



Shire of Lake Grace

# Local Government Structural Reform Process

# COMMUNITY UPDATE

## *The Background*

*In February 2009, the Minister for Local Government announced a package of wide ranging local government reform strategies. He invited each Local Government to engage in structural reform and look at the issues of boundary changes, amalgamation, shared regional services and a review of the number of elected representatives (Councillors).*

Thursday, June 4th saw Stage One of the community consultation meetings held in Newdegate and Lake Grace re the Local Government Structural Reform Process which is currently underway. Tony Cooke, who is assisting Council in the process facilitated and led the group discussions.

Both meetings were well attended given the unfortunate but necessary fact that these first round meetings were held mid-seeding. This was due to the 30 August 2009 timeline set down by the Minister for the completion of community consultation and preparation of submissions. Meetings were held in the Library/Telecentres.

A wide range of issues were raised and discussed at length during the meetings. The general feel of the meetings in regard to the future for the Shire was a positive one.

Following is a summary of the 'issues' and the 'questions' raised at the meetings:

## THE ISSUES

### Forced Amalgamations

- Strongly opposed

### Representation

- Shire already has 9 Councillors
- Keep 9 Councillors but don't have Wards
- Don't allow changes which reduce ability for ratepayers to be effectively represented
- Increase in geographical area and population with same number of Councillors - will representation be reduced?
- Increasing size too much will reduce representation
- Workload on Councillors will become an issue – less people willing to take on the role
- Very concerned at inference that Council could become a "Board of Directors"

### Employment Effects

- Shire a major employer
- Increased size of Shire will increase travel/commute times for staff

### Community of Interest / Social Fall

- Need to check who uses existing Shire facilities
- Boundary changes are timely and should be considered
- Forced amalgamations are opposed - creates grievances which take far too long to resolve
- Lake Grace is already well positioned and should avoid being dumped upon
- Any changes should be based on existing strengths (e.g. specified area rating)
- Avoid any changes which erode "local identity" – for existing Shire and for any "new comers"
- Care needed to ensure that the willingness of ratepayers to "volunteer" and be self reliant is not lost

### Regional Resource Sharing - Existing Efforts Need to be Acknowledged

- Already sharing resources and staff on a regional basis
- Working regionally with "Zero Waste" and Tourism
- Voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils with Dumbleyung and Kent Shires should be investigated
- A good opportunity to explore potential Shire boundary changes

### Specified Area Rating

- Farsighted initiative
- Highly successful and strongly supported
- Its retention must be a condition of any changes

### Increased Size

- May reduce rather than increase efficiencies
- May impose extra costs and inconvenience for staff and Councillors
- Specified area rating must be a condition of any changes
- New smaller towns in Shire may demand increased infrastructure facilities
- The condition of assets "inherited" in any amalgamations
- The increased distances from a major restructure might reduce "efficiencies"

### Funding

- Grant guarantees would only apply for 5 years so all transition costs must be resolved in that time

# THE QUESTIONS

- What are the real benefits to Lake Grace Shire of amalgamation?
- What are the costs and benefits of increasing the size of the Shire?
- Whose interests are served by amalgamations?
- Who will pay the indirect costs of amalgamations (letterhead, IT etc)?
- What are the impacts on Lake Grace's existing relationship with Gemini Medical?
- Where will service centres be located?
- What are the implications of the "New Governance Model" preferred by the Government? What is it? – more detail is required
- There isn't enough direction or detail being offered by the Government
- Does Government intend changes to the Act e.g. to limit ratepayer opposition to amalgamations?
- Why the rush for such important decisions?
- Are the assumptions correct - will money saved and efficiencies gained?



*Watch your mailbox for dates, times and places for the next round of meetings!*

In the meantime if anyone has any questions or wishes to make comment, you are most welcome, please feel free to do so - contact either Jim Fraser or Jeanette Bennett at the Shire ☎ 9890 2500.

Alternatively should you wish, Tony Cooke is available to discuss any of the issues - contact Jeanette for details.

Further information on the Local Government Reform process can be found online at the Department of Local Government 's website: [www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au](http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au) - look for 'Local Government Reform' heading and follow the link.