

Douglas firm on breaking free

Thomas Chamberlin

Wednesday, August 27, 2008

© The Cairns Post

ANTI-merger campaigners in the former Douglas Shire last night resolved to set up an advisory board to work with the Cairns Regional Council after unanimously voting to de-amalgamate.

At a packed meeting of 500 ratepayers in the former shire's council hall at Mossman, Cairns Mayor Val Schier took the brunt of anti-merger anger and refused to speak when challenged.

Fed-up over rate rises and a decline in services, the crowd agreed its only option was to try to work with the council until the next state election.

This was not before Steve Macrae from Meals on Wheels said his organisation had gone from paying no rates, under the former shire, to about \$2500 a year.

Angry ratepayers also jeered and laughed at a speech by Cr Alan Blake as he attempted to defend rate rises and the council.

Mid-meeting, a Cairns Regional Council sign was ripped off the podium at the crowd's request.

Seven of the 10 councillors were at the meeting organised by rebel Division 10 Cr Julia Leu.

"I'm honest, I voted against the fees and charges, I reluctantly voted with the budget," Cr Leu said.

"I regretted it immediately and I certainly regretted it when I found out later that other people in the Mossman office and also in the Cairns office tried to point things out."

Two motions were unanimously backed – to support a de-amalgamation and to conduct an independent survey (50 per cent funded by the council) which would look at community perceptions and de-amalgamation costs.

The other motion was to set up a fundraising committee to finance the report.

Both motions requested Cr Leu table a resolution requesting the council's support.

Cr Leu will put forward a motion at the next council meeting, requesting the Douglas advisory board provide feedback, information and positive suggestions from the community.

After the meeting, Cr Schier said she chose not to speak because she "wanted to listen".