

“De-amalgamation vote a victory for democracy” (Courier Mail, 11/3/13)

Four Queensland shires can now go forward consolidating their citizens’ aspirations for the way they live.

Since amalgamation there has been widespread disquiet across the state by people feeling distanced from a regional layer of government. An earlier Premier of Queensland, explaining his rationale behind his controversial decision to amalgamate smaller local governments in 2008, stated he was prompted by concern over the future of state governments. The large regional councils now loom like tectonic plates moving closer to State Government level with a distinct possibility of a single layer of government in the future. The resultant voice of the people will fade even further into the distant background.

In earlier days, Councils were a 50 – 50 mix – with power being divided pretty evenly between bureaucrats and elected councillors

For nearly five years, in too many significant Council decisions **the representatives of Tamborine Mountain have been consistently outvoted by representatives of other areas (2 : 5)** . This is not unexpected, given the regional shire is composed of widely diverse communities, and is under the stewardship of councillors with vastly different skill levels, motivations and personal philosophies. Two votes out of seven doesn’t allow for much to happen, or not happen.

Part of the problem now is the control senior bureaucrats wield. Planning schemes should provide some certainty to residents and confirm their aspirations. Because of the now complex planning schemes, many different outcomes can be achieved without anyone but an expert able to make an informed judgment on the material presented. So when councillors sit facing a battery of bureaucrats with “expert” pre-determined recommendations on particular issues, a very large problem arises. It is very easy to go along just for the ride.

Bureaucrats are able to present recommendations which may vary with what a community representative, or indeed the community itself, may desire. As they say, “he who pays the piper calls the tune”.

SRRC’s Body Corporate style of governance is to ensure Council is presented in the best possible light. Spin doctors are appointed specifically to do this.

Today, does anyone think that a large cashed up developer makes his initial approach to Council at the desk on the ground floor? . And regular spats with developers, especially in the P & E Court do not look good – especially for the Council mandarins.

That the council planners have regularly chosen to contradict the formal grounds residents put forward to object to development applications suggests the presence of a stronger imperative.

Today, except for representatives of Tamborine Mountain, councillors effectively operate as extensions of the bureaucracy.

This is just a short jump to total disconnection between this layer of government and the people.

Whilst ratepayers at the base of the pyramid lose out on satisfactory representation, it is the uppermost several people at the apex of the Council hierarchy whose political aspirations are greatly enhanced.

We don’t have much chance of having a voice under the present system, but Nigel’s attempt to establish councillor only meetings is a start to at least improve local input. However, Nigel copped a serve by Mayor Brent (Beaudesert Times, 23/1/13) who was unhappy about anyone stepping outside the “parrot” line orchestrated from above and rebuked our Councillor for doing a Derek Swanborough.

Spearheading the mountain rate payers' responses has been the 100 year old Tamborine Mountain Progress Association, a registered Community Purpose organization. Resident alerts, with formal information carried in the T.M. News, allowed residents to have meaningful input regarding possible change to their lifestyles.

It is common practice under dictatorships that **muzzling the press** is an imperative. Even in the current Federal debate, there is the suggestion that the powers are actively seeking to punish outlets they do not like.

In this vein, there was a council motion, (Oct, 2012) "**that Council revisit media release strategy to be sure that media outlets provide value for money in relation to circulation numbers and providing value for Council's media spend**". (Cr. Sanders, Beaudesert)

The new proprietors of the T.M. News were cautioned about having any association with the TMPA. In trying to build up a new business, the threatened loss of Council advertising is a serious consideration. The T.M. News did not have this problem before as its compilers were volunteers and profit was not an issue.

So, this paper will no longer publish **TMPA alerts** about imminent possible threats to the mountain lifestyle, at least in the foreseeable future. We'll have to think of something else.

Similarly, **Phil Giffard's regular Council Watch column** which was published for many years has been dropped. Phil did not choose to stop writing his column. An experienced writer since the mid 90's, ex-councillor and popularly regarded as the "father of our DCP", Phil was able to clearly explain to readers his observations of the activities of Council.

It should be remembered that in 2010, the editor of the **Daily Star** was ordered by a Council representative to remove articles and also to rearrange his paper's layout. Mr. Smith's response was the expected outrage and an official complaint was made to the media watchdogs.

With community response effectively silenced, the spotlight removed and with shutters drawn (it is now difficult to learn much from on line council reports) - Mayor Brent's seemingly squeaky clean ship of state sails on.

Community forum

Crs Nadia O'Carroll and Nigel Waistell will hold the next Community Forum on Sunday, 17th March, 2 pm in the Vonda Youngman Community Centre.

Our Councillors are working very hard, and we should make a big effort to support them.

Power Parade...."Save our water" campaign

For purchase of tickets in the Kia Art Union, please contact Norelle Lino on norelle@creativeasset.com.au

Alternatively, phone Norelle on 5545 2852.

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