

FON REPORT

JULY

On Friday the 4th of July Capt. Bligh and her motley crew sailed into Noosa, shouting from the 'masthead' "I love Noosa as its beauty is like a magnet". (Which of her 300 'spin doctors' came up with that one?) Ironically, no one has done more to destroy the magnet and put this beauty at risk than Anna Bligh.

Meanwhile the Minister for planning, Paul Lucas, surprised us by announcing the makeup of the Noosa Iconic Legislation Assessment Panel. Surprised because we expected the Panel to consist of non-Noosans. However, four of the Panel have residences in Noosa; three have been active over the years in preserving Noosa's environment and quality of life.

Russell Green, Peter Bycroft and John Mainwaring are well known within the community. The fourth Noosa resident is Peter Wood, previously Deputy Mayor of Toowoomba and Commissioner of Queensland Local Government Grants Commission. Leo Jensen the fifth member of the Panel, while not a resident of Noosa appears well qualified as past President of the Planning Institute of Australia. Interestingly both Peter and Leo are also members of the Port Douglas Iconic Legislation Panel.

In a rare response to community clamour the Bligh Government made a sensible decision for a change, which hopefully will protect the essence of our (Noosa) Town Plan. Whether this occurred because she has at last recognised the importance to Queensland of our Biosphere Listing or because of her sudden drop in popularity in the opinion polls, it's nevertheless a positive for Noosa.

Meanwhile further cracks are appearing in the walls of newly amalgamated councils, all the way from Port Douglas to Toowoomba and of course our own regional council. Mostly linked to substantial rate increases. As we reported on numerous occasions, neither Bligh nor Beattie commissioned any economic modelling on the cost of council mergers or conducted basic 'due diligence' studies. They simply said big is beautiful and therefore economies of scale will flow leading to big savings for tax payers.

Well, the Local Government Association of Queensland have assessed the costs of council mergers and believe the real cost will exceed 200 million dollars. To illustrate how far off the government's financial forecasts are, they budgeted for a mere 27 million dollars to cover amalgamation costs for the state.

Here on the Sunshine Coast it has been estimated 40 million dollars will be needed to install a state of the art computer system to efficiently link the

three former shires onto one system. In Toowoomba they claim their costs will increase by 13 million over the next decade in wage parity alone.

Prior to announcing the 9.1% rate increase for Noosa Residents and 17.6% rate increase for rental properties, Mayor Bob Abbot claimed the new council was facing a 'FISCAL CRISIS' aided and abetted by the state government reneging on payment of 6 million compensation for water assets. Further, the SCRC have deliberately kept the increase down by postponing needed infrastructure investment and minimizing other capital expenditure. This would seem to indicate years of substantial rate hikes even without taking into account Bligh's intention to dump a further 75,000 people into the Sunshine Coast and the infrastructure costs associated with it.

On this subject a very topical critique of the Queensland Governments forced amalgamation process was published in the Australian National University Journal. Titled, "NO LESSONS LEARNED" they summarised their study with the following three observations.

1. The Queensland Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC) learned nothing from the hard-won experiences of other states that previously embarked on similar structural reforms of local government.
2. The LGRC also ignored Australian and International literature on structural reform.
3. The LGRC also ignored recent state inquiries conducted by South Australia (2005) New South Wales (2006) Western Australia (2006) and Tasmania (2007) who were unanimous that structural reform (council amalgamations) was not a magic bullet that could cure financial ills of Australian Local Government.

The report concluded noting, "If structural reform in other states failed to remove financial un-sustainability, why should it be expected to work in Queensland. Local infrastructure across Australia is in such a parlous condition that only the injection of billions of dollar – far beyond the financial capacity of local governments – could remedy the situation".

All of which confirms Friends of Noosa's position from the very beginning that the LGRC was nothing more than a sham aimed at deflecting anticipated community anger away from the Beattie/Bligh government.

We are pleased to announce John Taylor of Sea Change Noosa has joined our executive group and has taken over management of our webpage. A reminder, our web address is: www.friendsofnoosa.org

Bob Ansett

