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Submission: Why Great Lakes Council, Taree Council and Gloucester Council Amalgamations is a good thing

The main argument in favour of bigger councils is that it increases "strategic capacity". The argument, advanced by Graham Sansom in his report, The Independent Local Government Reform Panel (ILGRP), which informs the current debate, argues that councils are having to function in a much more complex world and face significant challenges in the future.

They require higher calibre staff, deeper pockets and more co-ordination over larger regions to plan transport, deal with more complex developments and interact effectively with state and federal government..

There is an obvious need to recruit professional GM's and Managers from the private sector with proven track records of running a succesfull business entity.

In the case of Great Lakes Council, Taree and Gloucester councils there is an urgent need for consolidation into one entity and in spite of the recent Morrisson report would provide a more sustainable and profitable outcome. The main issue regarding funding is due the high number of rural roads and bridges within the Taree and Gloucester councils control.

Major cost savings are attributed to head count reduction especially a the Director and management level. There is no need for duplication of positions and even taking into account reduncies there would be significant savings

However the major cost savings for ALL councils is in the procurement area and majority of councils have a tendency to do their own thing. There needs to be centralised procurement especially for large ticket items. All three councils do not communicate on major purchases and run different databases and in the case of Great Lakes council budget to spend \$800k in computer hardware and software and use Technology One as their prime supplier. There needs to be purchasing contracts aligned with State Government in all areas especially Auditing/ Capital Equipment purchases, web site design and maintenance.

Major benefits for the ratepayers would be cheaper rates a sa direct result of the merger, coordinated approach to tourism with Great Lakes Council utilising and promoting Taree Airport for package tours. The rural residents in the Great Lakes communities would benefit greatly as Great Lakes Council neglects this sector and Taree and Gloucester are much more rural orientated.

Taree council has a far better vision for the future and have actively and successfully turned non productive farmland into subdivisions as opposed to GLC who are very negative to rural subdivisions in spite of the farming community struggling to make a living. Finally I would like to recommend ALL councils discontinue and return all Financial securities into consolidated revenue - allowing councils to invest money is simply a distraction from their core business which is providing services to the communities they serve.

Other cost savings are standard in this type of merger namely payroll employee benefits, reductions od council vehicles consolidation of plant and equipment standardisation on computer hardware and software. Sale of council buildings and other duplicated assets

Great Lakes Council, Taree Council and Gloucester Council

Amalgamations is a good thing

As a rural resident in the Great Lakes Council jurisdiction living in Wootton and a farmer I would fully support an amalgamation of Great Lakes, Taree and Gloucester councils into one entity. I am a self funded retiree after working in the private sector for 45 years. My main reasons for supporting this Government initiative is due to the following :-

1. Great Lakes Council rural residents are the poor cousins and in the main ignored by council we have gravel roads that are only maintained when we submit service orders and then the maintenance is sub-standard. Council no longer carries out any weed clearing, scheduled road maintenance.
2. The additional \$13 million funding support from Government offered if these three councils merge would greatly assist the budget deficits budgeted in 2015 -16 by all three councils. The only reason our local councils are opposing the merger and in the process wasting even more of ratepayers money commissioning worthless reports is due to self preservation of their positions which I fully understand. However putting their own personal interest ahead of the communities they represent is unacceptable. In any merger of similar or same entities or companies in the private sector it has been proven in the majority of cases the end result is a more efficient and cost effective entity and it would apply to the public sector.

Additional major cost saving benefits are as follows:-

Computer Hardware & Software

All three councils are using different applications software and Great Lakes Council uses many suites of Technology One which is the most expensive package used by the three councils. Each council is paying separate license fees. There needs to be standardisation across ALL councils for both computer hardware and software this cost saving would amount to millions of dollars.

Auditors

All three councils use different auditors -

Subdivisions

There is a major differential between all three councils regarding subdivisions, Taree council have apposite approach to rural subdivision into residential examples are Diamond Beach, Tallwoods and Kranbach. Gloucester and Great Lakes Council combined have one tenth of the rural subdivision approvals compared to Taree. In the Wootton, Coolongolook area there is a multi- million dollar opportunity for Great Lakes Council and NSW government in rates and stamp duty due to the inability of farmers to make any money farming on lot sizes under 80 hectares.