

**The
Residents
Association Sth
calls upon both
Government &
Opposition
to embrace**



**..a re-defining of
Local Government
... giving back to the
people the right to
determine their own
community**

Re-defining Local Government

Executive Summary

This statement is about re-defining Local Government – not merely de-amalgamation

This Association calls upon the Queensland Government to reverse its ill-conceived and costly action which it embarked upon during 2007-2008 and in doing so restore the concept of LOCAL GOVERNMENT to the people by the PEOPLE and not under the control of bureaucrats as is presently happening. The residents and ratepayers WANT representation by those people they voted for not bureaucrats.

During 2007 the Queensland State Government decided to amalgamate the former Caloundra City, Noosa Shire and Maroochydore Shire Councils into ONE Local Government entity with the claim that it would be more efficient, cost saving and of greater appeal and benefit to the ratepayers. On August 10, 2007 the Queensland Parliament endorsed the recommendation for the amalgamation. Following upon Parliament endorsement the three former councils were amalgamated to form the Sunshine Coast Regional Council (now the Sunshine Coast Council) effective from March 15, 2008.

Despite the disapproval and non-acceptance by the ratepayers and residents from the three former council areas the Queensland Government forced the unpopular amalgamation to take place. Almost 3 YEARS have elapsed since the amalgamation and the residents are yet to receive or see any tangible benefits which were stated by the Government at the time.

What has happened with the amalgamation?

There are fewer elected Councillors across the region to represent and address the needs and concerns of the ratepayers. The residents have difficulty in making personal contact with a Councillor and must first go through a bureaucrat. This is NOT Local Government.

- Rates & Charges have not diminished – people are clearly unhappy with the continual rate increases they receive.
- Bureaucrats have taken the power of representation away from the Councillors making them even less the voice of the people they are supposed to represent.
- The bureaucracy within the amalgamated council has increased uncontrollably and it now has more highly paid and less accountable Executive personnel than existed under the previous THREE COUNCILS. These high paid Executives have added to the operational running costs of council and these additional costs have been passed onto the residents through their rates.

A Recent poll conducted by News Limited found that two-thirds of residents surveyed in Queensland wanted the amalgamated "super councils" disbanded due to costs and inefficiency. On the Sunshine Coast alone a survey found that 71% of residents strongly favoured DE-AMALGAMATION. Surely this is sending a very strong message to the Government.

This Association strongly believes and supports the return of democracy in Local Government which can only be achieved through DE-AMALGAMATION and the restoration of the three former councils

What has happened?

Successive state governments have “disenfranchised” the whole concept of local government to the detriment of the Ratepayers.

The concept of Local Government used to be

1. the closest level of government to the people.
2. People governing their local community by local councillors, who represent the desires, requirements and the ambitions of a given area, which are unique to that local government area and are different to other local government areas

But the concept has been destroyed over the years by the State by.....

- a) Removing the autonomy of these local councils
- b) Forcing them to adopt a “corporation” approach where the elected Councillors are powerless and the powers given to bureaucrats who are not elected by the ratepayers and are not answerable to the ratepayers.
- c) Amalgamating these councils into super councils with inadequate access to the councillors by the ratepayers & residents.
- d) Prescribing a legislative framework which restricts the activities of elected councillors and places much power into the hands of the bureaucrats
- e) Creating a further level of paid management which has massively increased the cost of rates.
- f) encroaching on the traditional role of Local Government in the field of local planning

Why has the State deliberately weakened Local Government ?

It has been widely said that three levels of government is 'over-government' and the level that should be removed is "State Government, leaving it as Federal Government and Local Government.

By creating companies to manage water and other matters which had previously been adequately managed by council, there has in effect been a further level of government created, aloof from council responsibilities, and at extra cost.

The State is acting to

- "protect its own fiefdom by stripping power from Local Government", and
- removing access from the ratepayers & residents to the Council and Councillors,
- all on the pretence that 'Corporatisation' is more effective and will
 - a) **Reduce rates** and
 - b) **speed up decision making.**

We ask these questions:-

1. Hands up anyone who has had their costs reduced by amalgamation --- no one will raise their hands.
2. Hands up anyone who now has better access to their elected representatives than they enjoyed previously --no one will raise their hands
3. Hands up anyone who has had a quicker decision than prior to amalgamation.

This is why we call upon the Government & the opposition to commit to a short timetable to redefine Local Government and restore the power to the community rather than the bureaucrats.

What do we want?

- a) We want the amalgamations to be reversed – not just Noosa but also Caloundra and Maroochydore, as well as other politically motivated amalgamations.

These Councils were financially viable, on their own two feet, with separate communities of interest and amalgamations have achieved nothing other than fat cat bureaucrats, higher rates, and reduced services.

- b) We want return of power to the elected Councillors-
- c) We want the new 'unelected' fourth level of 'government' removed
- d) We want sufficient Councillors to enable them to be accessible to the residents, not locked away in a 'mushroom' environment playing 'corporate games' set by the faceless bureaucrats to keep them apparently busy, --away from their constituents,-- and to keep them out of 'real' decision making or representing their constituents.

**Would the elected members of State
Parliament allow themselves to be
divorced from representing their
constituents????**

NO WAY!!!!!!!

**Why then have State Members of Parliament
allowed it to happen to Local Government?**

FACT: It is currently easier for constituents to contact their State Member than their elected local Councillor which is the opposite of how it should be.

**Make no mistake ---This is not merely
about de-amalgamating -
but about restoring the Councillors
responsibility to represent their constituents
and this means 'Re-defining the whole role of
Councils and their responsibility to the
community.**

The amalgamation was unceremoniously forced upon the
ratepayers completely against their expressed desires.
De-amalgamation will restore the confidence of the ratepayers

Why we support de-amalgamation of local government

--- not just on the Sunshine Coast but all Local Government areas
that were amalgamated purely for misguided political
reasons rather than economic reasons.

We accept that some Local Government areas were NOT
economically viable and needed to be amalgamated but this
would have been the minority.

We say that on the Sunshine Coast --- it should revert to separate
councils for the area of the former Caloundra City Council
Maroochy Council and Noosa Council.

Amalgamation has clearly failed - it has NOT produced the benefits claimed at the time of its compulsory introduction -

- Rating has increased considerably rather than decreased
- There has been no recognisable improvement in services;
- Staffing levels have increased rather than the promised
reduction in numbers.
- Debt levels have increased

The “local” flavour of Government on the Sunshine Coast has been replaced by a “corporate” style of Government where the bureaucracy exercises far too much control and the elected Councillors are kept out of touch with the electorate.

De-amalgamation will restore true local government.

Councillors are spread too thin --

- The amalgamation has created an unwieldy and extremely expensive conglomerate supporting nothing but excessively highly paid bureaucrats who are not responsible to or answerable to the Ratepayers
- The fact that the entire Sunshine Coast area is governed by a Council comprising a Mayor and twelve elected Councillors results in a dilution in the ratio of elected Councillors to enrolled electors, as compared with the pre-amalgamation arrangement.
- This means that each Councillor represents a much greater number of constituents than was the case with the pre-amalgamation arrangement. Councillors are thus more remote from their constituents at the expense of democratic Government.
Any reduction of Councillors' fees by this reduction in the councillor/ratepayer ratio has been insignificant.

Ratepayers need more contact than has been available for the last 3 years.

De-amalgamation will rectify this situation.

- The whole Council management/administrative process functions at a slower rate.
Experience has shown that correspondence is not addressed with the urgency it deserves; Council decision making demonstrates a matching lack of urgency;

De-amalgamation will cure these problems brought by forced merger.

- There is an unquestioned difficulty in ratepayers gaining access to their elected Councillors, with clear evidence of Council bureaucracy interference to encourage electors/ratepayers to restrict dealings to employed staff rather than elected Councillors in an apparent attempt to strengthen their positions.

In this arrangement, democracy is the clear loser.

De-amalgamation will remove this impediment.

- Even after three years of amalgamation, the Regional Council continues to operate the three separate and distinct non-compatible in all computer networks employed by the three former Councils.

Obviously this must create both financial and logistical inefficiencies in overall accounting, rating, and administrative functions.

A figure of \$10 million has been mentioned as the cost of providing the computer hardware and software for an integrated system for the whole of the Sunshine Coast.

This of course will add to future general rate increases across the Region.

De-amalgamation will avoid this cost.

- Existing administration buildings and functioning computer installations are in place to serve individual councils.

De-amalgamation will take advantage of these facilities.

While the reasons cited are compelling, the most convincing case for de-amalgamation arises from a recent exclusive *Sunday Mail* poll in six of the major new Councils created by the forced mergers, where **65% of the people clearly indicated that they would vote in a referendum to roll back amalgamation.**

This opinion is strongest on the Sunshine Coast where 71% of residents favour de-amalgamation.

If the overwhelming wish of the people is to support de-amalgamation on the Sunshine Coast, democratic principles would suggest that the State Government should listen to, and hear the voice of the people who are painfully convinced that the benefits promised to accompany the forced mergers have never materialised, in all likelihood cannot happen, **and that we are left with a raft of costly problems as a constant reminder of this poorly planned and ill-conceived action.**

We say again that we call upon both Government & Opposition to embrace

**..a re-defining of
Local Government**

... giving back to the people the right to determine their own community

Who are we?

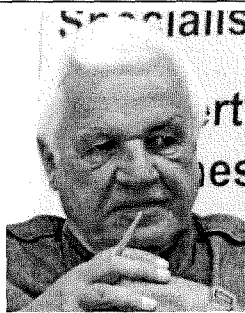
This report has been produced at the direction of the members of the **Residents Association South (Sunshine Coast) Inc.**, though their management committee :-



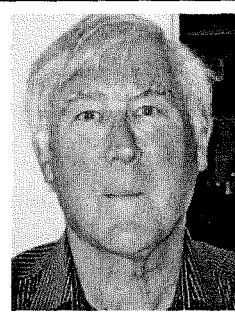
President: Ian Smyth BA., A.Dip.J.A., AFAIM 5491-9139 >>who is a retired Police Inspector, widely experienced in community and Government issues.



Vice President: John Smith, PSM, 5493-2015 John is a CPA and the retired Chief Executive Officer and Town Clerk of Caloundra City Council. He holds the Public Service Medal.



Secretary/Treasurer: Peter Bryant, OAM 0438-579-950>> a former Councillor in NSW serving 35years including 6 years as Mayor and a Sunshine Coast local business owner



Research Officer Tony Barry 5491-3156 is a former education officer with the Queensland Government and actively involved in the Surf Life Saving movement. He has authored major reports on climate & emergency services



Executive Member: Pam Owens p5494-8493 -a Hinterland resident championing the needs of the Hinterland community and has extensive community experience in Switzerland where she lived for 32 years



Executive Member: Ron Burnett 5491-7905>> Ron is Canadian and a qualified Town Planner. He makes a valuable contribution to the Residents Association as well as a member of local ecological groups



Executive Member: Peter Ryan ph 5492-1333; has extensive knowledge of Caloundra spanning more than 40 years, and a wide diversity of experience in Caloundra, and overseas, in aviation and business. A company director and investor, actively involved as a volunteer in several community organizations

...and we endorse the report "Threats to Local Democracy... by the University of Queensland"



Residents Assoc. South Sunshine Coast (reg IA145731)

Beerburum to Kawana & Hinterland to Caloundra.

Formerly Caloundra City Ratepayers & Residents Association

President: Ian Smyth 5491-9139, **Vice President:** John Smith ph 5493-2015

Secretary/Treasurer: Peter Bryant, OAM 5437-7048 **Research Officer** Tony Barry 5491-3156;

Executive: Pam Owens p5494-8493 ; Peter Ryan ph 5492-1333; Ron Burnett 5491-7905