

From: statements@qld.gov.au [mailto:statements@qld.gov.au] **Sent:** Friday, 15 August 2008 6:55 PM **Subject:** Former Douglas Shire Council ratepayers and residents now better off

Minister for Main Roads and Local Government
The Honourable Warren Pitt
15/08/2008

Former Douglas Shire Council ratepayers and residents now better off

People who claim life was better under the former Douglas Shire Council and de-amalgamation is the direction to head are deluding themselves, Local Government Minister Warren Pitt said today.

Mr Pitt said the previous Douglas Shire Council had been plagued by mismanagement, and ratepayers deserved better than the sub-standard quality of local government the council had been providing.

Mr Pitt said it was only the 15 March local government elections that had saved the council from being sacked.

"Those elections and the merging of the Douglas Shire Council with the Cairns City Council couldn't come soon enough.

"If it had been another 12 months until they were due, then I'm quite sure that the State Government would have dismissed the Douglas Shire Council, and appointed an administrator

"The former Douglas Shire Council's management practices were seriously sub-standard. It was not functioning as a responsible, competent council should operate.

"It was weighed down by poor management practices across a range of areas. Douglas Shire Council ratepayers and customers were being poorly served.

"The State Government has a responsibility to act when a local council is incapable of doing its job properly. This was clearly the case with the former Douglas Shire Council.

"Mismanagement was rife, and there was little or no prospect of the elected council turning the situation around.

"Merger or no merger, that council was living on borrowed time. If it hadn't been merged with Cairns City Council, or if it hadn't been voted out of office, there was every likelihood it would have been dismissed.

"From information provided to me, it is clear that the council was mired in its own inability to do the job it was elected to do.

"By way of example, the situation regarding the council's management of water supplies was totally unacceptable, and illustrates the former Douglas Shire Council's inability to manage its affairs.

"It simply did not have a sufficient contingency margin in its water storage capacity, and it was more a case of good luck than good management that there was not an incident such as a plant failure or a burst pipe that would have left Port Douglas and Mossman without water.

"If there had have been a major fire, for example, in Port Douglas or Mossman, the situation could have been a complete disaster.

"The Daintree River Crossing toilet project can only be described as a fiasco. The council simply should never have got itself into the mess that it did with this project.

"It wasted a large sum of money through failing to get the necessary approvals, and plan and do the job properly.

"It was the same with expenditure by the former council on management consultants, with very little to show for the substantial amounts of money spent.

"In both cases, it was ratepayers who were shortchanged and left shouldering the cost burden of the council's mismanagement."

Mr Pitt said the new Cairns Regional Council had set about rectifying the problems associated with the former Douglas Shire Council's poor record of management performance.

"The new council is spending \$1.5 million increasing water storage capacity and on other measures to address the water supply issues.

"It is steadily overhauling the management practices that had been in place to ensure a higher standard of administration for the areas that were the responsibility of the former council."

Mr Pitt urged Division 10 councillor Julia Leu to work as part of the Cairns Regional Council team of elected representatives, and not to pursue a divisive de-amalgamation agenda.

"Councillor Leu was elected as a member of the newly-merged council just five months ago, and she should be directing her efforts to working closely and co-operatively with her fellow councillors for the region as a whole, and more specifically for the division she represents.

"I would hope that Councillor Leu understands that significant efforts are being made to address the range of problems that the former Douglas Shire Council had either placed in the too hard basket, or lacked the capacity to properly manage.

"I would hope that Councillor Leu is prepared to work to give the new arrangements and the new approach a fair go, and is not swayed by populist pressures to support turning back the clock on

amalgamation."

Mr Pitt said he was satisfied that people living in the former Douglas Shire Council area were now substantially better off than before the council's merger with the Cairns City Council.

"This talk about de-amalgamation on the grounds that the merger has been a failure and residents and ratepayers of the former Douglas Shire Council are worse off is quite absurd," he said.

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