

From: The Douglas Shire Sustainability Group

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To: The Local Government Reform Commission
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Date: 16th May 2007

Review of Local Government Boundaries – Douglas Shire

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Douglas Shire Sustainability Group (DSSG) is an environmental advocacy group representing a broad cross section of the community of the Douglas Shire. Our membership represents 163 people.

With regard to the terms of reference for the Review of Local Government Boundaries we would like to make the following comments relating to the Douglas Shire.

- “Grouping of [like communities of interest](#) to maintain the [social fabric and character](#) of communities and areas of the State.”

The Douglas Shire is **unique** in its’ social character. Tourism, Agriculture, Environment, Lifestyle, Innovation and Excellence characterise Douglas Communities of Interest to create a distinct and unique identity. Consultation has shown there is a “...strong sense of attachment and pride in the Shire, and a deep appreciation of its natural assets.” “Residents also feel a strong attachment to a tropical lifestyle that goes with their environmental values.” [Douglas Shire Tourism Strategy 1998].

We have a very distinctive tourism-based community of interest due to the iconic nature of the unique natural environment.

We have an agricultural community of interest based around the Mossman sugar mill and surrounding cane farms.

We have a discreet indigenous community of interest, associated with the Kuku Yalangi People and their deep spiritual connection to the Mossman Gorge and Daintree Rainforest.

We have a community of interest based on innovation and world's best practice, e.g. local tour operators regularly win awards for best tourism product and practices. The Douglas Shire Council has won awards for its ground breaking planning scheme (that the community helped to establish) and for its environmental achievements.

Amalgamation with neighbouring shires would only serve to diminish or destroy these unique communities of interest and characteristics.

The only area of "like community" would be the area surrounding Julatten, currently part of Mareeba Shire.

- "Consolidating [regional natural resource management areas](#); water, environment."

The Douglas Shire is unique in that it encompasses two World Heritage areas, the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree Rainforest. 80% of the Douglas Shire is World Heritage Listed and the community identifies closely with these natural assets.

Having one Local Govt. body to align geographically to these areas lends significant weight to their continued protection.

Should the Douglas Shire be amalgamated with one of our surrounding shires, this would severely undermine the capacity of the community to protect our natural environment because of diminished focus due to a geographically larger area to govern.

We have exceptional water, and sewerage facilities that are far superior and more cost efficient to those of our neighbouring shires.

We have cleaner, cheaper water (calculated 30% cheaper than Cairns residents), 80% shire seweraged with full tertiary sewage treatment within 2-3 years, sealed road maintenance 40% lower cost per km than Cairns, over 93% of residents have waste collection services & all have free tip access.

Existing Shire boundaries encapsulate best alignments of water catchment areas, natural geography and natural heritage.

How would amalgamation with a neighbouring shire improve this situation?

- "Improved [Financial Sustainability](#)."

The Douglas Shire is in excellent financial shape.

“It (the Douglas Shire Council) is financially sound and has an enviable reputation for its widely admired planning initiatives”.

[**Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport, Hon Andrew Fraser, MP** by letter to Douglas Shire Council dated 8th March 2007].

An analysis of comparative Local Govt. financial statistics clearly demonstrates the Douglas Shire’s superiority over its neighbours. Should we be amalgamated with one of our neighbouring shires this would have a negative financial impact on the residents of the current Douglas Shire due to potential inherited debt, the prospect of higher rates, higher administration costs per capita, and the list could go on!

- “Options for [community representation](#) that reflect the diversity of the State’s regions and that promote representation of discrete communities”.

Presently, seven elected councillors represent the population of the Shire. Any proposal for amalgamating Douglas with a neighbouring shire will certainly result in diminished representation as a result of fewer councillors representing the same population base. This would be disadvantageous and unacceptable to the community of the Douglas Shire. Douglas Shire Council has on average one elected representative for every 1,700 residents. In Cairns it is one Councillor for more than 10,000 residents.

There is a significant concern that the Douglas community’s access to effective elected representation would be reduced to one or two Councillors if Douglas were amalgamated with Cairns.

- [“Amalgamating entire local government areas”](#)

The most sensible outcome of the review would be consideration of boundary changes that enhance outcomes for all parties concerned based on communities of interest. One such example is the communities of Julatten and Mt Molloy in Mareeba Shire where there are already strong linkages with Douglas Shire’s employment, services and facilities and a natural geographic alignment bounded by the Great Dividing and Mt Lewis ranges.

In conclusion, **DSSG strongly opposes** any amalgamation of the Douglas Shire with one or more of its neighbouring shires. It is impractical to split up Douglas Shire from an economic, social or environmental perspective. It is unjustified in terms of economics,

financial sustainability, population size, service efficiency or community identity to amalgamate Douglas with neighbouring Councils.

Our Douglas community is prosperous and self-sufficient and with the recent sacking of the Douglas Shire CEO, we do expect to see significant improvements in leadership and management within the Council.

Problematic governance will also be attended to, as DSSG is confident that misbehaving Councillors will be replaced at the next Council elections bringing about a new strategic focus to the Council and improved advocacy and stewardship on behalf of the Douglas Shire community.

WE urge the Commission to take these factors into account when deciding the future of the people of Douglas.

Yours sincerely,



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