

Barcaldine Regional Council



1. Recommendation

The Commission recommends:

- (i) the existing local governments of Barcaldine, Aramac and Jericho Shire Councils be abolished and a new local government formed based on the combined area of the three existing local governments;
- (ii) the new local government be called Barcaldine Regional Council;
- (iii) the new local government be undivided with six councillors and a mayor; and
- (iv) the new local government be classed as a regional local government.

2. Comparison of new and previous local governments

Name	PREVIOUS LOCAL GOVERNMENTS			
	Barcaldine Regional Council	Barcaldine Shire Council	Aramac Shire Council	Jericho Shire Council
Class	Regional	Shire	Shire	Shire
Size	53,677 sq km	8,443 sq km	23,361 sq km	21,873 sq km
Population 2006	3,503	1,690	699	1,114
Population 2026	3,589	1,736	665	1,188
Electors 2007	2,223	1,071	516	636
Electoral arrangements	Undivided 6 councillors plus mayor	Undivided 8 councillors plus mayor	Undivided 7 councillors plus mayor	Undivided 6 councillors plus mayor
Electors per councillor excluding mayor	370	133	73	106
Total operating revenue financial year 2006	\$21.6 million	\$6.5 million	\$9 million	\$6 million (estimated)
Annual capital expenditure financial year 2007 -2015	\$5.9 million	\$1.6 million	\$2.2 million	\$2.1 million
Total assets at 30 June 2006	\$113 million	\$32 million	\$44 million	\$37 million (estimated)
Debt at 30 June 2006	\$0.9 million	\$0.8million	Nil	\$0.1 million (estimated)
Community equity at 30 June 2006	\$108 million	\$30 million	\$42 million	\$36 million (estimated)

3. Rationale for new local government

3.1 Service delivery, operations and management

- Improved service delivery through economies of scale around:
 - planning;
 - managing water, waste and sewerage;
 - managing and maintaining road networks;
 - utilising plant; and
 - undertaking core corporate functions including executive and administrative functions, finance, procurement and information technology.
- Increasing the capacity of the local government through a larger asset and revenue base and a larger revenue base that improves the prospects of the new council attracting, retaining and better developing the skills base required to undertake the activities of a local government.
- Amalgamating the three local governments offers the potential to improve the quality of governance.
- Strengthening the ability of the new council to engage with industry and State and Federal Governments in relation to tourism, environmental issues, economic development, the management of the road network and water, waste and sewerage issues.

3.2 Communities of interest

- The major town of the region is Barcaldine where most of the educational, health, commercial, government, retail and financial activities servicing the region are located. Barcaldine also has a reasonable level of community services available particularly in education, including a TAFE college.
- Barcaldine has an airport with flights to Brisbane three times per week with QANTAS.
- Relatively close geographic location of most towns with strong transportation linkages. Aramac's and Muttaborra's main road link is the Muttaborra/Aramac/Barcaldine Road. Alpha, Jericho and Barcaldine are on the Capricorn Highway.

- All shires have similar economic interests with a heavy dependence on agricultural output (such as beef cattle and sheep).
- The current local government boundaries do not divide any localities.

3.3 Other

Not applicable.

4. Financial sustainability

Each local government was rated in the Financial Sustainability Review by Queensland Treasury Corporation as follows:

- Barcaldine Shire Council – weak (developing);
- Aramac Shire Council – moderate (developing); and
- Jericho Shire Council – moderate (neutral).

The combined council would have a greater capacity to improve its financial sustainability through:

- realising economies of scale;
- attracting, retaining and developing skilled staff as well as building the capacity of systems; and
- undertaking regional planning and infrastructure delivery.

5. Implementation issues

The Commission did not identify any specific issues relating to the formation of the new local government area.

6. Boundary issues

The Commission did not identify any major ongoing boundary issues.

7. Suggestions

The Commission gave consideration to the 105 suggestions it received in relation to Barcaldine, Aramac and Jericho Shire Councils and surrounding local government areas.

7.1 Details of suggestions

- Barcaldine Shire Council opposes altering its shire boundaries as the community is very satisfied with the services provided. It has sound relationships with neighbouring shires and amalgamation would have an unsettling effect on the community. The suggestion further states that Barcaldine is fortunate in that it is centrally located in the region at the junction of Landsborough and Capricorn Highways and the town of Barcaldine provides many of the medical, cultural and sporting facilities for the surrounding shires of Aramac and Jericho in particular.
- Aramac Shire Council states that it is highly unlikely for the people of Aramac Shire to achieve an improved financial sustainability through any form of amalgamation with neighbouring shires. This is on the basis that Council staff form the functions of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, State Emergency Service and Queensland Ambulance. Four council jobs lost equates to 32 community jobs lost and believes that the social fabric of the community will be torn apart with amalgamation.

Aramac Shire Council did suggest some boundary changes:

- Aramac Shire to have a significant boundary realignment with Winton Shire. This has been mutually agreed upon by both Winton and Aramac Shire Councils as Aramac Shire Council provides services to the Winton Shire Council.

- Aramac Shire Council would continue to pursue negotiation of a boundary alignment with Flinders and Dalrymple Shire Councils, so the people in the southern end of Flinders and Dalrymple Shires who use the Aramac town as their community of interest can do so.
- Council's aim for structural reform is to strengthen their community of interest and improve coordination and service delivery efficiency and effectiveness through significant boundary realignments with Winton, Flinders and Dalrymple Shire Councils.
- Jericho Shire Council's suggestion is that no changes be made to its local government boundaries due to it being financially sustainable, the absence of a community of interest with adjoining local governments, the significant number of community services council provides, distance issues, and the social fabric of the community would be torn apart. There are no suggestions around amalgamation options.

7.2 Commission's comments on suggestions

The Commission considered all suggestions and recommends amalgamation on the basis that each local government will find it increasingly difficult to service their respective communities in the long-term. The issue of distance is not as significant as it is the far western and north-western local government areas. The suggestion by Barcaldine Shire Council indicates that strong communities of interest do exist between these three local governments and the Commission concurs with this suggestion.

8. Other Commission considerations

The Commission also considered whether the local government boundaries should remain unchanged. It concluded the ability of local government to continue to provide the facilities and services needed to maintain the social fabric of these communities will be enhanced due to the larger revenue base of the new local government and its ability over time to reduce administrative overheads. The larger local government will strengthen the ability of the council to advocate in the interests of its communities.

In addition, the Commission considered the following:

- amending the boundaries so that the western section of the existing Aramac Shire Council be included as part of the Longreach Regional Council amalgamation;
- splitting the boundaries so that the eastern half of the current Jericho Shire Council (Alpha and east) be allocated to Emerald Regional Council and the western half be allocated to Barcaldine Regional Council; and
- amending the boundary between Aramac and Winton Shire as it suggested in the Aramac Shire Council suggestion.

The Commission feels that such changes involving, as they do, a splitting of neighbouring councils introduces unnecessary complexity into the transition process associated with the implementation of its recommendations. On balance, it considers a better outcome is achieved by combining the whole of the existing council areas, given the community of interest around the service centre of Barcaldine. This does not preclude the new council engaging with its neighbours in relation to boundary realignments at some future date if considered desirable.

9. Objectives set for Commission

OBJECTIVES	OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED
Facilitates optimum service delivery to Queensland communities.	Yes to the extent possible given the very small population, the shire area and its resources (including financial and human resources).
Ensure local government effectively contributes to and participates in Queensland's regional economies.	Yes.
Manages economic, environmental and social planning consistently with regional communities of interest.	Yes to the extent possible given the limitations of council as a consequence of council's capacity constraints in respect of resources, access to expertise and finances.
Effectively partners local government with other levels of government to ensure sustainable and viable communities.	Yes but more robust and better resourced local governments have the capacity to participate on a more equal basis in representing local government and community interests.