



Warren Pitt MP
Member for Mulgrave



**Minister for Main Roads and
Local Government**

MC07.6844

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Mr Neil Laurie
Clerk of the Parliament
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Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for providing the Honourable Andrew Fraser MP, former Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport with a copy of the wording of petition number 875-07, lodged with the Legislative Assembly of Queensland, regarding local government reform in the Douglas Shire area.

As the newly appointed Minister for Main Roads and Local Government I am responding to you on this matter.

On 27 July 2007, the independent Local Government Reform Commission (the Commission) provided its recommendations on the name, class, boundary and electoral arrangements for each new local government in Queensland.

The State Government established the Commission as the most appropriate vehicle to provide advice and recommendations on the most sustainable structure for local government in Queensland.

The use of an independent commission is the same process used to determine the boundaries within which constituents vote at both State and Federal elections. It is appropriate that Queensland's new local government sector be held to the same standards.

All Queenslanders had the opportunity to provide the Commission with their individual views on local government reform in their region during its month-long public consultation. The Commission received 47,267 submissions, including 3,796 suggestions that contained specific issues for consideration.

The Commission gave consideration to the 81 suggestions it received in relation to the Cairns/Douglas region. It subsequently recommended that the existing Cairns City and Douglas Shire Councils be joined to form the Cairns Regional Council.

The Commission reported that the amalgamation of the two existing councils is likely to improve the quality of governance to ratepayers of Douglas Shire, which has been of significant concern in recent years.

It also found that the combined local government would have greater capacity to improve its financial sustainability through its ability to achieve economies of scale; attract, retain and develop skilled staff as well as build capacity of systems; and undertake regional planning and infrastructure delivery.

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The Commission identified significant shared characteristics of the two communities of interest, Douglas and Cairns. The whole region is considered to be heavily dependent on tourism which is to a large extent linked to the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (ie. Kuranda Rainforest and Daintree Rainforest). It was noted that strong transportation links exist between Douglas Shire and Cairns City supporting both tourism and commerce along the coast.

The Commission determined that the new local government would have an improved capacity to develop a coherent regional plan for the management of growth in such an environmentally sensitive region of Queensland comprising high tourism values.

In determining its recommendations, the Commission gave consideration to the effect of the reforms on individual communities throughout Queensland. In particular, the Commission noted that many of the submissions it received from Queenslanders expressed apprehension that a specific community might cease to exist if it were amalgamated with other local governments. The Commission considers that identification with 'place' exists within the current local government arrangements, and that changes to these boundaries will not extinguish the ability for communities to identify with the particular locality into the future.

The State Government will pass new laws to give greater protection to the internationally-recognised natural icons located in Cairns Regional Council. The former Premier announced that the Iconic Queensland Strategy will give the force of State law to already existing planning schemes in such environmentally significant areas as Port Douglas.

The Government has accepted all of the boundary change recommendations of the Commission. These were implemented through the *Local Government Reform Implementation Act 1997* which became law on Friday, 10 August 2007.

I acknowledge that change may not come easily to all, however the Government is committed to providing a smooth transition to a more appropriate local government structure.

A Cairns Regional Council Local Transition Committee has been established to help guide existing councils to new arrangements.

Cairns Regional Council will come into effect following the local government elections on 15 March 2008. In the meantime, ratepayers will continue to receive the same services from their existing councils.

Thank you again for your comments.

Yours sincerely

Warren Pitt MP
Minister for Main Roads and Local Government