

Fit for the Future

Facilitated Workshop for Griffith City Council and  
Murrumbidgee Shire Council

Date: 26 May 2015



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## Overview

KJA was engaged by the Office of Local Government to provide facilitation services for a meeting between the General Managers and Councillors from the Griffith City and Murrumbidgee Shire Councils.

The Independent Local Government Review Panel Report lists Griffith City and Murrumbidgee Shire as possible merger partners. The report also lists Carrathool Shire Council as a possible merger partner with Griffith City Council.

Murrumbidgee Shire Council approached Griffith with a view to participating in discussions to consider the Panel's recommendations. A meeting of representatives of both Councils was held at Murrumbidgee Shire Council on 10 March 2015. The Councils subsequently resolved to seek endorsement to engage an independent facilitator, through the Office of Local Government, to examine all issues/options in relation to a possible merger of the two Councils.

KJA was selected to facilitate the discussion which was held on Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> March in the Griffith Council Chambers. This was the first session that was open to all Councillors of both Councils to discuss the merger issue.

The participants were engaged and active in the three hour workshop. The final workshop activity was to ask participants directly whether they supported the move to commission a Merger Business Case together. There was considered support to move to a Merger Business Case from Griffith Councillors and also from some Murrumbidgee Councillors. After responses from more than half of the participants, the Mayor of Murrumbidgee Shire noted a 4-2 council vote to progress a Merger Business Case with Jerilderie had been resolved and Murrumbidgee Shire will pursue this option. The workshop finished quickly after this announcement with the general consensus being that the key question was redundant and there was therefore little further to discuss.

## Workshop Design

Our workshop design for this project was guided by a set of KJA principals that underpin all facilitations. These include:

- Constructive:** Our agendas are constructive and tailored to encourage genuine conversations to understand the position of each individual council. The agenda will hone the key discussion points and be created to ensure time is used efficiently.
- Focused:** Our approach is geared towards focusing workshop participants on the subject of a merger and ensuring the conversations seek to explore opportunities.
- Outcomes:** We facilitated the process to achieve the outcome that the merger potential was fully explored, with Councils sharing their plans, current position, challenges and issues, to make an informed decision on their path for Fit for the Future. A summary workshop outcomes statement was provided to workshop participants.





### **Workshop objectives:**

The working objectives for the session included:

- Explore the opportunities for Griffith and Murrumbidgee Councils to work together to become Fit for the Future, most particularly through investigating a merger option;
- Strengthen working relationships.

### **Workshop Agenda**

The workshop agenda was drafted based on research of the history and vision of each Council including a review of their Community Strategic Plan, local media and stakeholder interviews prior to the workshop.

The purpose of the workshop was to test whether there was a shared will to pursue a Merger Business Case together. To answer that question, each Council needed the opportunity to consider their position and the position of the other Council in the context of a local and a regional vision and test the pros and cons of a merger. The draft agenda was simply:

- Who we are
- Our vision for the region
- Strengths and weaknesses of a merger
- Testing a Merger Business Case

### **Workshop Outcomes**

The Councils worked together to explore and discuss opportunities, and identify common values and synergies with a view to identifying whether a merger path is possible.

The workshop was an opportunity for Councils to be clear on what they bring to the table. The session garnered information and views about their future, their objectives, expectations and regional perspectives.

All participants engaged in the discussions, with the first activity an opportunity for introductions and expectation setting. Participants listed a range of expectations which included interest in how each Council sees themselves and their role going forward; relationship building; identifying the benefits and challenges of a merger; and most particularly to explore the main question of whether the Councils were willing to pursue a Merger Business case.

The Regional Vision was in most part a shared, clearly articulated vision with features including:

- growing economic prosperity
- increased access to infrastructure and water sources
- improved infrastructure, most particularly roads, but also education facilities
- effective local government delivering services within a fair rate structure
- growth in strategic capacity – ie the ability to effect change in the region
- prospering natural environment
- strong tourism sector
- strong community

Councillors rated their progress towards this vision as reasonably progressed with ratings between 1 and 10 sitting mainly in the 5-7 range, with an outlying assessment of 1 out of 10 citing lack of a voice on infrastructure.



Participants were then allocated to groups to discuss the challenges and benefits – or “pros and cons” of working together as a merged entity. This activity prompted much discussion in the groups.

The pros and cons varied, however the pro points included

- Building strategic capacity
- Larger entity gaining a greater voice
- Larger population providing a ‘louder voice’ and the power to influence
- Staff benefits and career options

Cons cited included:

- fear of uncertainty
- loss of identity
- loss of representation
- expected rate increase

The final workshop challenge was for each participant to share their views on whether they could support moving to a merger business case. To ensure a very clear takeaway, this challenge was presented as a clear question directed to participants: “Do you support these two councils moving to consider a Merger Business Case?”

Each participant responded to the question in turn. Many participants considered the challenges to merging to be manageable and supported progressing to a Merger Business Case. After responses from more than half of the participants, the Mayor of Murrumbidgee Shire noted a 4-2 council vote to progress a Merger Business Case with Jerilderie had been resolved and Murrumbidgee Shire will pursue this option. The workshop finished quickly after this announcement with the general consensus being that the question of whether to move to a Merger Business Case was redundant and there was therefore little further to discuss.

As there was not a common position across both Councils, the workshop attendees did not support progressing to a Merger Business Case together.

### Final position

- Griffith City Council – standalone submission
- Murrumbidgee Shire Council – investigating options including pursuing Merger Business Case with Jerilderie Council or Rural Council model.



## Attachment 1: Workshop Notes

Griffith and Murrumbidgee

31/03/15

### EXPECTATIONS/ TAKE AWAYS

- How does Murrumbidgee see themselves?
- Where to from here?
- Conclusion on a MBC – yes or no
- Identify Benefits/ Challenges
- Benefits of a larger council identity
- Something to take to community
- Are we missing something?
- Relationship building
- Identify and clarify key issues.
- Councillor's as part of the conversation.

### VISION

- Good Roads
- Economic Prosperity – Value add to agriculture
- Sustainable, Happy, Engaged, Healthy
- Good Value for money ratepayers
- Fairer water system ( allocations and balance)
- Increased Job opportunities – attracting professionals
- Tourism potential realised
- 'Chook Capital' of Southern Hemisphere
- A Voice being heard at higher levels
- Full access to gas infrastructure
- Secure water Source/ Infrastructure
- Increased education options/Facilities
- Services delivered at the best price
- Effective and honest representation
- Protected environment especially Artesian Basin

### STRENGTHS - GRIFFITH

- Organisation
- Viewpoints
- Budget control
- Passionate community
- Staff resilience
- Diversity of community
- Vision
- Investment
- Regional Centre
- Dedicated Councillors





## STRENGTHS - MURRUMBIDGEE

- Ability of Staff
- Quality of Assets
- Financial Position
- Positive Community
- Strong Staff
- Voice in RAMROC

## WHATS HOLDING US BACK?

- Water
- Negativity re Murray Darling Basin
- Pessimism
- Haves/ Have nots – Gap is growing
- Population levels
- Lack of funding
- Rules and Regulations/ Compliance
- Decreasing population
- Decreasing Funding and Grants
- Disenfranchised community
- Lack of Major strategic long term projects

### Group 1

PROs of a MERGER	CONs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share of State Cash \$5M subsidy</li> <li>• Share staff Library, Health Inspections etc.</li> <li>• Rate Pegging? Crs? Agree</li> <li>• Career Path</li> <li>• Strategic Capability (M. River)</li> <li>• Essential Regional Infrastructure (Spread Cost)</li> <li>• Greater Voice (State/Federal)</li> <li>• Community Interest (MIA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representation (GCC 1:2500, 1:300)</li> <li>• Duplication of staff/systems</li> <li>• Staff uncertainty</li> <li>• F.F.F ( Not fix road infrastructure)</li> <li>• MSC Rate Increases</li> <li>• Perceived service reduction (Murrumbidgee)</li> <li>• What's in it for Griffith (Infrastructure)</li> </ul>

### Group 2

PROs of a MERGER	CONs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficiencies of Management</li> <li>• Increased Buying Power</li> <li>• Bigger Voice ( Bigger = Louder)( Joint Organisation will achieve increase)</li> <li>• Ability to work on Regional Projects</li> <li>• Ability to up skill, career advancement</li> <li>• Shared staffing and resources</li> <li>• Better option than a Rural Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dislocated employees</li> <li>• Logistics of travel</li> <li>• Loss of Representation *</li> <li>• Emotional Issue</li> <li>• Current view based on incorrect figures</li> <li>• National migration to Regional Centre's (South)</li> </ul> <p>Standalone Joint Organisation (Griffith, Leeton, Murrumbidgee, Narrandera, Carrathool)</p>



### Group 3

PROs of a MERGER	CONs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Griffith has good skill set – Especially Tourism identity'</li><li>• Greater representation in big issues</li><li>• More efficient/ economic plant use</li><li>• \$\$ Provided to assist costs of change</li><li>• Combined councils give better access to grants</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Murrumbidgee – loss of identity</li><li>• Number of councillors</li><li>• Loss of reputation</li><li>• Potential for higher transport/ travel costs</li><li>• Costs in managing change RE: admin costs – paper, uniforms etc.</li><li>• Cost of delivery of services</li><li>• Perception of financial disadvantage to Murrumbidgee rate payers (reserves)</li><li>• Loss of potential grants for small councils</li></ul>

### 1-10 Assessment on 'How are we tracking?'

1. - No voice – Infrastructure
2. *(No comment)*
5. - Room to improve
6. - Economics – Doctors residence – Tourism – Health – Accommodation – Business – Roads – Infrastructure
7. - Delivering Key Issues
8. *(No comment)*





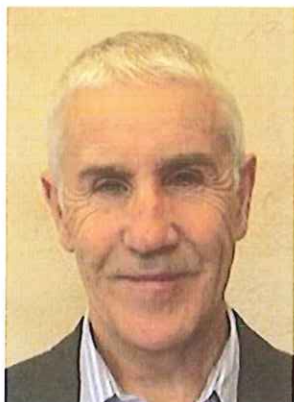
## The Facilitation Team

**Natalie Boyd**  
Project Director



Natalie Boyd has more than 20 years experience in the communications and consultation sectors. Natalie works extensively with local government on developing community strategic plans, conducting policy reviews, special rate variation communications and running deliberative democracy programs. Recent clients include Willoughby, Blacktown, Shellharbour, Dubbo and Coonamble Shire Councils. Her areas of expertise include managing stakeholder relationships on high-profile and high-impact projects, including the Royal Botanic Gardens Master Plan, the Sydney Airport Master Plan and the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority's Bays Precinct plan. Natalie has also undertaken national consultation programs for COAG, and helped set strategic direction for clients such as Health Infrastructure NSW.

**Ian Colley**  
Facilitator



Ian has a rich background in senior public policy roles, and has designed and facilitated hundreds of projects in business, government and community settings. Before setting up his consulting practice in 1996, he was a senior Ministerial advisor on education and training, then Program Director for the Dusseldorp Skills Forum. Ian currently teaches facilitation and leadership courses at the University of Technology, Sydney. He also chairs community liaison groups for clients including Barangaroo, Orica, and NSW Ports. Ian has worked with American Express, Barangaroo Development Authority, City of Sydney, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, IBM, NSW Department of Education and Training, NSW Department of Housing, NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure and Natural Resources.



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