

THE FON REPORT

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Only two months into council amalgamations and serious issues are already emerging.

It should come as no surprise that no one seems to have the slightest idea of what ultimate costs will be borne by Noosa rate payers over the merging of the three Sunshine Coast shires. Incredibly, no 'due diligence' study was ever conducted to determine cost benefits. No 'financial modelling' was carried out, only vague utterings by the Beattie/Bligh government assuring us 'economies of scale' will flow, ultimately leading to greater efficiency and reduced costs. They have produced no empirical evidence to support this claim, while evidence obtained by 'Friends of Noosa' show just the opposite is likely. Globally, Super Councils tend to grow exponentially leading to bloated bureaucracies and inefficiencies.

The State government provided \$27.0 million to cover transitional costs of merging over 70 Queensland councils yet on the Sunshine Coast alone, the reported cost for a new computer system, needed for the merged council, will cost around \$10.0 million, over one third of the allocated funds. Add wages, relocation costs, travel allowances, new equipment, modified council chambers, communication systems, signage and any number of other hidden expenses and the real costs are more likely to be four times the allocated 27.0 million.

Then we have the co called 'Iconic Legislation', a misnomer if there ever was one. Perhaps 'moronic legislation' is a better description for what was originally promised by a rattled Premier to placate the people of Noosa. The concept was to enshrine planning processes, environmental control and flora, fauna management within the Noosa community, which would be designated as Iconic. As always with this government, things are never quite what they seem, so when the legislation finally passed through parliament it effectively shifted total planning power to the State by not only empowering the Planning Minister with authority to override decisions on any 'development application' but even worse, responsibility for selecting a panel of 3 to 5 people, who may or may not come from the Noosa Shire and could include representatives of the Property Council. Sounds like an April fool's Day joke, but unfortunately it isn't.

In addition to effectively removing planning responsibilities from local governments assessed as 'iconic', rate payers will also be burdened with funding the costs of the Panel and its associated support team. We don't know how much because it seems the government don't know or are not about to tell us, what remuneration each panellist will receive.

Of course money is of no concern to the Bligh government, as she recently orchestrated a pay raise of nearly \$100,000 a year for her newly appointed chief of staff, the formally discredited Mike Kaiser. His package of \$268,000 puts him in the upper echelons of public servants pay and in fact places him above the Premier in the income stakes. But not to worry, Ms. Bligh fixed that problem by creating a plum government job for her husband to help defray family expenses.

Recently, the Auditor General who was asked by the Friends of Noosa to intervene in the amalgamation process on grounds it was nothing more than a sham, lambasted the secrecy of this government. An argument we pressed in a complaint to the CMC after being denied access to documents that passed between the Bligh government and the so

called Independent Reform Commission on council amalgamations. The Auditor General highlighted 40 examples of this culture of secrecy. Amongst them were 11,000 documents handed to cabinet including briefing notes from Beattie to Bligh, and most other documents relating to council amalgamation, thus exempting them from Freedom of Information exposure. This from a Premier who in her first week in office promised to run an open and transparent government while announcing a review of FOI policy so as to improve public access to government documentation.

As Machiavelli once observed, "politics have no relation to morals". But be assured the Friends of Noosa will be carefully monitoring the performances of both the State and Regional governments.

Bob Ansett

Friends of Noosa