

Submission to IPART - Joint Organisations - Scale and Capacity - 19 May 15

IPART's public consultation on 11 May has encouraged some in the local government to believe that a door has been opened to Joint Organisations as an alternative to mergers.

In this submission I propose benchmarks for Joint Organisation proposals to meet the scale and capacity objectives.

Background

Regional Organisations of Councils, ROCs, exist now in our council system. To some extent they allow councils to share services and make joint representations to government on regional planning issues. Councils claim there have been savings on shared services, although there must still be extra administration involved with inter council coordination.

ROCs are not effective at representing policy issues to government. ROCS report directly to Councils not ratepayers. ROCs have no connection with the people they purport to represent. Most residents would not know what a ROC is, would not know who is representing them on the ROC and would be unaware of the issues they are trying to represent.

The role of chair of the ROCs is shared between mayors of the constituent councils who have no electoral relationship with voters in the wider region. They are unable to communicate issues with the wider regional

electorate, they cannot be effective community leaders at the regional level.

The role of ROCS in regional planning is curtailed as they have no planning powers. They cannot direct or bind their constituent councils on any matter.

Councils putting forward Joint Organisation proposals to IPART may attempt to dress up existing ROC arrangements, without addressing these issues.

Proposal

If Joint Organisations are to be effective and have scale and capacity they must have

1. the power to make planning decisions for the whole region e.g. commission master plans, make LEPS, decide medium to large scale developments applications.
2. a governing body that is directly elected, e.g. the mayors of each council, each directly elected, and the president of the JO directly elected by the residents of the whole region.
3. the power to provide region wide services e.g. roads and rubbish.
4. the responsibility to work with government on regional planning issues e.g. health, transport, education, economic development, make binding decisions and to report back directly to the electorate.
5. proper resources to take on these tasks.

Local councils could retain the following functions

1. raise rates and charges on behalf of the JO,
2. decide small scale development proposals
3. provide local community engagement services, eg volunteers, markets, parks, art galleries, community centres.

It has to be accepted that Joint Organisations represent another tier of government. Council mergers would also achieve the required scale and capacity.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission, which I wish to be public. I have previously made a submission to IPART in regard to questions 1 and 4, section 1.6.1.of the consultation paper.

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