

## **INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Wollondilly Shire Council

**Date received:** 7/07/2015

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*Our Reference: TRIM 8280#169 AND: MDC*

Inquiry into Local Government in New South Wales  
Attn: The Director  
General Purpose Standing Committee No.6  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000

3 July 2015

Dear Director,

**WOLLONDILLY SHIRE COUNCIL SUBMISSION – INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Wollondilly Shire Council thanks the General Purpose Standing Committee No.6 and NSW State Government for the opportunity to comment on the Inquiry into Local Government in New South Wales and 'Fit for the Future' reform agenda.

This submission supports the NSW State Government's overall NSW Local Government 'Fit for the Future' reform agenda as described in the reform package launched, October 2014.

Wollondilly Shire is supportive of:

- The appointment of IPART to the role of the Expert Panel;
- The use of local government knowledge and expertise in technical assessments; and
- The use of information sourced from IPART decisions on Special Rate Variations.

We believe there is however a need for a clear definition in relation to the 'scale and capacity' criterion. Lack of definitions can lead to a potential for subjectivity during the assessment process, particularly for councils that meet the 'key elements of strategic capacity'.

Further, we would like to raise concern with the potential use of inconsistent data across councils, which may have implications on the assessment process. Inconsistent data could be problematic to the self-assessment process in relation to "backlog calculations". This may lead to uncertainty of information accuracy and inconsistency across proposals put forward by Councils.

There is also a lack of clarity concerning the value/weighting being placed on community input. We are concerned that there is a significant shortcoming in the criteria set by the Government as the focus of the assessment of "Fit for the Future" is based on financial ratios and does not incorporate any consideration of the community's requirements.

The proposed assessment methodology considers Councils' consultation with the community when IPART is assessing council proposals. The methodology encourages Council to engage with their communities when preparing their proposals, document the consultation process and outcomes of their community engagement; however there is no reference to the weighting of community involvement and how the feedback from communities will be considered in the overall assessment process.

To improve the level of transparency, the inclusion of community voices, and ensure councils have allocated sufficient time and resources to community engagement, Council requests that a clear value or weighting be provided in relation to the extent of how IPART will consider feedback from the community in the assessment of proposals.

Council would also value further consultation on the outcome of the current Fit for the Future submissions. A further opportunity to make comment on the results of the assessment of the submissions would be welcomed if circumstances change as a result of the assessments.

Wollondilly Shire is not supportive of forced amalgamations. Indeed, even voluntary amalgamation proposals should be carefully assessed to ensure they can achieve sustained benefits. The issue of local government amalgamations has been ongoing from when the first local councils were created in the late 1800s. Over that time there have been periods of both voluntary and involuntary amalgamations, with a number being undertaken in the last 10 years.

However, despite the ongoing pressures for amalgamations, primarily on the assumption of economic efficiencies, there remains very little real evidence that the amalgamations have actually reduced costs to the community.

The Independent Local Government Review Panel (ILGRP) has identified some Councils as needing to amalgamate to become fit for the future. The ILGRP identified Wollondilly Shire Council as requiring no change with some possible future boundary adjustments. We note, particularly, that Wollondilly is experiencing unprecedented growth. We currently have 43 planning proposals and as well as major land release initiatives we are currently working on with stakeholders for major growth locations e.g. Wilton Junction. We expect our population to rise to over 100,000 over the next 25-30 years and we continue to work closely with the State Government to ensure optimal outcomes for our growing community.

Wollondilly Shire Council is supportive of the role of co-operative models for local government including the 'Fit for the Futures' own Joint Organisations, Strategic Alliances, Regional Organisations of Councils and or shared service models.

Wollondilly Shire Council continually demonstrates the value of co-operative models and initiatives with all levels of Government in and outside our region, Non-Government Organisations, service providers and community groups. The key to collaboration and cooperation has been our ability to share resources and knowledge with other agencies. This has been, and is, an approach Wollondilly Shire Council is committed to as it enables us to strengthen our position, explore new opportunities and implement cutting edge initiatives and outcomes for the benefit of our community.

For example, for many years Council has been building on our existing relationships at all levels of government and non-Government agencies through strategic alliances, resource sharing opportunities, interest groups, sub-committees, associations etc. Council continually seeks and identifies new opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing to provide better outcomes for the Community and Council now and into the future.

These collaborations include but are not limited to:

- Macarthur Regional Organisations of Council (MACROC), the association of the Macarthur Region's three local government authorities, has been in operation since 1986. (Wollondilly, Camden & Campbelltown Councils). As a ROC we continue to implement:
  - Joint training initiatives and regional training sub-committee
  - Asset management collaboration
  - Regional Spoils Sub-committee and Business Unit scoping project
- Local & NSW Chambers of Commerce
- Sydney PeriUrban Network of Councils (SPUN)
- The Wollondilly Health Alliance
- The Dilly Wanderer - Community development and resource sharing outreach service

Wollondilly Shire Council has for many years implemented evaluative processes to ensure we are relevant and focused on our community needs. This is demonstrated through our S.E.E. Change project and our Success Management Program.

The S.E.E. Change project presents a strengths based framework to reflect and document the achievements, innovative projects and strategies Council is undertaking to become a sustainable effective and efficient organisation. It has also produced a document to communicate this to all our stakeholders and enabled a wider exposure of the outcomes and achievements for the Wollondilly Shire. This document is a living document that is reviewed and refined as we improve our processes and is a useful communication tool to demonstrate Council's ongoing improvements and is used as supporting evidence to report to the community outcomes of the Community Strategic Plan 2030.

Council has also implemented a Success Management Program (SMP) which is a Cultural Change program aimed at refocusing on our values, culture and the effectiveness of council's business operations. Council initiated the SMP for the following major reasons:

- Respond to significant growth – a projected population increase from 45,000 to in excess of 100,000 is anticipated over the next 25 to 30 years. Wollondilly Shire is a major growth sector in the Sydney metropolitan region and therefore the Council has consequent high level responsibilities.
- Customer Service - drive to improve organisational values and management to underpin on-going improvement in the delivery of customer service; external and internal.
- Resource constraints - human and financial. Quality systems and processes are crucial to maximise efficiency, effectiveness, flexibility and performance.
- Working relationships, perceptions and complaints – as with many Councils, improved working relationships with applicants, the community and other council sections are needed.
- Performance issues – managing staff workloads, prioritisation of work and the use of current resources to achieve outcomes.

Council also recently submitted a successful Special Rate Variation to address a long standing infrastructure maintenance backlog and the need provides sufficient funding for major asset renewal programs.

Therefore, the 'Fit for the Future' initiative is a welcome reform for Local Government and Wollondilly Shire Council believes we are already on the journey to remain relevant and close to the people we serve.

I have also attached a copy of our Fit for the Future submission for your information and as further evidence on the initiatives our Council is pursuing.

Again thank you for the opportunity to comment on this fundamentally important reform process. If you have any questions on this submission please contact me.

Yours faithfully

Luke Johnson  
**General Manager**