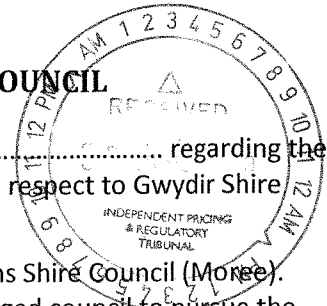


SUBMISSION ON BEHALF OF GWYDIR SHIRE COUNCIL

We write on behalf of CWA - Bingara Branch regarding the Independent Local Government Review Panel's (IGRP) option put forward in respect to Gwydir Shire Council (GSC).



The option is to join Namoi Joint Organisation, or to merge with Moree Plains Shire Council (Moree). Subsequent communication in respect of Fit for the Future strongly encouraged council to pursue the Moree option.

We have read and support Gwydir Shire Council's Fit for the Future submission to stand alone.

We also believe we write on behalf of our broader community. Council undertook community consultation during June with eight (8) community meetings held throughout the Shire to gauge the mood of residents in regard to the option of merging (with Moree or any council). In excess of 500 residents attended those meetings. Each meeting was chaired by a member of the community, and each meeting unanimously and enthusiastically supported the following resolution:

"THIS MEETING DOES NOT SUPPORT ANY MERGER WITH MOREE PLAINS SHIRE COUNCIL OR ANY OTHER COUNCIL".

From the time that residents have been made aware of the risk of amalgamation, there has been strong public support for GSC and opposition to any merger. Residents have developed the "odd socks" campaign, with one resident writing a jingle as a theme song, and towns and villages are dressing in and displaying odd socks. The campaign with the theme GSC and Moree, like odd socks, don't go together, has received >350 'likes'.

Six hundred and twenty seven letters (627) in support of Gwydir Council remaining a stand alone Council have been submitted to Council to pass onto the local member for Northern Tablelands to hand to the Minister for Local Government. Residents started petitions in towns and villages within the Shire, with more than 879 signatures collected in support of Gwydir standing alone.

In addressing the IGRP review and the Fit for the Future process:

- The one size fits all approach is in our opinion, not possible – you cannot compare Regional councils with Metropolitan councils. This is like comparing apples to oranges. Not only is the rate base incomparable, so is the size (population and area), geography, culture and demographics.
- Rate pegging – this has hindered our Council to adequately fund the services required by the community.
- Cost shifting e.g. RTA, Centrelink and Library services – originally Federally funded then left for Council to operate
- Special rate variation (SRV) – Gwydir Council has applied for a SRV – there has not been a rate increase above the allowable rate pegging limit in our Council for 38 years, yet more and more cost shifting has occurred.
- We believe that the focus of the Fit for the Future process has been on financial sustainability with little consideration given to social and cultural challenges being faced by rural local government as our council tries to compensate for the declining level of services.
- Cost of a merge – Gwydir Council is a result of a merge of Yallaroi and Bingara Councils in 2004. It is understood the cost of that amalgamation was in excess of \$3.3 million, the majority of which came from the financial resources of the merged Councils, significantly weakening their financial position.
- Council has since been able to undertake efficiencies by reducing staff numbers while introducing operational efficiencies.
- Services currently provided that may be lost to the community include an Aged Care Facility, two medical centres, adequate maintenance of our >2,000km of roads.
- At a local level – it would seem that residents would lose representation on a merged Council, possibly being represented by only one or two Councillors.

- Gwydir Shire Council is a forward thinking shire and its achievements are many – by virtue of being a small regional council, it has had to become more than just about 'Roads, rates and rubbish':
- Council owns a Medical Centre in both Bingara and Warialda and these two towns have new multi purpose hospital facilities, largely due to the efforts of GSC.
- Council owns an Aged Care Facility in Warialda and with community support and grant funding has recently completed a \$3m upgrade.
- GSC has recently completed a \$4 million upgrade to the Bingara water supply system.
- Council has been at the forefront of developing the Gwydir Learning Region, an alternative pathway of education which has achieved national recognition. Three school- based Trade Training Centres have been established and are operating (for Primary Industries, Hospitality and Vehicle Maintenance). These facilities complement the already excellent facilities of the two High Schools, and offer the opportunity for developing Centres of Excellence, optimising educational opportunities within the Shire.
- GSC has been proactive (developing a Gwydir Learning Region) and providing apprenticeships and traineeships for the young, and engaging them on meaningful projects and providing an opportunity for careers that may not have otherwise existed.
- GSC is an active participant and supporter in a range of community managed facilities, making the shire a great place to live and to visit.
- Council recognises and encourages tourism to the region by maintaining two Visitor Information Centres and two Caravan Parks.

" GSC provides our organisation with a space to meet on a monthly basis.

" GSC also regularly allows staff to work with us – offering professional advice, help in organising of activities, physical labour and support.

(Both of the above gestures help to keep CWA-Bingara Branch costs down, resulting in more money being put back into our community.

Conclusion

We, as a community wish to support our Council in standing alone because we believe that this is the best outcome for our community. Council has the support of its community to continue to stand alone and provide the ongoing services expected by its community.

(PRESIDENT)

Name:

Tanya Heaton

Emma Smith (Secretary)

Address:

[Redacted Address]

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[Redacted Address]

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Signature:

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Date:

27-7-2015.

27/7/15