



Gundaroo Community Association Inc.

c/- Post Office

Gundaroo NSW 2620

gundaroocommunityassociation@gmail.com

President: Anne Barwick

Secretary: Linda Le Mesurier

Treasurer: Moraig McKenna

FIT FOR THE FUTURE

A response from the Gundaroo Community Association (GCA) to the options paper issued by The Yass Valley Council (YVC) addressing the NSW Government's initiative "Fit for the Future"

PREAMBLE

The NSW Government has embarked on a process to create more efficient and sustainable local government in this state. This has involved a number of reviews by independent panels and task forces. In September 2014, the Government issued a challenge to all councils – Fit for the Future – in which councils were asked to prove their capacity to remain independent or agree to amalgamate. Those councils who decided to remain independent were asked justify their position by 30th June 2015.

YVC determined in October 2014 to remain independent. YVC has prepared a draft options paper addressing the issues nominated by the NSW Government in its Blueprint "Fit for the Future." This paper contains input from (not exclusively) and was agreed to by a community working group – convened in March 2015.

YVC posted the options paper on its website on 11th May. On that same day, it advised ratepayers of a series of consultative meetings across the YVC district, commencing on 12th May in Gundaroo and concluding in Sutton on 28th May. Individuals and groups within the council area were asked, if they so wished, to make submissions based on the options paper by 27th May.

RESPONSE

1. General

The GCA acknowledges the efforts of Council to facilitate and consult with a community working group to address this issue, albeit five months after the original decision not to amalgamate, and for the public meeting held in Gundaroo on 12th May.

It is most unfortunate that there was little or no time for Gundaroo residents to digest the contents of the paper and prepare for the consultation meeting. The reality is that a majority of residents were unaware that the meeting was being held and in fact still know little or nothing about the options paper and its ramifications.

The GCA is very conscious of the need to consult with both its members and the community. Even in the smaller arena of Gundaroo it has difficulty in obtaining a comprehensive cross sectional response in less than two weeks. It is questionable, therefore, as to how comprehensive the current council consultation process will be.

Therefore, the GCA does not in any sense refute Council's claim of broad community consultation. However, it has major concerns that the final submission to NSW Government will not contain any explanation for the poorly promoted and rushed community consultation that was undertaken.

2. The Options Paper.

The Blueprint for the future of Local Government, "Fit for the Future" has defined a fit for the future council as one that is:

- a) sustainable;
- b) efficient;
- c) effectively manages infrastructure and delivers services for communities; and
- d) has the scale and capacity to engage effectively across the community, industry and government.

As already mentioned, GCA has not been able to canvass opinion from the majority of its community due to time constraints. Nonetheless, it does feel there is general consensus that the current situation of council independence is preferable to amalgamation. Therefore, the comments which follow are observations designed to assist council in strengthening its submission and eliminating certain perceived inconsistencies.

a) financial sustainability

The GCA notes that the paper addresses financial sustainability essentially over the next five years.

i) **Sale of Land Assets.** The paper outlines in detail the land assets held by council. It does not show current values, expected appreciation over the next five years and in some instances shows action in relation to possible sale will not take place in the five year period. As both Scenarios 2 and 3 indicate that a portion of the revenue will come from land sales, the submission would be stronger if there was more detail as to which land council intends to sell, the current land sale price and potential revenue results for such land. It may also be of benefit to indicate the anticipated revenue returns from the confirmed land developments at Parkwood and Murrumbateman and perhaps, Gundaroo.

ii) **Infrastructure backlog.** TCorp has made specific references to the infrastructure backlog. Scenario 3 seems to addressing some of the issues by outlaying additional funds to counter this. Nonetheless, it would seem more positive if Council was up front in declaring the current backlog, and showing, more specifically, how it plans to reduce the backlog over time.

iii) **Borrowings.** This section makes some general comments about borrowings. TCorp suggests that "...council does not have the capacity to undertake additional borrowings." It may be clearer if there is a statement to the effect that no borrowings

are anticipated until the current loan is repaid (2020), if of course, that is the case or if Council does in fact have plans to undertake further borrowings.

iv) Operating Deficit. TCorp has commented on Council's operating deficits. It may be a positive for Council to indicate how it is reducing the operating deficit. The General Manager indicated at the consultation meeting that at the end of this financial year he was anticipating a break even situation.

v) Case against Scenario 3. Council has listed two items under this heading. It may also be appropriate to mention that some ratepayers (lower income, single parents, some pensioners) may not be able to afford the increases. In this regard, council could counter these concerns by outlining its intentions to assist these particular groups.

- b) efficient;
- c) effectively manages infrastructure and delivers services for communities; and
- d) has the scale and capacity to engage effectively across the community, industry and government.

GCA acknowledges that some aspects of each of these points are addressed in sections of the options paper relating to financial sustainability (eg in the section "How to reduce revenue"). It may be of benefit to Council to address each of these points as separate sections or headings in the final submission. GCA suggests that qualitative statistics and examples are more impressionable than quantitative ones.

GCA is aware of the strong Council support in Gundaroo for the War Memorial Hall Committee and the Park Trust through annual grants to maintain the infrastructure and provide appropriate community facilities and of verge maintenance and street repair. As you are aware, GCA is also involved with Council in discussions re Masterplans and rezoning in the village and has confidence in Chris Berry and his staff that this matter is being dealt with efficiently.

Beyond this, because of the small stature of the village and therefore the comparatively fewer council services, GCA does not feel competent to comment further on these points b,c and d.

e) Joint Organisations

The recommendations from the Independent Local Government Review Panel and the Local Government Acts Taskforce address the concept of joint organisations in great detail and this aspect of local government development appears to be a high priority for the Government. It may be to council's advantage to address this issue in its submission, particularly in relation to the proposed Tablelands JO. The Council has noted its involvement with the Canberra Region Joint Organisation and some of the advantages (eg bulk purchasing). It is reported that many savings and benefits could also be made in areas such as human resources, maintenance contracting and IT through the active and efficient use of JOs.