

From Douglas Shire Mayor Mike Berwick regarding Amalgamation and Icon Legislation

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today. I am seeking a reversal of the amalgamation decision as it affects Douglas Shire and the resources to properly develop and implement the Icon legislation.

It never made sense to amalgamate the Douglas Shire. For example, as the transition progresses it is becoming evident at least 80 per cent of the staff will need to stay where they are for efficiency and service reasons.

The Icon legislation is an excellent idea which many communities are already seeking. It will need time and resources to do well, rushing it will be a mistake. Your staff have a discussion paper reflecting the current views on the matter, a copy of which is attached.

In light of the above I have outlined my proposal and reasoning below for your consideration.

Proposal

- Douglas Shire is de-amalgamated;
- The Council is dismissed and administrator appointed;
- A community advisory board is established;
- The Icon legislation is developed with Douglas included;
- Douglas staff, (or others) are resourced to develop the legislation, particularly as it applies to Douglas;
- The state establish an environmental/landscape management regime in partnership with the Australian Government for the Shire;
- When the above is complete an election is held with no divisions.

Reasoning

Many amalgamations made sense, Douglas did not because:-

- It was financially very strong with low dependence on grants;
- The infrastructure is in good shape;
- Rates are comparable or less than neighbours;
- It is a conservation and tourism icon;
- It has won state and national environment and planning awards;
- The community of interest is strong and the population is geographically isolated;
- The community is stridently opposed to amalgamation but supportive of dismissing dysfunctional councils;
- A repeat of the poor governance will be very unlikely with divisions gone;
- Shires like Douglas and Noosa can become outstanding examples of sustainable communities demonstrating the links between conservation, lifestyle and economic success;
- Most believe Douglas was amalgamated for the bad governance of this Council;
- It is already obvious at least 80% of the staff will need to remain where they are and operate out of the Douglas Shire offices for efficiency and service reasons.

Benefits

- The community will rejoice;
- Jason O'Brien will hold his seat;
- Jim Turnour's chances will improve, particularly if the state and commonwealth work together on securing the future of the Douglas Shire.

Summary - why Douglas can be distinguished from other shires

- Douglas was an ideal fit with the Commission's Terms of Reference;
- We have a proven track record in environmental management and propose to extend the concept of sustainability from ecological, as in IPA, to triple bottom line;
- The governance issue will be resolved by the electorate, particularly with the removal of the divisions;
- Adequate time is required to develop the icon legislation.

Yours sincerely

Cr Mike Berwick
Mayor