

## Newsletter Number 11 - October 2016

### **WELCOME BACK - THE QLGRA NEWSLETTER RETURNS...**

Where to start? A lot has happened since Newsletter No 10. Some information has been forwarded by email in the meantime. However, there are many things to update and much of the content that follows will be of interest to you.

Over the last year, the Management Committee of QLGRA Inc has met with both the representatives of the Minister for Local Government, Hon Jackie Trad and face to face with the Shadow Ministers for Local Government - Fiona Simpson MP and Andrew Powell MP. The great disappointment is that neither party is able to come up with any policy on local government that represents meaningful change.

Neither major party are supporting community right to boundary reviews, neither are challenging the increasing power of Mayors and their CEOs, neither have formally indicated readiness to conduct a broad ranging inquiry into the state of local government in Queensland post the 2008 amalgamations. If either party – the LNP or the ALP – were to consider one aspect of councils it should be their rates, fees and charges. These are a guide to how well a council is functioning.

For many ratepayers, their rates, fees and charges are going through the roof. Politicians of all persuasions claim that they have the best remedy for reducing the cost of living and often refer us to electricity, car registration or health costs. However the hidden cost that is spiralling upwards rapidly is the cost of rates. Take this example – A single aged pensioner living in my street would be earning approximately \$22,802 per year if he or she owns own house. The cost of rates to that person would be \$2000 per year – close to 10% of his/her income!

**It is this sort of hidden cost that attracts voters to the alternative voting options. RATES are a cost of living issue. To the LNP and the ALP, we say, “if you don’t address the issue of local councils in Queensland you stand to erode your voter base further”.**

### **Exciting News - "Does Your Council Serve Your Community"**

QLGRA Inc proudly announces the first (that we know of) community based Queensland wide survey of Councils. “How well does your council serve your community?” has been prepared by David Horner who has undertaken this mammoth task. It is the ideal opportunity for us to gather views from ratepayers and citizens about their councils. When collated the information will inform both us and many others: Has amalgamation worked? Are there good points? What are the weaknesses? Please take your time to fill in this survey. We look forward to releasing results early in 2017.

It will be up on the QLGRA Inc Website: [www.qlgralliance.org.au](http://www.qlgralliance.org.au) in early November. Reminders will be sent out by email.

**Therefore it is very important for all to have their say on this survey.**

Watch out for the survey on our website and in your inbox.

Please take the time to give your feedback.



From: <http://www.governmentnews.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Council-merger-cartoon.jpg>

by Fiona Katauskas.

# The Good News

**There are two state MPs who are taking up issues of serious concerns to ratepayers and community groups – Peter Wellington and Rob Pyne.**

**Political Donations:** Some progress: Peter Wellington (the Independent MP from Nicklin) has been pushing for far more openness in political donations and for donations from developers to be banned. The following was announced by the Premier in July:

“Real-time disclosure of political donations to be introduced in Qld.” Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk said an electronic real-time donation disclosure system would be in place by the end of the year. The Premier said the system would make political donations at state and local government level even more transparent. “As a new Government last year, the first Bill we introduced to the Parliament decreased the donation disclosure threshold from \$12,800 to \$1,000,” Ms Palaszczuk said.” \*

However we are still waiting to see if the issue of politically driven donations will be addressed. We are also awaiting a response from the Premier for a request to limit donations made by Trade Unions to a similar disclosure threshold. Thanks to those who wrote letters in support of Peter Wellington MP who has been driving this campaign.

\* <http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2016/7/19/realtime-disclosure-of-political-donations-to-be-introduced-in-qld>)

## Management Committee

### Chair:

Colin Hewett  
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### Acting Secretary:

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### Vice Chairs:

Bob Johnson  
Stanthorpe

Cliff Thomas  
Maryborough

### Treasurer:

Jack Muller  
Monto

### IT Officer:

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### Committee Members:

Estelle Bridgeman  
Peak Downs

Terry Gordon  
South Burnett

Joseph Monsour  
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### EMAIL ADDRESS:

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**Complaints Process about Councillor Conduct:** Rob Pyne MP (Independent) has consistently campaigned since mid-2015 to request that the State Parliament conduct an inquiry into the complaints process for councils in Queensland. Many of our members and supporters making complaints under the current process have had the experience where the perpetrator of the complaint is often the person investigating it. The Crime and Corruption Commission does not investigate many complaints, lacking either the will or the legislative and investigative powers to undertake full investigations.

Pyne's tabled documents from all over Queensland detail the problems with the process of getting complaints seriously considered by any government department or instrumentality.

The state government has launched an inquiry "Councillor Conduct Complaints Review", although they argue it was not in response to the Rob's work.

Submissions closed late September. The QLGRA made a full submission. It can be requested from the Secretary or viewed at our website [www.qlgralliance.org.au](http://www.qlgralliance.org.au).

If you wish to view the evidence tabled by Rob Pyne MP in the Parliament, these can be viewed at the Hansard website. We can also organise to forward you relevant links.

We look forward to a far more independent complaints process but don't hold your breath!!

## NEWS FROM WITHIN QLGRA INC

**Two AGMs** – The 2015 AGM was held in Maryborough and was an excellent forum with many new members from that region and other widespread Qld regions attending.

The 2016 AGM with greatly increased attendance from around Qld was held in Yeppoon. Here we had the good fortune to hear Capricorn Mayor Bill Ludwig describe the journey he and his community took to de-merge from an amalgamated Rockhampton Regional Council. Bill considered this one of the greatest achievements of his public life and many of our members would agree. In his report he clearly demonstrated the benefit to Yeppoon (Capricorn Council) being able to govern in its own right. He also expressed his view that it had benefits for the remaining council. Fuller notes on his speech are available by contacting the Acting Secretary.

**Changes to the Executive:** At the 2016 AGM in Yeppoon the following changes to the Management committee were made– we welcome new Chair Colin Hewett and new Secretary is Geoff McKay. However due to Geoff suffering a recent health scare, Jo Kesteven is currently acting Secretary; whilst we have not lost the experience and wisdom Bob Johnson (Chair 2013 to 2016) who happily takes over as Vice Chair and Membership Office. Estelle Bridgeman from the Peak Downs Reform Groups joins the committee with her valuable experience.

**One General Meeting** was held in Toowoomba in May 2016. This was the first time we have held a general meeting and it was over-subscribed and brought forward many ideas and suggestions.

**Updating of our goals:** this has been an arduous process for our group but we have now broadened our goals. We have developed a new flyer to promote QLGRA and detail our new goals – please see final page. If you would like to order a supply please advise the Acting Secretary who will forward your request.

# THE MEDIOCRE NEWS

## Making allegations of corrupt conduct public: Is it in the public interest?

The CCC has seen fit to establish an inquiry into this question. Of deep concern has been the behind-the-scenes push to criminalise people who make allegations before they are proven. If some interests have their way, it could possibly become illegal to tell your spouse, GP or other person that you have lodged a complaint with the CCC, let alone make the issue about which you are concerned public. It is often very hard to nail the evidence of 'grey corruption' that exist within local councils as so much room exists for powerful players to manipulate evidence, decisions etc especially if silence is legislated.

QLGRA Inc has made a submission to the second round of public submissions and this will be on our website asap. For more information the website is at [qlgralliance.org.au](http://qlgralliance.org.au) or to see the CCC site and view submissions so far, go to: <http://www.ccc.qld.gov.au/research-and-publications/publishing-allegations/pacc>.

## The Council Elections 2016.

**Full Postal Voting:** During the council elections held in March 2016 it came to our attention that 20 out of the 73 Qld councils used a full postal vote to conduct their elections. Our analysis showed that in many electorates there was a range of problems including significant reduction in the number of valid votes. This was due to a number of factors - voters not receiving their ballots in the mail, voters not understanding the complexities of the paperwork in order to return a valid vote (including confusion with the referendum that was held at the same time), voters not understanding that a postal vote was the only way to vote and most importantly of all, a feeling amongst many that there was no valid way to ensure that once you voted and posted the envelope, that your vote was counted. Thanks to those who signed the QLGRA petition.

**The State government has announced an inquiry into the Election and the panel will be three former Mayors – chaired by Jim Soorley along with Pam Parker (ex-Logan) and Wayne Kratzmann (ex South-Burnett). Concerns have been raised about the lack of ratepayer and citizen representation on this panel.** We will keep you informed. (More information: <http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2016/10/15/panel-to-conduct-electoral-commission-review-announced>.)

## Queensland Audit Office Report - Management of Assets

The Qld Audit Office released the report: Forecasting long-term sustainability of local government (Report 2: 2016–17) in October 2016. It would appear that the regionalisation of local community councils in 2008 has **not** (as we predicted) improved the performance of councils in yet another significant aspect of their operation. Here is the summary in their words:

"Queensland's 77 councils provide vital infrastructure services that help grow local economies .... These services require councils to manage large numbers of complex, long-lived assets, almost all of which they own and control. Councils forecast they will be collectively responsible for \$124 billion of assets by 2025. For councils to retain existing service levels these assets need to be maintained and then replaced at the end of their lives, while new assets need to be acquired to match population growth and increasing demand for services.

The Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning (the department) is responsible for providing support and advice to councils. In 2012, the Local Government Act was amended and the Local Government Regulations were overhauled. At the time, the department asked us about our ability to audit the 10-year financial forecast of councils. We assessed the sector's ability to produce reliable and relevant financial forecasts as poor, and committed to doing a performance audit on this topic after the legislation had been in place for several years.

This audit delivers on that commitment and examines whether councils can demonstrate that they are financially sustainable in the long-term.

We recommend councils improve the quality of their long-term forecasts and financial planning by:

1. maintaining complete and accurate asset condition data and asset management plans (Chapters 2, 3, and 4)
2. implementing a scalable project decision making framework for all infrastructure asset investments (Chapter 2)
3. engaging directly with their communities on future service levels (Chapters 2 and 4)
4. developing financial plans to explain their financial forecasts and how they intend to financially manage the council and its long-life assets (Chapter 2).

We recommend the Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning:

5. allow councils to set their own financial sustainability targets where they can justify that a different target is more appropriate for their long-term sustainability (Chapter 2)
6. strengthen their governance role, including analysing long-term planning documents, to allow the Minister to identify councils in, or becoming, financially stressed (Chapter 3).

Cont'd below:

QAO report continued.

7. support councils to strengthen their strategic planning by building their capability and capacity to produce 10-year financial forecasts and asset management plans that can be relied on, and are integrated with their annual budgetary processes. They should be renewed and updated at least every four years (Chapters 2 and 3).


8. require councils to include in their annual budget or annual report statements: the long-term financial forecasts for at least three subsequent years after the budget year reporting analysis of actual to budget figures (Chapter 2).

9. broaden the number of ratios required to be calculated over 10 years to include the asset renewal funding ratio, once councils have improved their asset condition data (Chapter 4).”

Taken from: <https://www.qao.qld.gov.au/reports-parliament/forecasting-long-term-sustainability-local-governments>

We are pleased to advise that we have printed the following leaflets to promote the QLGRA Inc. They detail our revised aims in a brief form. If you would like some, please email us at [qlgra@gmail.com](mailto:qlgra@gmail.com)

**QUEENSLAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM ALLIANCE Inc**



The QLGRA is a non-party political association of groups and individuals from throughout Queensland focused on the reform of local government.

The QLGRA's mission is to be a vigorous peak body promoting the views of local communities regarding improved representation and governance standards in all areas of local government.

**Aims**

(A) To lobby the state government in all matters relating to good local government.

(B) To advocate for:

- a) alignment of boundaries that reflect shared community interests and identity;
- b) representative and effective local councils that provide amenity to their communities;
- c) accountability, openness and transparency by local government to communities;
- d) integrity in council elections, governance and operations;
- e) efficient councils providing quality local services at reasonable charges;
- f) community based local councils with boundaries that can only be changed by referendum;
- g) reasonable levels of state and federal grants and subsidies to support local councils;
- h) good governance principles in the Local Government Act and compliance with those principles.

**History** On 15th March 2008 controversial forced amalgamations reduced the number of councils in Queensland from 156 to 73. Five years later, 4 councils successfully de-amalgamated, but applications from many other areas to do so were rejected by the state government.

On the 13th July 2013 delegates from a range of Queensland ratepayer and concerned citizen organisations met to establish and formalise an umbrella group - the Queensland Local Government Reform Alliance, Inc. (QLGRA).

The objects of the association are:

*"to lobby the Queensland Government in relation to all matters related to good local government including the promotion of community acceptable local government boundaries that reflect local community and identity, and to defend the democratic right of Queensland citizens to have a say in the establishment of such boundaries".*


Statewide membership has followed and the QLGRA continues to grow. Membership is open to groups and individuals who share the goals and objectives of the association at modest cost.

The members of QLGRA work to share the commonality of our cause. We share resources and strategy ideas across member groups and individuals. QLGRA members believe in community based local councils. "United We Stand".

For full details of the QLGRA Inc aims, constitution, membership rules and detailed history, please view the formal documents on our website [qlgralliance.org.au](http://qlgralliance.org.au).

To join or if you have any queries please contact [secretary@qlgralliance.org.au](mailto:secretary@qlgralliance.org.au) or phone 0413 242 893.

**QUEENSLAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM ALLIANCE Inc.**



Next Edition will be devoted to a regional round up. Contributions welcome.