

Toowoomba Regional Council



1. Recommendation

The Commission recommends:

- (i) the existing local governments of Toowoomba City, Cambooya Shire, Clifton Shire, Jondaryan Shire, Millmerran Shire, Pittsworth Shire, Crows Nest Shire and Rosalie Shire Councils be abolished and a new local government formed based on the combined area of the eight existing local governments;
- (ii) the new local government be called Toowoomba Regional Council;
- (iii) the new local government be undivided with 10 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

NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT		PREVIOUS LOCAL GOVERNMENTS			
Name	Toowoomba Regional Council	Toowoomba City Council	Cambooya Shire Council	Clifton Shire Council	Jondaryan Shire Council
Class	Regional	City	Shire	Shire	Shire
Size	12,973 sq km	117 sq km	638 sq km	867 sq km	1,910 sq km
Population 2006	151,283	97,531	5,885	2,583	14,731
Population 2026	193,718	115,587	9,392	2,845	21,504
Electors 2007	95,728	60,581	3,903	1,857	9,326
Electoral arrangements	Undivided 10 councillors plus mayor	Undivided 8 councillors plus mayor	Divided 8 councillors plus mayor	Undivided 6 councillors plus mayor	Divided 8 councillors plus Mayor
Electors per councillor excluding mayor	9,572	7,572	487	309	1,165
Total operating revenue financial year 2006	\$162 million	\$95 million	\$8 million	\$6 million	\$15 million
Annual capital expenditure financial year 2007 - 2015	\$73 million	\$40 million	\$3 million	\$2 million	\$7 million
Total assets at 30 June 2006	\$1,849 million	\$1,331 million	\$43 million	\$46 million	\$121 million
Debt at 30 June 2006	\$85 million	\$69 million	\$minor	\$minor	\$6 million
Community equity at 30 June 2006	\$1,728 million	\$1,240 million	\$42 million	\$45 million	\$112 million

PREVIOUS LOCAL GOVERNMENTS				
Name	Millmerran Shire Council	Pittsworth Shire Council	Crows Nest Shire Council	Rosalie Shire Council
Class	Shire	Shire	Shire	Shire
Size	4,521 sq km	1,090 sq km	1,631 sq km	2,199 sq km
Population 2006	3,454	5,059	12,701	9,339
Population 2026	3,997	6,185	22,232	11,976
Electors 2007	2,008	3,183	8,782	6,088
Electoral arrangements	Divided 9 councillors plus mayor	Undivided 6 councillors plus mayor	Divided 8 councillors plus mayor	Undivided 8 councillors plus mayor
Electors per councillor excluding mayor	223	530	1,097	761
Total operating revenue financial year 2006	\$7 million	\$6 million	\$16 million	\$9 million
Annual capital expenditure financial year 2007 – 2015	\$3 million	\$3 million	\$7 million	\$8 million
Total assets at 30 June 2006	\$58 million	\$60 million	\$118 million	\$72 million
Debt at 30 June 2006	Nil	\$1 million	\$3 million	\$6 million
Community equity at 30 June 2006	\$57 million	\$59 million	\$110 million	\$63 million

3. Rationale for the new local government

3.1 Service delivery, operations and management

In addressing the local government reform Terms of Reference, the Commission sought to ensure a capability for this region, which will enable it to plan for the considerable economic expansion and growth it will experience in the next 20 years.

The Commission bases its recommendation for amalgamation of the eight councils on the following:

- Builds on the strong history and experience in planning at the regional and subregion scale through the efforts of the Eastern Downs Regional Planning Advisory Committee

(EDRPAC), and the Darling Downs Regional Organisation of Councils (DDROC).

- Acknowledges the urban growth pressures facing local governments on the periphery of Toowoomba City, which itself has diminishing land availability for accommodating predicted future population growth in its greater metropolitan area.
- Encourages more effective ways to manage the expansion of low density residential and rural-residential areas to the west of the city, through integrated strategic planning for new urban growth communities.
- Creates an organisation of a scale and capacity to undertake comprehensive natural resource management across the region in an integrated manner that will be essential to sustain rural enterprises across the region as well as providing the region with environmental amenity, in addition to managing its urban growth areas.

- Provides a better platform for managing the important surface and groundwater resources in the region, optimising the provision of related water infrastructure, and for more efficiently and equitably allocating water resources and regulating water demand.
- Recognises the relationship that Toowoomba and the Eastern Downs have with the adjoining South East Queensland, in particular the important role of Toowoomba City as the gateway between South East Queensland and the Darling Downs.
- Promotes and supports major economic development initiatives emerging in the region, including:
 - the Charlton/Wellcamp integrated transport hub and industrial area;
 - the national inland rail service from Melbourne and the second range road and rail crossing from Brisbane; and
 - the significant transport logistics and related industrial activity opportunities related to the national road and rail infrastructure passing through the region.
- Provides the capacity for a well managed, forward thinking Regional Council with a combined population of approximately 150,000. Sound population growth (estimated to grow by 28 percent or approximately 50,000 between 2006 and 2026) results in a local government that can deliver:
 - strong leadership;
 - quality strategic planning;
 - robust financial performance combined with sound governance;
 - efficient and effective service provision;
 - efficient and cost effective asset acquisition and management; and
 - regional infrastructure planning, financing, construction and management.
- Results in a regional local government which is a strong advocate for the region and that can work effectively in collaboration with industry the State and Federal Governments, in pursuing and supporting major infrastructure initiatives including transport and water, coal mining, coal seam methane gas extraction and future energy generation projects.

In summary the amalgamation of these eight local governments results in a regional local government

of a scale and capability to:

- promote and support major economic development initiatives emerging in the region;
- undertake the planning for the expected growth and the assessment of development proposals and applications for major projects;
- coordinate the delivery of services and infrastructure,
- develop an integrated approach to natural resource management;
- obtain economy of scale advantages which facilitates improved governance, greater access to technical resources, and an organisation better able to respond to the social needs of a region undergoing change;
- ensure sound environmental management; and
- provide the necessary political leadership and advocacy capability to engage with State and Federal governments and major companies in respect of the region's land use, natural resource, environmental, economic and social challenges of the region.

3.2 Communities of interest

- Toowoomba is the regional centre for the Darling Downs and southern and south-western Queensland where higher order educational, health, commercial, government, retail and financial services can be accessed. It is noted that other towns have some of these facilities however to the extent they are not available in these towns residents generally travel to Toowoomba.
- Similarly there is a high incidence of the regional community undertaking leisure activities in Toowoomba.
- With the exception of Clifton Shire, Pittsworth Shire and Millmerran Shire all other areas are heavily dependent on Toowoomba for employment opportunities and a large percentage of the residents commute to Toowoomba for employment.
- The rural economic base of the Darling Downs and Toowoomba City are intrinsically linked with the City providing services to the rural communities of the Darling Downs.
- A shared community of interest based on strong social and economic linkages.
- Toowoomba is the transport hub for the region.
- The proposal removes a number of boundaries that currently artificially split localities.

- There are no natural barriers between the communities.

3.3 Other

The SEQ Regional Plan has set a target of 10,500 additional new dwellings in Toowoomba with the replacement of existing housing accounting for some 3,500 new dwellings to encourage a more compact and higher density of urban development in Toowoomba.

4. Financial sustainability

Each local government was rated by Queensland Treasury Corporation as follows:

- Toowoomba City Council – moderate (developing);
- Cambooya Shire Council – moderate (negative);
- Clifton Shire Council – moderate (developing);
- Jondaryan Shire Council – very weak (negative);
- Millmerran Shire Council – weak (developing);
- Pittsworth Shire Council – weak (developing);
- Crows Nest Shire Council – moderate (developing); and
- Rosalie Shire Council – weak (positive).

It is likely that the amalgamated local government will be rated moderate with a developing outlook.

The combined local government will have greater capacity to improve its financial sustainability through its ability to:

- achieve economies of scale;
- attract, retain and develop skilled staff as well as build capacity of systems;
- undertake regional planning and infrastructure delivery; and
- manage development of the region including the growing urbanisation of areas around the fringe of Toowoomba City.

5. Implementation issues

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

6. Boundary issues

The Commission noted the following possible ongoing boundary anomalies which may require future attention. In particular the Commission noted the potential for:

- examining whether the township of Yarraman (currently in Rosalie Shire) has a stronger community of interest with a local government for the South Burnett
- examining the boundary changes proposed in the suggestion received from Dalby/Wambo with respect to the existing Rosalie Shire, Millmerran Shire and Jondaryan Shire (based on Census Collection Districts); and
- examining the boundary changes proposed in the suggestion received from Toowoomba City particularly with respect to the existing Esk, Jondaryan and Rosalie local government areas.

7. Suggestions

The Commission gave consideration to the 189 suggestions it received in relation to the councils that comprise the new Toowoomba Regional Council.

7.1 Details of suggestions

- Toowoomba City Council's suggestion proposes the incorporation of the City of Toowoomba and surrounding areas into a new regional local government. The proposed boundary for the new regional government comprises the whole of Toowoomba City, Cambooya and Clifton Shires and parts of Crows Nest, Jondaryan, Pittsworth, Rosalie and Esk local government areas. The boundary consolidates the primary reticulated water supply area and associated urban water storage catchments it also incorporates the "urbanising" parts of those local government areas adjoining the boundary of Toowoomba City and within it the area described as the Toowoomba Statistical District.

The suggestion also proposes electoral arrangements including:

- the Mayor of the new local government is elected at large (i.e. by the entire voting population within the new area);

- representation from within the existing Toowoomba City boundary remains unchanged (i.e. as multi-member electoral division); and
- one representative is elected from within the relevant boundary (whether whole or part) of each existing Shire reflecting new electoral divisions.

Suggested names include Toowoomba City Council, Toowoomba Regional Council, Greater Toowoomba Regional Council, Eastern Downs Regional Council or Toowoomba City and Eastern Downs Council.

- Clifton Shire Council's suggestion proposes the formation of a Condamine Shire incorporating Clifton, Pittsworth and Millmerran Shires and part of both Cambooya and Jondaryan Shires. Its main concern is the formation of a 'Toowoomba super council' which Clifton Shire considers will be to the detriment of these small communities.
- Cambooya, Millmerran and Pittsworth Shires' joint suggestion to the Commission proposed:
 - retaining each council as individual stand alone local governments with some boundary adjustments to allow for better management of environmental, economic, social and other resources;
 - progressing the development of a shared services model to improve efficiencies in service delivery whilst maintaining local representation and democracy; and
 - in the event of any amalgamation that Cambooya, Millmerran and Pittsworth Shire be combined as this arrangement gives the optimal economic, environmental and social outcomes along with an additional boundary change in Jondaryan and a minor boundary change affecting Gatton Shire.

The suggestion is unanimous in its opposition to amalgamations with Toowoomba City and/or Dalby/Wambo Shire. This is based on:

- each Shire having a strong rural context and this must be reflected through representation in order for the best interests and effective management of those residents to be met;
- while each local government is becoming increasingly populated this growth remains essentially rural based and issues in these

- localities are largely rural in nature;
- inclusion of large urban based local governments will result in a significant and harmful loss of representation for these communities, and
- Millmerran has no community of interest with Dalby.

- Dalby Town's and Wambo Shire's joint suggestion proposes an amalgamation scenario of the existing Dalby Town Council, Wambo Shire Council, Millmerran Shire Council and parts of Jondaryan, Rosalie and Pittsworth Shire Councils. The scenario offers the potential for enhanced sustainability in respect of environment (catchment management, open space management and biodiversity protection), economic (impact on private sector and employment, utilisation of natural resources and land management) and governance (financial sustainability, skills, technology and infrastructure).

It also suggests the new local government be named the 'Darling Downs Shire Council' and that the new Darling Downs Shire Council be undivided with a mayor and eight councillors.

- Jondaryan Shire's suggestion is for Jondaryan Shire boundaries to remain unaltered. If amalgamation with neighbouring shires is inevitable residents wish this to be a small scale amalgamation (with minimum number of rural shires). Residents were evenly divided on the notion of a single large rural shire located between the Toowoomba and Dalby Shire boundaries. They strongly rejected becoming part of a city-based local government in particular Toowoomba City.
- Crows Nest and Rosalie Shires' joint suggestion outlined strong preference for the amalgamation of the two shires to form a Northern Downs Shire. This was based on:
 - the final report developed through the SSS process recommended the amalgamation of the two Shires and the strong community support for this
 - a desire to preserve the sense of community;
 - the ability to plan consistently across like communities including for infrastructure and social elements;
 - similar natural resource management

- challenges exist across both shires; and
- the merged Shire being consistent with the regional framework and in the regional context could see the reduction in the number of Darling Downs local government from 13 to approximately five.

Crows Nest and Rosalie Shires also suggest that alternative options do not meet the reform objectives in that they:

- fragment communities of interest;
- include rural towns but exclude the rural areas they serve;
- reduce representation to undesirable levels; and
- erode social fabric by diluting the support provided by a more remote local government.

7.2 Commission's comments on suggestions

The Commission considered:

- Toowoomba City's suggestion which has merit but involves splitting several existing local governments and would leave a number of other local governments in the region with limited capacity, while still being heavily reliant on the Toowoomba City for health, education, retail, commercial, recreation and other services.
- Crows Nest and Rosalie Shire's joint suggestion, although supported through the SSS process, does not address a number of the key objectives which the Act requires the Commission to have regard. In particular it does not:
 - optimise regional planning capability within the region;
 - provide a structure to effectively address ongoing growth and planning issues in Toowoomba City and surrounding areas;
 - address the significant community of interest and direct social and economic linkages between Toowoomba City and these areas; and
- provide a basis for optimum service delivery to the region in that it fragments responsibility for service delivery to the same community between different administrations in a small geographic area.
- While the Pittsworth and Millmerran local governments links with Toowoomba are arguably not as strong as Crows Nest, Rosalie and Jondaryan Shires, the Commission determined that including them in the new local government strengthened the overall planning and capacity of the region in which they will play a vital part into the future.
- Dalby Town's and Wambo Shire's joint suggestion is viewed as having some merit. Although consideration was given as to Millmerran Shire being amalgamated with Dalby Town and Wambo Shire, the Commission determined that service delivery to the area from Dalby would be inferior to the larger capacity local government based around Toowoomba City. In addition, the majority of residents of these areas travel to Toowoomba to obtain services they cannot obtain in their local communities. The possible exception is that area to the south and east of Dalby which encompasses both Bowenville and Cecil Plains.
- The Commission noted the 1,541 form letters received from residents of Crows Nest and Rosalie Shires opposing amalgamation other than with each other.

8. Other Commission considerations

The Commission also considered Toowoomba City, Crows Nest, Rosalie, Cambooya, Clifton, Millmerran, Pittsworth and Jondaryan Shires remaining as individual local governments. However, the Commission is of the view that such a recommendation would not position many of these local governments to meet the future economic challenges of the region. In particular the region is likely to be one the key economic drivers for the State for the next 20 years and beyond, through the ongoing development of the resources, energy, industrial and transportation sectors. It also means that multiple local governments would play a role in the development of Toowoomba City's Urban Footprint leading to an inefficient pattern of development resulting in higher servicing costs to ratepayers. This is also the basis on which the suggestions by Jondaryan and Clifton Shires to maintain existing boundaries did not meet the objectives of the Act, nor the Commission's Terms of Reference.

9. Objectives set for Commission

OBJECTIVES	OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED
Facilitates optimum service delivery to Queensland communities.	Yes.
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.
Effectively partners local government with other levels of government to ensure sustainable and viable communities.	Yes.