



Our Ref: SC7870 MC
(in reply please quote)

The Hon. Shelley Hancock MP
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Dear Minister Hancock,

In the wake of your response to the NSW Opposition's Question on Notice (0248) regarding Cootamundra Gundagai Regional Council, I am writing to reiterate my previous requests for an independent review of the Cootamundra Gundagai Council merger.

In the absence of any data available to me to demonstrate the claimed efficiency gains of the forced merger, as the local Member I am left in a very difficult position. The Cootamundra Gundagai Regional Council tell me they are facing a deficit of \$30 million over the next ten years, material which I provided to the parties present during our June 5 meeting.

Before my time as Member, mergers which were cancelled for metropolitan local government areas went ahead in the bush. I hope in our correspondence thus far I have been able to convey the anger that prevails over this process, specifically among the community of Gundagai. As you are well aware this community have petitioned the Government, and patiently awaits the assessment of the petition.

While I appreciate fully that an excess of \$20 million has been provided to CGRC to help meet operating costs and renew community infrastructure for the new Council, I believe the Government has a duty to assess the outcomes promised in the 2015 Council Amalgamation policy, and evaluate the success.

I understand your position is that any demerge proposal would reduce the



Steph Cooke MP, Member for Cootamundra

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economies of scale and advantages available to the council and unwind all the improvements it has made to date. In the absence of the KPMG report, I believe an independent review would help the Government, and myself as Member for Cootamundra, to demonstrate and substantiate this position.

Should such a review indicate positive benefits, current or projected for the merged Council, I believe it would go along way in silencing criticism and correcting the record.

I appreciate your willingness to meet with Mayor Abb McAlister and Councillor David Graham on August 7, and appreciate your attention to this matter to date. I would also like to take this opportunity to formally invite you to visit and meet the community of Gundagai.

Yours sincerely

Stephane Cooke

23.7.2019

Steph Cooke MP
Member for Cootamundra