

The focus of the package, which includes a total of \$1 billion in funding for Local Government, is to make councils across the State financially sustainable. In what the State Government is describing as 'Fit for the Future',

Voluntary amalgamations are being encouraged with \$258 million dedicated to assist councils who decide to merge and make the changes needed to provide better services to communities.

However, scope has also been given to different needs of rural councils, with \$7.5 million allocated to get new regional joint organisations up and running, plus a further \$4 million set aside for a small rural councils inno-

vation fund.

Councils with a current or projected population under 10,000 will be invited to work with the NSW Government in developing a new rural council model.

All councils will be required to assess their current position and submit a 'Fit for the future' proposal by June 30, 2015, which will then be assessed by an independent expert panel.

Temora Shire Council held a workshop with councillors and senior staff on Wednesday night of this week to discuss the package, while further discussions on the matter were also held at Council's monthly meeting yesterday.

Speaking to The Temora Independent prior to the workshop, Mayor Rick Firman said it was very difficult to make any "iron-clad commitment" with only "very sketchy" details.

However, he did add that Council was glad that the State Government had finally responded to the ILGRP report.

"We are pleased to see the NSW Government wanting to strengthen local government in NSW, however, it must not be at the expense of rural councils such as ours," Cr Firman told the Independent.

Continued page 4

Cautious response to Fit for the Future

■ From front page

"On the surface, it appears there is scope for us to retain our identity, as has been Temora Shire's consistent stance, via the rural council model."

"This rural council model is yet to be finalised, however, it is pleasing we appear to be invited to help shape the model, which we appreciate."

Asked whether Council would consider the ILGRP's recommendation for Temora to potentially merge with Coolamon and/or Bland Shire Councils given the financial incentives on offer, Cr Firman reiterated Council's stance that it wanted to retain its own individual identity.

He suggested that the financial incentives would not actually go towards general spending, but would be needed to cover costs associated with any mergers.

"Temora Shire Council, together with our citizens, have (sic) held the strong and consistent view that we must retain our identity," he said.

"I cannot see Council changing that view."

"I believe Council will continue to do whatever is in the best interests of our citizens."

Cr Firman said he was pleased that the State Government appeared to be

honouring its policy of no forced amalgamations.

"We hope and pray that the no forced amalgamations policy is not done by stealth (ie. making it impossible for us to stand alone)."

"The 'Fit for the Future' package is certainly going to be challenging for many Councils, given the criteria proposed."

"Temora Shire is up for the challenge though."

While the State Government's package encourages mergers, it also leaves open the option for more joint organisations between councils and a model for rural councils which Cr Firman welcomed.

"I respect the NSW Government for finally realising that a 'one size fits all' mentality is outdated," he said.

"To their credit, they have realised that rural councils are not the exactly the same as our larger and metropolitan council 'cousins'."

"The General Manager and I are in the fortunate position that we are both on the REROC (Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils) Executive Board and can be a major part of the modelling for rural councils and joint organisations."

Cr Firman welcomed the State Government's economic credentials.

"In terms of Temora Shire Council's future, we have said from the very first discussion papers being released (by the ILGRP) that we will work night and day, and as hard as we possibly can, to bring about the best result for Temora Shire citizens," he said.

"I still firmly believe we

can continue to stand up to the toughest scrutiny presented to us."

"The NSW Government certainly knows Temora Shire is here, as we have been fortunate to have met with both Ministers of Local Government (Messrs Dor Page and Paul Toole) this year."

"They know we have a great story to tell and our future is very bright," he said emphatically.

"A rural council and community must not be penalised for consistent high performances."

"We believe in our heart and minds that Temora Shire is very much fit for the future."

Cr Firman said he had discussed the matter with Local Member Adria Murrumbidgee Piccoli, who had indicated his continuing support for Temora Shire.

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19.9.

MAYOR RESPONDS TO "FIT FOR THE FUTURE"

"We will do our best to prove what we believe – that Temora Shire is very much 'Fit for the Future,'" said Mayor Rick Firman. Responding to the release of the State Government's "Fit for the Future" package, its response to the Independent Local Government Review Panel's report, Cr Firman said Council will work hard to prepare its response to the criteria outlined by the Government for each Council to assess its current position and outline its future direction.

"Temora Shire has a great story to tell. This includes being ranked 13th of 152 Councils by TCorp for financial sustainability.

"We will be shouting about this and our other achievements loud and clear," Cr Firman said. Cr Firman and General Manager, Gary Lavelle, will meet again with the Office of Local Government early this month and then with Minister Paul Toole, later in the month, in Wagga.

"There is a lot of detail (in the package) still to be determined," Cr Firman said. Cr Firman said Minister Toole "certainly knows about Temora."

"It was also great to hear the Minister on Sydney radio recently, talking of Temora's wonderful sister city relationship with Randwick City Council, and how this was an example to others."



Minister for Local Government Paul Toole (left), with Mayor Rick Firman (centre) and General Manager, Gary Lavelle.

Temora Shire Council

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**Views of Temora
Shire Council**

Making our Shire fit for the future

As Council will be aware, all regional mayors and general managers were invited to a briefing by the New South Wales Office of Local Government regarding the "Fit for the Future" programme.

We have been most optimistic about our future, however, after this briefing, general manager Gary Lavelle and I felt even more positive about Temora Shire being able to prove we are most certainly a "fit" for the future Council.

The previous "magic" number of a minimum population base of 10,000 people, is not necessarily the case now.

We must ensure we put the best possible submission to the State Government prior to the due date of June 30, 2015.

I firmly believe Temora Shire will be deemed very much "Fit for the Future".

As per Council's advice, the general manager and I have been arranging meetings with various Members of Parliament, to discuss the "Fit for the Future" programme.

We have arranged a meeting with the Member for Burrumbidgee,



from the mayor's chair

with Temora Shire Mayor, Rick Firman

The meeting took place at Parliament House in Canberra.

The main focus of those discussions was seeking assistance with our heavy vehicle alternate route.

For the alternate route to become a reality, we must be able to obtain Federal and State funding.

We will also be meeting with the Federal Assistant Minister for Health, Senator Fiona Nash.

We will be discussing Temora Shire health-related matters. Council appreciates Mr McCormack's strong support in arranging these important meetings.

Councillor Nigel Judd, Director of Administration and Finance Steve Firth and I attended the annual Local Government NSW Conference at Coff's Harbour.

This was a most important conference for Council to be represented at and we looked forward to



this year's event being more productive than the last.

We were pleased to welcome back Cr Peter Speirs from his recent trip to our Japanese "sister city" - Izumizaki.

Cr Speirs presented a very special illuminated address to the Mayor of Izumizaki on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of our sister city relationship.

Council thanks Cr Speirs for representing Temora Shire on such an occasion and for the relationship between our two communities continue to flourish.

Council and the community are advised that the Visions of Temora Shire Past/Present/Future project is again on this year.

This year, our primary school students from St Anne's Central, Temora West Public and Temora Public Schools will be perform-

ing all things Temora Shire to represent the present.

This will be held on Wednesday, November 12 in the Temora Town Hall, commencing at 11am.

Council places on record its appreciation to the St Anne's, Temora West and Temora Public School principals - David Keenan, Toni Smart and Sharon Reardon, respectively - and their teachers, for their strong support.

This is a most important programme, and one which only further enhances the pride our students have in their community!

We have also warmly welcomed back our Council colleague and friend, Cr Dennis Sleigh.

As many would be aware, Cr Sleigh recently underwent a series of very serious operations, and continues to recuperate and improve at home.

Council and the Temora Shire community continue to have Cr Sleigh in its prayers, knowing he will be declared 100 per cent fit in no time at all.

It is a real joy for us to have him back in his Councilor's seat.

TITLE: Amalgamations... should Temora Shire be merged

PUBLICATION: Temora Independent

DATE: 21.02.2014



TEMORA SHIRE COUNCIL
AMALGAMATIONS...
SHOULD TEMORA SHIRE BE MERGED?

Temora, Bland & Coolamon - How would this work?

The Mayor, Councillors, & staff of Temora Shire Council, invite members of the Temora Shire Community to a public meeting, to discuss our future!

Thursday, February 27, 2014
6:00pm
at the Temora Town Hall

Public urged to attend

Edwina Sinclair

Temora Shire Council is gearing up for what has been described as a "vitally important" meeting with community members to discuss the future of Local Government and the prospect of amalgamations. The community information night, to be held this Thursday evening from 6pm, was raised

by Mayor Rick Firman in a mayoral minute at last Thursday night's monthly council meeting.

Cr Firman described the meeting as "one of the most important community information nights in our recent history".

"At the meeting, Council will examine and endorse our response to the various recommendations of the Independent Local Government Review,"

It is of vital importance our residents know what is potentially in front of us.

Cr Rick Firman
Temora Shire Mayor

but we strongly oppose.

"The proposal for Temora Shire to amalgamate with Coolamon and/or Bland Shires is the key one, and one we strongly oppose," he stressed.

"It is of vital importance our residents know what is potentially in front of us.

"That is why Council resolved to host this information session."

Cr Firman said he was proud of the draft response document which had been produced following a recent workshop with councillors and staff members, and thanked general manager Gary Lavelle

for his input.

"This document, when we finalise it as a council, will then go to the Division of Local Government for New South Wales, and the General Manager and I will present a copy directly to the NSW Minister for Local Government in Sydney on March 27," he told councillors.

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TITLE: Public Urged to attend (2)

PUBLICATION: Temora Independent

DATE: 25.02. 2015

All residents urged to attend public meeting

■ From front page

"I am confident that we will receive a very positive hearing."

Cr Firman took the opportunity to urge his fellow councillors and council staff members to attend this Thursday's public meeting.

"Council also strongly urges all residents of the Temora Shire to make time to attend this important information evening," he added.

"Temora Shire Council endorses, and continues to acknowledge, the NSW Government's policy of no forced amalgamations."

"We have a moral obligation to inform our citizens of what may or may not happen to their community."

"Temora Shire Council believes in our citizens and, we know in our hearts, they believe in us," the Mayor said.

"It is this support from our community that must be demonstrated by attending our public meeting."

Council looks forward to seeing a Town Hall filled with residents who are passionate about where we all live, work and play - the home we call Temora Shire," he concluded.

DATE: 4.3.2014

PUBLICATION: Temora Independent

TITLE: No to Amalgamation

"No" to amalgamation

Andrew Hawksley

The residents of Temora Shire have sent a resounding clear message to the State Government on the subject of local government amalgamation: NO.

Almost 500 concerned Shire residents packed the Town Hall for last Thursday evening's public meeting called by Temora Shire Council to seek guidance from the community.

In fact, so many turned up that the dividers at the rear of the hall had to be pulled back so the adjoining supper room could accommodate the overflow.

Council's general manager, Gary Lavelle gave what he termed "the Readers' Digest version" of the comprehensive report by the NSW Local Government Independent Review Panel.

"The panel had three members when it was formed, people with a lot of credibility in the industry," Mr Lavelle explained.

"However, we (Council) believe they exceeded their brief in the report they brought back.

"It's the interpretation of the data that we took offence to."

"Council has kept an open mind in all instances.

"It is fair enough to say that local government across the state has its problems, with a lot of councils broke or otherwise in weak financial positions.

"A lot of councils are in financial distress and, in some cases, even basic services can't be provided," he acknowledged.

Mr Lavelle went on to remind the meeting that Temora Shire remains in a very sound financial position.

"The panel says that local government is not fit for purpose, and that it has not moved with the times."

"Temora Shire Council does have a few runs on the board – yet we've been determined by the panel to be at risk."

The core of the panel's stance, he explained, was its prediction that the Shire would have fewer than 10,000 residents by 2031.

Mr Lavelle told the residents at the meeting that Council agreed with 60 of the 92 recommendations in the panel's final report, with a further 20 not relevant to Temora Shire.

Council disputes the remaining 12, "strenuously opposing" recommendations that Temora Shire merge with Coolamon and/or Bland Shires, and that Goldenfields Water County Council merge with

Riverina Water.

"Goldenfields has gone from being \$7 million in debt when it was formed to having \$23 million in its reserves for planned future works."

"To be honest, I think it is a very well-performing organisation, one which deserves our support."

Temora Shire Mayor, Rick Firman, said Council had sent a letter to every member of both NSW Houses of Parliament declaring Council's support for Goldenfields.

Meanwhile, Councillor Nigel Judd said he was gravely concerned with the prospect of amalgamating Temora Shire, as would likely mean only three councillors for each of the three shires.

Cr Firman reported he had been speaking earlier in the day with NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell, who

reassured the State Government maintained its "no forced amalgamations" policy.

"We will continue to present to the government the strongest possible case why Temora Shire must preserve its identity," he vowed.

Cr Firman then opened the meeting to comments from the floor.

Alice Grief, a former Temora Shire Citizen of the Year, was the first to speak.

"We elected this Council to protect us – with amalgamation it will all come undone," Mrs Grief said.

Enrol Schmetzer offered some observations of his own.

"Is Temora Shire broke? No, I don't believe it is," he said.

"And, if it ain't broke – don't fix it," he declared, to chuckles of agreement from around the hall.

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Shire sends a clear message on amalgamation

■ From front page

"If we amalgamate with one Council, we will reduce our voice by half; with two other councils, by a third."

"Besides, three members for the Independent Review Panel seems small – a jury consists of 12," he added.

Another resident, Alan Lynch, recalled a Queensland council amalgamation in 2006 in which the smaller councils suffered badly.

"You have no voice, no say, and the government wanted to change the boundaries for its own agenda."

George Bishop tabled a motion, that "a strong message be sent to the Premier that this meeting is against amalgamation, and that this meeting endorses the Council in its actions against it".

The motion was seconded by Rex Bryant and promptly passed – unanimously – by the almost 500-strong crowd.

Also present at the meeting was the Mayor of Bland Shire, Neil Pokoney, who was asked by Cr Firman for his thoughts.

"We believe our Shire is sufficient for us to look after," Cr Pokoney said.

"Bland sits with you, and we'll be supporting you in what you have

called for tonight, including the retention of Goldenfields Water County Council."

Cr Firman told the Independent after the meeting that he was delighted with the response to the meeting and its outcome.

"We were overwhelmed by the attendance; there were nearly 100 apologies, too."

"The response has further inspired us to keep doing what we have been doing."

"It's been a considerable time since we last had a public meeting like that – I understand the last time was back in the mid-1980s, to discuss the extension to the administration building."

"We'll now put the finishing touches to Council's final submission on the panel's report, for which submissions close April 4."

In the meantime, Cr Firman said he and Mr Lavelle would spend a busy day in Sydney on March 27, in meetings with a number of Ministers, which had been organised by the Member for Murrumbidgee, Adrian Piccoli.

Among them are (Local Government), Brad Hazard (Planning and Infrastructure), Duncan Gay (Roads), and Katrina Hodgkinson (Primary Industries).

Council no to overtures for amalgamation

Edwina Sinclair

Temora Shire Council has rejected overtures from Boorowa and Young Shire Councils to investigate options for the amalgamation of Local Government Areas in the region.

The matter was considered at the March meeting of Temora Shire Council, when correspondence was tabled from the Mayors of Young and Boorowa Councils inviting Temora Shire to be involved in a project investigating options for a regional grouping of Councils.

The impetus behind the project was the recommendation from the Independent Local Government Review Panel that the Local Government Areas of Boorowa, Harden and Young should merge.

In his report relating to the correspondence, General Manager Gary Lavelle noted that the Minister for Local Government had agreed to contribute \$20,000 "to engage a consultant to review the councils' options".

"The councils are required to fund the remainder of the consultant's costs," he added.

"Within the consultant's brief there are several options to review a larger grouping of councils than just Boorowa and Young, and (they) are offering Temora Shire the opportunity to consider being part of the project."

When the matter was raised for discussions, Mr Lavelle said the approach was largely unexpected.

"It certainly hasn't been on our radar to this stage," he said.

TITLE: Council no to overtures for amalgamation (2)

PUBLICATION: Temora Independent

DATE: 11.04.2014

Mayor Rick Firman said he been approached by the Mayor of Boorowa Shire about the project at the recent gathering of country mayors.

"This contradicts Temora's Shire's chosen course," he added.

While he commended Young and Boorowa Shire Councils on their efforts, Cr Firman said "we're not entering the notion of the path that they're going down".

"Thank you for the invitation but no thanks," was the response of Councillor Graham Sinclair.

Councillor Peter Speirs agreed, suggesting that it was important that Temora Shire point out its own commitment to the REROC (Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils) model.

"I know why they're asking Temora Shire to join them... they want our engineering department to show them how to build good roads," observed Councillor Nigel Judd, to general mirth.

Council resolved to advise Boorowa and Young Shire Councils that it was not interested in taking part in the project.

Time to speak up, Council tells community

Edwina Sinclair

MEMBERS of the local community are being urged to voice opinions about the performance of Temora Shire Council and whether or not they support local government amalgamations.

Council is undertaking a survey to gauge community members' opinions on its current position and future, as part of the Fit for the Future reform process, which was instigated by the State Government in order to ensure a sustainable and efficient Local Government sector.

A report on the survey was presented at the April meeting of Temora Shire Council by General Manager Gary Lavelle, who noted that Council was required to undertake community consultation as part of the process of preparing its Fit for the Future submission, due on June 30 of this year.

"We have done a fair amount of community consultation," Mr Lavelle told councillors. "But we really feel we need to let everyone in the general population have their say. This will inform our submission that's going to the (State) Government at the end of

June."

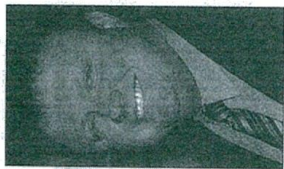
Mr Lavelle went through the survey with councillors and noted that it included "pretty basic questions".

"They're not leading questions in any way," he added.

"It's very important that it be a transparent process. It's a shame we didn't have some form of survey form at our public meeting (in 2014), observed Mayor Rick Firman, noting that it had been attended by over 500 community members keen to express their opposition to any kind of forced amalgamations.

Temora Shire Council has been consistent in its position of opposing any form of amalgamation with neighbouring Councils.

It has instead supported



Gary Lavelle.

ed the Joint Organisation concept proposed by the State Government, which advocates a similar model to the Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils (REROC), of which Temora Shire Council is currently a member.

Mr Lavelle said the survey would enable community members to provide input on what they "actually feel about our performance, and what the community feels is wrong about amalgamation and what they think is right about amalgamation".

Councillors provided Mr Lavelle with a number of suggestions for additional community groups to approach, and venues to act as distribution points for the survey.

While paper copies of the survey will be available, Mr Lavelle said it was preferable for people to complete it online if possible. "It only takes three minutes to do online," he stressed.

Cr Firman said he was sure all councillors would be happy to help anyone who needed assistance accessing or filling out the survey form.

"What's difficult for us is to make sure we don't lead people's views."

Mr Lavelle said he would provide councillors and staff with a document explaining the background to the process and about the survey's content, but with no leading commentary as to expected answers.

He said it would describe in a "neutral and dispassionate way" why the State Government is going through this process.

Mr Lavelle noted that with a tight time-frame, survey responses would

need to be in by the end of May to be incorporated into the submission.

The survey is already available on Council's webpage and Facebook page, with paper copies available from the Council offices.

Mr Lavelle said he would provide councillors and staff with a document explaining the background to the process and about the survey's content, but with no leading commentary as to expected answers.

TITLE: Amalgamation – Have your say now

PUBLICATION: Narraburra News

DATE: May 2015

THE Narraburra News

IEWS OF **Temora Shire Council** May 2015, Number 128

AMALGAMATION? Have your say now



Council is conducting a survey of resident attitudes to inform its "Fit for the Future" submission.

The State Government has asked councils to submit a proposal by 30th June outlining how they intend to become "Fit for the Future."

The survey intends to capture resident views on:

1. The performance of Council
2. Attitude toward amalgamation
3. Attitude toward Council participation in a Joint Organisation

The survey is short - about 3 to 5 minutes - and is available on Council's website www.temora.nsw.gov.au and on hardcopy at:

- Council Office
- Visitor Information Centre
- Temora Library

Additionally, Council will be offering local groups the opportunity to have Council staff or councillors attend and explain the process.

Council General Manager, Gary Lavelle, said: "It is imperative that we get as many surveys as possible returned for a meaningful result."

The survey will be open until 31st May.

Town stands firm against amalgamation

Andrew Hawkley

THE FIGURES speak for themselves: the residents of Temora Shire are dead set against amalgamation.

Temora Shire Council this week released a summary of the responses to its recent Fit for the Future survey, which painted a very clear picture of what the community wants.

Council was delighted that 656 responses were received for the survey, giving an accurate cross-section of the district's expectations for the future.

The vast majority of respondents - 96.19 per cent - said that Temora Shire should remain as it is.

When asked what they value most about living in the Shire, the top answers were "a sense of community and a friendly place" (91.77 per cent), "a safe place to live" (86.59 per cent) and "a good place for families and children" (85.52 per cent).

A series of questions sought to gauge how well the respondents understand the local government reform process and the ramifications of an amalgamation.

More than half those surveyed said they had, in the past year, contacted Council, the Mayor or an elected member concerning an issue other than the payment of rates.

More than 75 per cent answered they were fully aware of the Fit for the Future proposals, while almost 90 per cent of respondents said they were either "very" or "quite" interested in local government reform issues.

Around the same number said they

were aware of the existence of the Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils (REROC).

Given a choice between amalgamation and being part of a newly-formed "Joint Organisation" (such as REROC), almost 90 per cent said they would opt for the latter.

Residents also expressed an impressively high level of confidence in the way the current Council conducts itself.

Using a scale of one to five, with five the highest rating, Council averaged around 4.5 for all three categories - quality of service, Council's financial strength and the way it communicates with the community.

When asked to rate neighbouring councils on a scale of one to five as a preference if Temora Shire did have to merge, Coolamon Shire was the most popular with 4.44, followed by Junee (3.34), Coolamundra (2.87), Young (2.19) and Bland (2.15).

A question asking what "potential benefits" would come from an amalgamation saw another telling response, with 74.54 per cent saying they could see no benefit.

Asked to nominate the major disadvantages of a merger, the top answers were that local issues would be overlooked and Temora would lose its identity (73.95 per cent), the respondent was happy with the way things are (69.82 per cent), and a lack of presence in Temora (68.9 per cent).

On the subject of council amalgamations in general, 84.15 per cent said they are "strongly opposed".