

Newsletter Number 12 - JUNE 2017

EDITOR'S WELCOME:

Welcome to newsletter number 12 of the Queensland Local Government Reform Alliance. Once again, a lot has happened over the 9 months in the world of Queensland Local Government. We hope to summarise much of it in this newsletter. However, it all points to one thing. **There is an urgent need for our politicians to step up and fix local government in Queensland.** The evidence of how poorly councils are operating is mounting: Four state run Inquiries into councils, the state wide explosion of community groups fighting council decisions, never ending rate rises for many ratepayers, Mayors and Councillors getting donations from developers, a Mayor charged with criminal offences, the sale of council assets to developers, the loss of green space, the state of council maintained roads, the number of council meetings held in private, the complaints of bullying, the number of new council levies – need we go on???

When we started QLGRA Inc, it was because many communities had been denied the right to a referendum to de-amalgamate, as promised by the LNP. Then the LNP handed more powers to the Mayors and CEO's and the ALP does nothing to challenge this issue and nor will it review the effectiveness of the amalgamated councils. It seems to be that what started as our concern about amalgamated councils has now ballooned into the truth – large amalgamated councils do not serve the ratepayers or citizens. But large councils are defended by developers, Mayors and their CEOs, government bureaucrats, the LGAQ and the political elites of this state. The prediction that the bigger the council the bigger the temptations is proving true.

Now is the time that we need to pressure Politicians across Queensland to make local government an election issue.

Exciting News - The 2017 AGM will be in Gympie

We are planning to hold our next AGM in Gympie on September 2 and 3 2017. The AGMs are a fantastic opportunity to meet with other concerned citizens and share ideas and information.

Speaker: Cameron K Murray has been approached as a speaker and has indicated his availability to speak on Saturday 2nd. Cameron with his academic colleague Paul Frijters have undertaken a comprehensive review of the relationship between developers, councils, land rezoning, the privatisation of public works such as tollways and railways. Their book "The Game of Mates – How Favours Bleed the Nation" outlines the deep concern around these issues. It will be a very informative speech.

The AGM's logistical arrangements are currently underway and details will be available when they are available! (in the near future).

QLGRA ACTIVITIES SINCE OCTOBER 2016

FURTHER REPORT FROM THE AGM HELD IN YEPPON IN AUGUST 2016.

Speakers Mayor Bill Ludwig and Professor Tim Prenzler were very informative. Further to the previous mention of Mayor Ludwig's inspiring speech, Professor Prenzler provided an insight into crime fighting techniques and their relevance to 'grey corruption'. Grey corruption is that behaviour whereby favours are done that are not strictly illegal but end up costing the community - lies and false promises; abuse of entitlements; pork barrelling; political donations and undue influence; gifts and benefits; excessive and wasteful expenditure. His input is resonating in the light of the Belcarra Inquiry (see article below)

If you wish to see a summary of both speeches here is a link: <https://qlgralliance.org.au/2016-agm-forum-yeppoon/>

It is recommended reading.

QLGRA ACTIVITIES SINCE OCTOBER 2016

Meeting with MP Mark Furner planned for 7th July – following previous attempts to meet with Jackie Trad MP when she was Minister for LG, it is very pleasing that the new minister has agreed to meet personally with representatives of QLGRA and hopefully we may be able to achieve positive result regarding local government.

Meeting with PHON: QLGRA in association with Reclaim Caboolture Shire Inc met with Steve Dickson MP Leader of Pauline Hanson's One Nation (Queensland) and have been invited to submit suggestions on local government policy for PHON as the upcoming state election.

Meeting with Greens, Lazarus and Katter's Party: We are hoping to further our input with each of these parties. Local Government issues cut across party lines - with many party members themselves distressed at the poor state of councils and the loss of representation.

We have also made contact with groups such as OSCAR and BRU (peak groups for Sunshine Coast and the Brisbane) over the last year and currently in communication with a group from Victoria (Chan Chieah) to form an Australia wide ratepayers group.

Attendance at the Belcarra Inquiry: Chair Colin Hewett has attended every session of Operation Belcarra Public Hearing (Chair Alan MacSporran). This inquiry has been running since October 2016. The Hearings started on April 18th 2017 and is ongoing. From the onset of proceedings the inadequacy of the electoral act and the inefficiency of the Electoral Commission Queensland became very apparent demonstrating the need for a complete overhaul of both. Walter van der Merwe (Commissioner of ECQ) revealed the inability of his office to properly monitor council elections with 1787 candidates over the 77 councils. **A major concern is that the ECQ does not have investigative powers or abilities.** It relies on complaints from the public to bring to their attention anomalies. Further there is no penalty for an incorrect return. So it would seem that unless it has been brought to the attention of the ECQ by electors the transgressors will go unpunished. **Even more concerning is that when a return is incorrect the candidate is merely invited to amend their return!!!**

The CCC is also investigating the true independence of candidates. As was demonstrated by a number of witnesses, both political parties were shown to be active participants in the promotion of candidates declaring themselves as independent when in fact they were supported and promoted by major political parties and unions.

To date four mayors have been subpoenaed before the commission – Ipswich's Paul Pisasale (now Ex Mayor), Moreton Bay's Alan Sunderland, Gold Coast Tom Tate and in the most recent hearing Luke Smith from Logan.

On the issues of donations to Mayors and Candidates, the allegations against the LGAQ having advised candidates on how to blur the money trail is of major concern to the QLGRA. The hearing went on to investigate the perceived or real conflict of interest with Mayors and Councillors who were generously supported financially by developers. The Hearing also investigated Mayors and Councillors running as undeclared teams or groups sharing resources, finances, how to vote cards and in one instance the use of a common slogan.

Of great interest to our Chair was the poor memory of many witnesses and their inability to remember specific events of their campaign. Our Chairman Colin Hewett believes that the water supplied at the hearing to witnesses may have had a memory erasing chemical in it (tongue-in-cheek).

As a result of evidence presented before the hearing the Honourable Rob Pyne MP Cairns has tabled a number of documents further demonstrating the state of decay within our councils. Research by some media outlets has confirmed My Pyne was not irresponsible in his use of Parliamentary Privilege. QLGRA fully supports Rob Pyne's call for a ICAC style inquiry into all councils across Queensland and we believe it is long over due that some of the allegations of impropriety and corruption go back as far as 2009.



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A SNAP SHOT OF THE STATE OF QUEENSLAND COUNCILS

To convey the depth of problems facing Queensland's Councils we have selected a few news items that speak to the breadth and depth of the problems. This snapshot is the tip of iceberg.

Council bullying 'widespread'

31 January 2017 5:30 PM.

By Jeremy Sollars

Allegations of a toxic workplace culture within local government workforces are not confined to the Southern Downs Regional Council, as documents tabled in State Parliament late last year reveal. As reported in the Free Times on 19 January, a range of council employees, along with some of their family members, have accused Southern Downs Regional Council management of bullying and intimidating staff to such an extent that some have contemplated suicide.

But equally disturbing instances have also occurred in other Queensland councils – including the Cairns, Tablelands, Fraser Coast and Gympie Regional Councils – and in some tragic cases staff have ended up taking their own lives as a result.

Source: <http://freetimes.com.au/stories/2017-01-31/council-bullying-widespread/>

News from the Fraser Coasts Regional Council

(Editors Comment: the background to this is that the former CEO of FCRC was removed by a new council elected in 2016. An internal report detailing the difficulties by consulting firm CPEM was tabled by Rob Pyne MP in the Parliament. The report was prepared whilst the previous CEO was in place. The report detailed extensive inter-staff difficulties. Editor's Italics)

Message from Mayor Chris Loft of Fraser Coast Regional Council:

I will continue to fight to make our council more open, honest and accountable with the community because that is what they demand and that is what they deserve. I want to publicly thank Mr Rob Pyne and whomever was brave enough to put forward the public interest disclosure because *until everyone within the Fraser Coast Regional Council acknowledges how bad things had become* we cannot move forward to becoming an empowered organisation.

Source: <https://www.coolum-news.com.au/news/mayors-message-time-put-complaints-behind-us/3188419/>

RATE RISES – remember CPI is set at 2.1% over the last 12 months:

Brisbane:

Cr Cumming said the 2.4 per cent average rate hike in the 2017-18 budget brought Cr Quirk's personal rate hike tally to 23.5 per cent since he became mayor six years ago. Source: <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/brisbane-city-council-201718-rates-rise-see-how-your-suburb-fared-20170614-gwqk3.html>

Moreton Bay:

Property owners in Australia's third-largest local government area will be hit with a 3.99 per cent increase in council rates, after Moreton Bay mayor Allan Sutherland handed down his council's 2017-18 budget on Friday. Source: <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/moreton-bay-residents-hit-with-4-per-cent-rates-rise-20170602-gwjbjd.html>

Scenic Rim:

Rates on residential properties in the Scenic Rim will increase by 2% this year and Rural 4.9%. But some commercial property owners will be hit with rises ranging from 20% to a massive 290%. Source: Page 3 Fassifern Guardian June 21 2017

Bundaberg:

TODAY the Bundaberg Regional Council handed down its 2017/18 Budget.

Bundaberg ratepayers have been slugged with a 3.45% average increase and a new \$50 a year environment charge. Source: <https://www.news-mail.com.au/news/local-budget-what-your-rate-rise-is-being-spent-on/3189809/>

Rob Pyne calls for a Queensland ICAC to fight corruption. By Felicity Caldwell

Queensland needs an Independent Commission Against Corruption because the crime watchdog is not up to the job, an independent MP argues. Member for Cairns Rob Pyne has ramped up calls for a Queensland ICAC. It comes after weeks of turmoil for former Ipswich Mayor Paul Pisasale. Mr Pisasale was charged with three offences, including extortion, and has been kicked out of the Labor party. He recently resigned, citing ill health, and it was later revealed he was stopped carrying \$50,000 at a Melbourne airport, although barrister Sam Di Carlo stated he had asked him to carry the money as part of a Supreme Court settlement.

Mr Pyne used parliamentary privilege to table documents levelling serious allegations of corruption and misconduct against Mr Pisasale Labor MP Jo-Ann Miller has referred the allegations against Mr Pisasale contained in Mr Pyne's documents to the Crime and Corruption Commission.

Speaking outside Parliament on Friday, Mr Pyne said an ICAC was needed in Queensland to lift standards of transparency and accountability in local government and public administration. "The state government needs to be listening and they need to be acting," Mr Pyne said.

He said an ICAC would need to have broader powers than the CCC, hold open hearings and the definition of corruption needed to be widened. The Palaszczuk government has introduced a bill to widen the definition of corrupt conduct, but Mr Pyne said he did not believe it went far enough. Mr Pyne said he felt "vindicated" by recent events ... He also wants a ban on property developer donations to mayors and councillors.

The 36-minute press conference was attended by about 18 supporters, with some taking the opportunity to address media about personal stories of accusations of corruption or misconduct. Others silently held A4 signs displaying a red map of Queensland with a green tick inside and the words "ICAC NOW".

But a spokeswoman for Attorney-General Yvette D'Ath said Queensland had a very effective body in the CCC. "Someone would need to make a very strong case that its powers, which were crafted in line with the Fitzgerald inquiry findings, were in some way fundamentally insufficient," the spokeswoman said. "I don't think that case has been made. "We are proud of the work we have done in strengthening the CCC's powers." ... Fighting corruption in local government has been a long crusade for Mr Pyne. In 2015, while still a Labor MP, he demanded an inquiry into local government.....

Author of *Game of Mates* Cameron Murray supported Mr Pyne's calls for an ICAC and said matters that "wouldn't pass the pub test" as they were unethical or misconduct were sliding under the radar as they were not captured by legislation. "We need to broaden those powers to capture some of that and to change the culture of what's going on," Dr Murray said.

Source: <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/rob-pyne-calls-for-a-queensland-icac-to-fight-corruption-20170623-gwwzb9.html>

Councillor seeks ban on developer donations

21st June 2017 5:00 AM

UPDATED 7:01 AM

by [Andrew Backhouse](#)

COUNCILLOR Megan O'Hara Sullivan said a ban on property developers donating money to councillors' campaigns was needed to stop any potential for a conflict of interest.

She's penned a letter to the Minister for Local Government and the Queensland Attorney General urging them to consider banning donations from property developers at a local government level.

"Through my experience as a councillor on Toowoomba Regional Council, I have determined that the interests of properly developers consistently conflict with the interests of the wider community," she said.

Source: <https://www.thechronicle.com.au/news/councillor-calls-ban-developers-donations-campaign/3191728/>

Two Logan City councillors have taped their mouths shut and dramatically walked out of a council meeting in protest over what they say is censorship.

Councillors Darren Power and Lisa Bradley said they had been silenced in the wake of a Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC) inquiry by a directive to councillors directing them to flag any subjects they want to raise in council meetings beforehand.

"This has to do with the CCC open inquiry that was held last week and it was a deliberate attempt to gag us and hence the taping of the mouths," Cr Bradley said.

Cr Power added: "I've been here for 20 years, I've never seen anything like this and I've got to say the timing is absolutely impeccable, a week after the CCC inquiry, what's going on?"

Cr Bradley and Cr Power had accused Cr Smith of voting for planning changes that benefited developers who had made donations to his political campaign.

Last week, [Logan City Mayor Luke Smith fronted a CCC inquiry into the conduct of candidates involved in the 2016 local government election.](#)



Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-20/logan-city-councillors-tape-mouths-shut-in-censorship-protest/8635430>

ECQ 'secretive, authoritarian' organisation with management problems, report finds

By Chris O'Brien

The Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) is a secretive, authoritarian organisation with many management, communication and technology problems, according to a review of the 2016 local government elections.

The inquiry report, tabled in State Parliament, made 74 recommendations to urgently overhaul the ECQ before the next state election, which is expected within six to eight months. The review into the council elections, the four-year terms referendum and Toowoomba South by-election was ordered in response to a large number of complaints about the conduct of the polls, pre-poll voting, counting and communication. Chaired by former Brisbane Lord Mayor Jim Soorley, the report recommended that council elections be moved from March to October or November, and that the ECQ urgently appoint a full-time chief information officer and invest in technology. Mr Soorley said there was a litany of problems, "related to technology, communication, the postal voting system, the roles and management of Returning Officers, staffing numbers, training of staff and the organisation of the ballot process on the ground". He said many people did not get to vote and the vote count was slow. "There was a cavalier culture in the Electoral Commission — there were broken systems and poor management — that's a recipe for disaster," Mr Soorley said. "We're lucky the last election wasn't a disaster, but going forward it could be." He said the ECQ's own internal review "glossed over many issues and problems within the organisation".

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-15/ecq-secretive-authoritarian-organisation-report-finds/8619834>

**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).

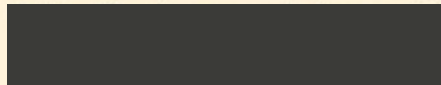
The objects of the association are:

"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.



**QUEENSLAND LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
REFORM ALLIANCE Inc.**



FINAL WORD

For an interesting view I thought I would post parts of the 2016 Labor Party Platform on Local Councils:

7.122 Local government is the level of government closest to the community. Every day it affects the lives of Queenslanders – our local services, where we live, and the look and feel of our communities.

7.126 Labor will ensure that local government elections are conducted in a fair and democratic fashion.

7.127 Local governments should be adequately resourced to ensure they can fulfil the functions required of them by the state government and by local residents. Where funding is provided by state government, resourcing should prioritise in-sourcing (ie through direct employment and without outsourcing) wherever possible.

7.128 The state government has a responsibility to ensure that the state has a system of local government that is efficient, effective and accountable, and that provides fairness and equity for local government employees.

7.130 Local governments should maintain a competent permanent workforce at all levels to ensure continuity of operation and the most efficient and effective provision of local government services.

7.131 Local government utilities such as water supply, sewerage, waste management and transport should not be privatised or contracted out. Local government water retail and distribution should continue to be wholly operated by local government and owned by the people.

All this when they proudly boast: 7.14 Labor delivered a more sustainable local government sector for Queensland by amalgamating unsustainable councils, enabling them to achieve better economies of size and scale.

HAS ANYONE OUT THERE SEEN AN ECONOMY OF SCALE YET?? ANYWHERE?? ANYWHERE??

