

Minutes of the Shire of Tammin Special Council meeting held at Council Chambers, 1 Donnan Street, Tammin, on Wednesday, 11 February 2009.

The President requested a Special meeting of the Council of the Shire of Tammin to be held to discuss the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development's announcement on amalgamations.

1. DECLARATION OF OPENING/ANNOUNCEMENT OF VISITORS

Cr R Stokes declared the meeting open at 3.06pm.

2. RECORD OF ATTENDANCE / APOLOGIES / LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Present

Cr R.J. Stokes	President (Presiding Person)
Cr K.L. Caffell	Deputy President
Cr M.D. Greenwood	Member
Cr S.J. Jefferies JP	Member
Cr B.F. Stokes	Member

Mr M.G. Oliver	Chief Executive Officer
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Visitors

Nil

Apologies

Nil

Leave of Absence

Nil

3. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Nil

4. DECLARATION OF MEMBER'S INTERESTS IN AGENDA ITEMS

Nil

5. AGENDA ITEMS

5.1 Local Government Amalgamations (PROP-00)

Author – MG Oliver, CEO, 6 February 2009 Interest – Nil

BACKGROUND

On 5 February, 2009 Mr Castrilli, the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, publicly announced strategies for local government reform based on a voluntary reduction in the number of individual councils.

The Liberal-National Government strategies aim to achieve greater capacity for local government to better plan, manage and implement services to their communities with a focus on social, environmental and economic sustainability.

Mr Castrilli, who announced the strategies at a combined local government ward meeting in Exmouth, said he hoped future merged councils would also reduce their total number of elected members to between six and nine.

"I am inviting each of the 139 councils within Western Australia to embrace this opportunity to voluntarily amalgamate and to voluntarily reduce the total number of elected members for each council," he said.

The Minister considers that a period of six months from the date of this announcement would be enough time for each council to advise him of its clear intentions for amalgamations and reductions in the total number of elected members.

He also requested all local governments to form appropriate regional groupings of councils to assist with the efficient delivery of their services. This would be in line with proposed grants to local government, under the recently announced Country Local Government Fund which services individual councils and their regional organisations.

"The strategies I have announced today take the regional approach to decision making to another level for local governments within WA," he said.

"In October last year, I established the Local Government Sustainability Joint Steering Committee to review the West Australian Local Government Association Sustainability Study and develop an implementation strategy.

"After carefully considering its recommendations and additional research, I am convinced that local government in its current form is simply not sustainable."

Mr Castrilli said there were 85 local councils in WA serving populations of less than 2,000 people.

He also noted more than 50 councils had representation ratios of one councillor to less than 100 electors and this ratio fell as low as one to 20.

"The benefits from amalgamations across the state, including metropolitan Perth, will be very significant," the Minister said.

"These include achieving greater economies of scale, elected members clearly focusing on governance and long-term strategic planning.

"Increased competition for staff positions within the sector will be a welcome change from the present situation."

Mr Castrilli observed that fewer, yet larger, local governments would improve their State and Federal Government lobbying capacity, and this may lead to additional funding and partnerships from those levels of government and the private sector to further improve services to communities.

To oversee and assist local governments with implementation of the strategies, the Minister is proposing to establish a Local Government Reform Steering Committee to include public and private sector representation and two elected members of the Local Government Advisory Board.

Four working groups will report to the steering committee on a regular basis.

"I urge each local council to take every advantage of this opportunity for voluntary reform," Mr Castrilli said.

WALGA responded:

The State Government today promised it would break an election promise on no forced amalgamation of Local Governments if Councils failed to "voluntarily" put forward plans to merge in six months.

Prior to the State election, the WA Local Government Association secured commitments from both the Liberal and National parties that there would be no forced amalgamation of Councils.

At a meeting of Local Government representatives in Exmouth today, Local Government Minister John Castrilli said: "If Councils do not amalgamate there will be legislation".

When asked by Elected Members to clarify his position on forced amalgamations he told the meeting: "If you don't want to do it, I'll do it, as simple as that."

WALGA President Cr Bill Mitchell said the announcement amounted to abandonment of the State Government's election commitment.

"There is nothing voluntary when you are given a six month deadline and told what the outcome has to be and that if you don't volunteer it will be forced," Cr Mitchell said.

When asked if a Council that determined it was sustainable, could it continue in its current form the Minister initially said "no" then qualified it with: "there will have to be a lot of good reasons why it should stay on its own."

Cr Mitchell said for the past four years WALGA had researched and consulted with the sector on achieving greater sustainability with the final plan now being implemented by almost every Council in WA.

"Setting such a timeline is unnecessary given that all but four of the State's 139 Councils have currently commenced initiating regional cooperation as proposed in the Systemic Sustainability Study final report," Cr Mitchell said.

"What this announcement has done is damage all work towards regional cooperation by Local Governments who will now be focused only on ensuring their own survival in an amalgamation process."

He said the extensive research and analysis undertaken by WALGA had identified at least \$30 million would be required from the State Government to implement the process, however the Minister could offer no view on the amount of funding required.

The Minister told the meeting that any financial assistance to facilitate the amalgamation process would be determined by working committees as yet to be established.

Cr Mitchell said the comprehensive sustainability plan developed by WALGA was based on the premise of voluntary participation to retain local control with regional efficiencies.

"In all our research there was no evidence that the simplistic option of making larger Councils was more efficient, rather that two small problems merged into one big problem," Cr Mitchell said.

"For any sustainability improvements to be implemented and maintained in the longer term there has to be local community support which requires a voluntary process."

WALGA further responded:

That guidelines and incentives for amalgamations are to be announced soon.

Speaking to WALGA State Councillors and representatives of the Gascoyne and Murchison zones in Exmouth, the Minister was adamant that he would legislate for amalgamations if Local Governments didn't respond positively to his challenge.

There are no plans to defer the October election process and no detail is currently available in regard to potential transition arrangements from old to new structures.

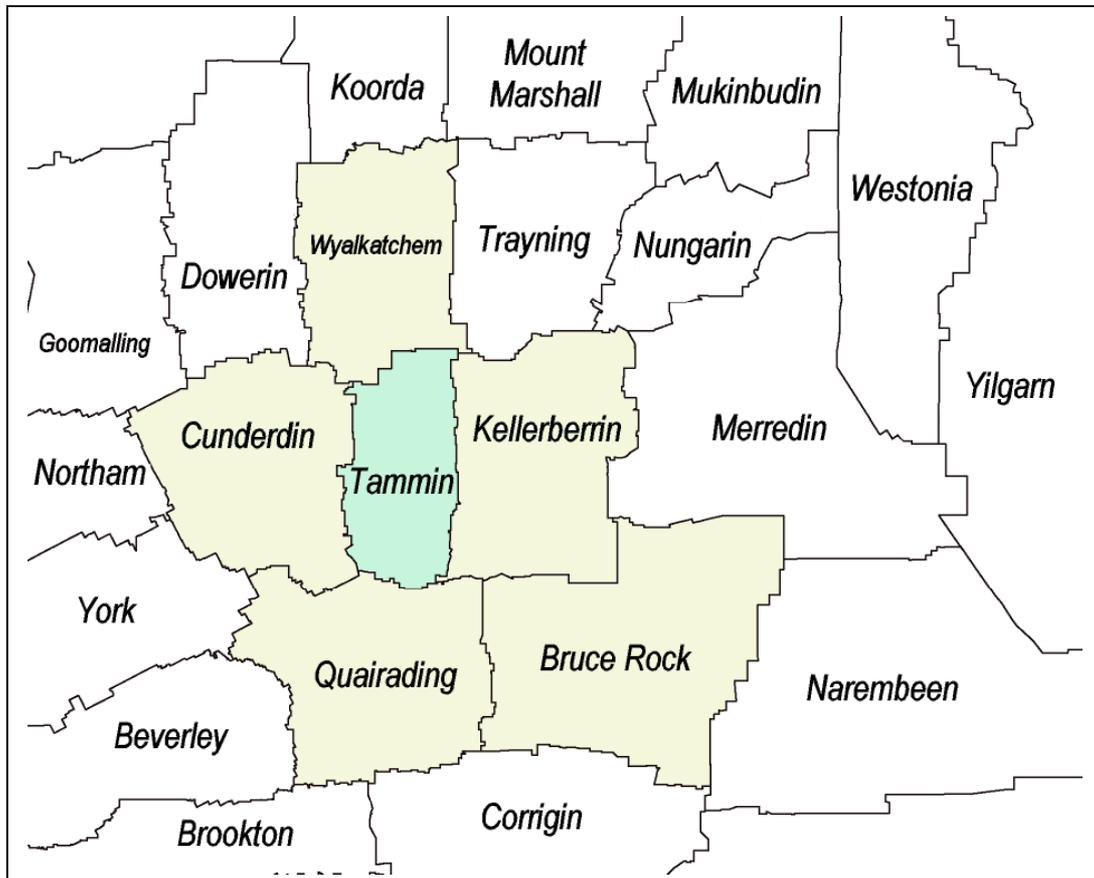
It is disappointing that the government has chosen to ignore the body of evidence presented in the various SSS reports regarding the problems with amalgamations as a reform strategy.

However, the Association will apply all of its available resources to support Local Governments in responding to the Minister's challenge.

I will keep you informed of developments as soon as more detail is available from the Minister and would appreciate being copied into any response, comment, or action by your Local Government.

COMMENT

It would seem that despite pre-election commitments, the Government has decided not to accept the work done by local government on structural reform over the past couple of years culminating in *The Journey – Sustainability Into The Future* and is keen to see a reduction in the number of local governments.



In considering the Shire of Tammin's position and without any further direction from the Minister on what the Government is seeking to achieve, it is worth reflecting on the minimum 2,000 population figure referred to by the Minister and how it relates to the Shire of Tammin's neighbours.

Population figures (Local Government Directory) for the Shire of Tammin's neighbours are:

Shire of Tammin	450
Shire of Cunderdin	1,490
Shire of Kellerberrin	1,165
Shire of Quairading	1,022
Shire of Wyalkatchem	620

Perhaps also worth considering is the outlook from the perspective of Tammin's neighbours – that is who might be interested in joining with Tammin.

Shire of Cunderdin	1,490
Shire of Beverley	1,625
Shire of Dowerin	861
Shire of Goomalling	983
Shire of Northam	10,100
Shire of Quairading	1,022
Shire of Tammin	450
Shire of Wyalkatchem	620
Shire of York	450

Shire of Kellerberrin	1,165
Shire of Bruce Rock	950
Shire of Merredin	3,630
Shire of Nungarin	300
Shire of Tammin	450
Shire of Trayning	467
Shire of Quairading	1,022
Shire of Wyalkatchem	620

Shire of Quairading	1,022
Shire of Beverley	1,625
Shire of Brookton	1,061
Shire of Bruce Rock	950
Shire of Cunderdin	1,490
Shire of Kellerberrin	1,165
Shire of Tammin	450
Shire of York	450

Shire of Wyalkatchem	620
Shire of Cunderdin	1,490
Shire of Dowerin	861
Shire of Kellerberrin	1,165
Shire of Koorda	496
Shire of Mount Marshall	614
Shire of Tammin	450
Shire of Trayning	467

To take this logic a step further becomes a little blurred – it is likely that existing relationships (e.g. ROCs) and distance will come into consideration.

The second part of the Minister's announcement requesting all local governments to form appropriate regional groupings of councils in line with the Country Local Government Fund is a little harder to understand – certainly in the Wheatbelt. Maybe the point made is directed to other areas of the State where VROCs are yet to be established.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Significant but unknown.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Significant but unknown.

STATUTORY ENVIRONMENT

The Local Government Act would need to be overridden (new legislation) to achieve the Government's direction.

FUTURE PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Significant but unknown.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Nil.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That Council discuss the Minister's announcement and wait for the details of the guidelines and incentives.

Simple Majority Required

6. CLOSURE OF MEETING

There being no further business the Chairman closed the meeting at 4.30 pm.

Tabled before the Ordinary Council meeting on 19 February 2009.

Cr R.J. Stokes, Chairman