



## **Shire of Victoria Plains**

### **Minutes of a Special Meeting of Council held**

**On  
At  
Commencing**

**Tuesday 13th October 2009  
Council Chambers, Calingiri  
4.10pm**

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## 1 DECLARATION OF OPENING

The Presiding Member declared the meeting open at 4.10pm.

## 2 ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES

<b>President:</b>	Cr G Erickson	South Ward
<b>Councillors:</b>	Cr N Smith	East Ward
	Cr B Johnson	East Ward
	Cr D Holmes	South Ward
	Cr D Lovelock	West Ward
	Cr J Kelly	West Ward
	Cr J Brennan	Central Ward
	Cr S Young	Central Ward
<b>Apologies:</b>	Cr M Anspach	West Ward
<b>Chief Executive Officer:</b>	Mr H Hawkins	

## 3 BUSINESS TO BE DISCUSSED

### 3.1 SHIRE OF VICTORIA PLAINS LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURAL REFORM IN WA DRAFT SUBMISSION SEPTEMBER 2009

FILE REFERENCE: A1.17.2  
REPORT DATE: 7<sup>th</sup> October 2009  
APPLICANT/PROPONENT: None  
OFFICER DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST: None  
PREVIOUS MEETING REFERENCES: Various since July 2009  
AUTHOR: Harry Hawkins - Chief Executive Officer  
ATTACHMENTS: Draft Report Format

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:** To advise Council of the draft submission document prepared by the Chief Executive Officer and allow council to endorse the submission.

## **DRAFT REPORT**

The Shire of Victoria Plains takes this opportunity to make a submission on the issues of structural reform. We believe that the process is flawed in that it did not allow sufficient time for the local community to be properly consulted and in the wheat belt areas where many Local Government Councillors are farmers their opportunity to give sufficient time and therefore input to the submission was restricted by seeding and subsequent farming activities.

As one of the original 19 Western Australian Road Boards established in 1871 the Shire of Victoria Plains originally stretched from the Indian Ocean to the South Australian border and from Carnamah in the North, to Bolgart in the South. The Shire has a long and rich history which we would like to preserve. Today, the total area lies across 2,570 sq km with a population of 942. The area is renowned for its prosperous agricultural activities, beautiful wildflowers, longstanding heritage and of course, as the home of the Benedictine Community at New Norcia.

The Shire of Victoria Plains like most Local Governments in Western Australia agrees that there is a need in the sector for reform however again like many local governments we do not believe that amalgamations should be the only appropriate way to achieve this. It is our belief that a formal shared services alliance without the additional layer of bureaucracy and compliance of a formal regional council would be the best model for us. This could be best achieved using a Strategic Alliance model or the South Australian subsidiary model as proposed by the South East Avon Voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils (SEAVROC).

### **SHIRE OF VICTORIA PLAINS STATISTICS**

Area 2,570 sq km

Population 942

Road length 817km

Number of Electors (2007) 789

Rate Revenue (2008/09) \$1,681,136

Operating Budget (2008/09) \$3,168,761

Capital Budget (2008/09) \$2,578,741

Industries: Grain, hay, livestock, tourism, transport and wild flowers

### **The Journey Thus Far**

After the Minister's announcement in February 2009 the Shire of Victoria Plains held a Councillor and Senior Staff Workshop run by an independent facilitator, Stephen Goode. This early workshop came to the conclusion that there were not a lot of advantages for the Shire of Victoria Plains in amalgamating and that the best course of action would be to stay as we are or stand alone.

A project team was elected which consisted of the Shire President, Deputy Shire President and Chief Executive Officer who then consulted with all seven neighbouring shires. A summary of these meetings and the outcomes is as follows

#### 7th April – Shire of Toodyay

Toodyay have appointed consultants to review benefits etc to communities of Toodyay and Chittering if they were to merge. Victoria Plains welcome to join in. Toodyay are open to merging with the Shire of Victoria Plains regardless of what happens with Chittering.

#### 8th April – Shire of Wongan Ballidu

The Shire of Wongan Ballidu's 1st option is for a merger of 5 shires Wongan Ballidu, Goomalling, Dowerin, Wyalkatchem, Koorda and their 2nd option was 6 shires, 5 as above plus Vic Plains. Happy to have Vic Plains merge with them and others

#### 15th April – Shire of Goomalling

The Shire of Goomalling is happy to merge with Victoria Plains however they are looking at a merger with Dowerin and perhaps Wyalkatchem and Koorda. Goomalling believe that they are sustainable in their own right.

#### 20th April – Shire of Chittering

The Shire of Chittering is happy to talk to Victoria Plains however at this time their 1st preference is to merge with Toodyay (see them as like animal). However they are happy for a Toodyay, Chittering and Victoria Plains merger.

#### 29th April – Shire of Moora

The Shire of Moora would be open to any merger with Vic Plains and they would like Victoria Plains as a partner. Moora is currently looking at a part of Dandaragan, part of Coorow and part of Victoria Plains. They were disappointed with lack of interest in Moora by other shires but could continue on their own and they would like to see the CMVROC continue.

#### 6th May Telephone Call to Shire of Dandaragan

Dandaragan advise that they are not looking at any proposals that impinge on Victoria Plains therefore in view of the distances involved they don't feel there is any point in having a face to face meeting. They would however like to keep the lines of communication open so we are each aware of what the other is proposing.

#### 6th May Telephone Call to Shire of Gingin

Gingin advised that their Council have informally spoken to Chittering and Dandaragan but wanted to stay on their own. Gingin said they would meet if we wanted to however we should probably go down the same path as we are with Dandaragan and not meet but keep the lines of communication open.

This resulted in Council taking the decision that the best option for ratepayers would be to look at collaborating with shires to the south and led to the engagement of the consultant looking at the benefits of a merger between the Shires of Toodyay and Chittering to identify the benefits to the community of the Shire of Victoria Plains of a merger with the Shires of Toodyay and Chittering, a merger with another shire or shires and to stand alone. The consultants final report was received late August and concluded that there were only moderate savings available but these could be more than absorbed by the cost of staff

redundancies and that there would be significant reductions in Grants Commission funding from year six onward .The community was then consulted through five public meetings held in Calingiri, Piawaning, New Norcia, Gillingarra and Bolgart where they were provided with the pros and cons of four options

1. Stay as we are,
2. Voluntary merger (amalgamation),
3. Split up the shire (boundary changes), and
4. A shared services alliance.

Amalgamations and/or boundary changes were totally rejected at all meetings and the preference was to stay as we are. As that was not recommended the next best option was considered to be a shared services alliance.

The project team and other councillors were then involved in several workshops in the region and further meetings with neighbouring shire representatives to further expand the various possible structures for reform that met with the direction given to the Council by our electors. Individual councillors conducted numerous telephone calls with Mayors, Presidents, CEO's, consultants and councillors of shires and cities in NSW, S.A., Qld and W.A. in an effort to better understand the potential benefits and costs/downsides of the various reform models available that could suit our situation.

Council then went back to the community to advise them of the outcomes of these workshops, discussions and deliberations and the ultimate resolution was framed at that public meeting held on September 21<sup>st</sup>.

## **STRUCTURAL REFORM**

The guidelines issued by the Local Government Structural Reform Steering Committee ask for the submission to address four main points being;

- Amalgamation
- Representation
- Regional grouping
- Transition timeline.

### **Amalgamation**

The Shire of Victoria Plains, as a result of the investigations it has undertaken, is not convinced that amalgamation with any of its neighbours, both singly or as a group, would benefit our electors as well, and appropriately, as a selective, formal resource (physical and/or intellectual) sharing arrangement with willing partners would achieve.

Amalgamations would be costly to implement, greatly reduce representation on behalf of our electors, impose inappropriate pressures and divisions on the social structure of our Shire, result in inequitable changes in rates and go against the wishes of our residents. Should the State Government be able to provide evidence that significant financial and social benefits for our residents would be gained by amalgamation of our Shire with others then we would be willing to revisit the reform process and recommend this to our electors. Research our councillors have undertaken on the results of amalgamations elsewhere in Australia have revealed a consistent pattern of cost increases, including staff increases in some cases, and this alone would cause us to doubt the value of

following the amalgamation strategy.

The Shire of Victoria Plains Council has opted to follow the motion passed at the Community meeting held in Calingiri on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2009 and passed a resolution "That the Victoria Plains Shire Council submits to the Minister by the 30th September 2009 that it will remain, at this point in time, as the existing local government entity of the Victoria Plains Shire" with an additional sentence "that the shire continue to look at shared services/resources".

Council and Management have worked hard over the last five years to successfully raise the level of financial sustainability in the shire and would like the opportunity to continue on that journey into the future while retaining our own identity.

The Shire of Victoria Plains is unique in several ways, the shire has a common boundary with seven other local governments, it also has no major town or population centre but seven small towns and settlements spread throughout the shire with no one community of interest. This makes it very difficult to contemplate an amalgamation with any of its neighbouring shires on economic or social grounds.

Agricultural and household supplies are available in the towns of Bolgart, Calingiri and Yerecoin while others who choose not to shop locally can travel to the metropolitan area, Bindoon, Goomalling, Moora, Toodyay or Wongan Hills depending where they live in the shire and the products they require. Medical services are also sourced from Bindoon, Gingin, Goomalling, Moora, Toodyay, Wongan Hills or the metropolitan area. Regularly used local sporting facilities are available in Bolgart, Calingiri and Yerecoin with hotels, taverns or licensed sports clubs situated in Bolgart, Calingiri, Mogumber, New Norcia and Yerecoin. There are shire and community run town halls in Bolgart, Calingiri, Gillingarra, Mogumber, Piawaning and Yerecoin and the shire also has libraries in Bolgart, Calingiri and Mogumber. Volunteer emergency services are located throughout the shire with St John Ambulance sub centres in Bolgart, Calingiri and New Norcia and bush fire brigades in Bolgart, Calingiri, Gillingarra, New Norcia and Yerecoin.

This diversity of services and facilities located in the seven towns and settlements throughout the shire and the proximity to various neighbouring larger centres and the metropolitan area also highlights the inability to nominate a community of interest for amalgamation.

The communities of the Shire of Victoria Plains will never have the opportunity to receive many of the services delivered by some neighbouring shires not because of any capacity constraint but due to the nature of the shire's makeup of seven small towns and settlements that do not provide for a population density to make some service provision viable. Residents have for many years been happy to make up for this by travelling to the metropolitan area or larger neighbouring towns and this will not change with amalgamation. Having a larger shire with a centre in a bigger town will not increase the viability of service provision in the small low population towns and settlements in the current Shire of Victoria Plains.

Resource sharing and regional service provision will ensure that services continue to be available while long term planning and budget allocation to reserves will provide funds to maintain community assets.

Calingiri, the largest town and administrative centre of the present Shire of Victoria Plains would be decimated by the removal of the shire administration and/or works depot from the town as several local businesses and sporting clubs rely on the shire and its staff for their survival and without work at the shire many of the staff members would most likely have to leave the town and shire.

Resource sharing and regional cooperation would provide the economies of scale found with larger amalgamated shires while enabling the local governments to bring their workforces and administrative functions together gradually with little community backlash.

The Shire of Chittering has given a strong undertaking to be involved with Victoria Plains in the establishment of a shared services/resources alliance along the lines of the South Australian subsidiary model. Other shires that in our opinion could benefit from becoming involved in such an alliance would be Goomalling, Toodyay, Moora and Wongan Ballidu.

### **Representation**

The Shire of Victoria Plains completed a review of wards and representation in 2008 which concluded that the current four wards with nine councillors should be retained with minor boundary changes. It is therefore considered appropriate to retain this for the immediate future however Council would be open to another review to reduce the number of elected members.

### **Regional Grouping**

The Shire of Victoria Plains is currently a member of the Central Midlands VROC and operates with the other shires in that group as a region however with Moora and Wongan Ballidu pursuing other amalgamation options and the Victoria Plains Council looking south to Chittering and Goomalling for increased resource sharing opportunities the preferred regional grouping should the CMVROC be dissolved would be to join with the current AROC group of Chittering, Toodyay, Goomalling, Dowerin and Northam.

### **Transition Timeline**

The Transitional Timeline is not significant for the Shire of Victoria Plains as we are not proposing to amalgamate with any neighbouring shire however we would like to increase our shared services/resource sharing with willing partner(s) as soon as practicable.

Suggestions for minor changes were put forward by Cr Lovelock.

Cr Kelly noted that in the early part of the submission of meetings held with neighbours the word merge may be seen as final and should include the word "discussion".

Cr Smith agreed the submission is OK as is.



Cr Holmes is not happy with July 2010.

Cr Brennan is not happy with July 2010 and noted that Victoria Plains should be wary of Chittering as they are against GMO's. Chittering may end up telling Victoria Plains how to farm.

Cr Young agrees with changes.

Cr Lovelock read out a motion from the Liberal Party State Conference.

“that the Liberal Party is opposed to forced amalgamations and the use of financial sanctions to force amalgamations”

These motions were defeated at the conference.

**RESOLUTION 259/09**

**Moved Cr Brennan seconded Cr Kelly that Council endorse the Shire of Victoria Plains Submission to the Minister for Local Government on Structural Reform as finalised and agreed at this meeting.**

**MOTION PUT & CARRIED 8/0**

Cr Erickson wished all Councillors involved in the Elections on the 17<sup>th</sup> October well.

**4 DECLARATION OF CLOSURE**

There being no further business the Presiding Member declared the meeting closed at 4.53pm

Signed this                      20<sup>th</sup>                      day of                      October    2009

Presiding Member .....