



Mr Dale Stewart
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Report sent 1/6/10

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Report to C.P. re 2010

Dear Dale

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY SHIRE COUNCILS REPRESENTATION

As you are aware, a meeting of country Shires was convened at 6.30pm on 4 August 2010 in the Karri Room at the Parmelia Hilton Hotel Perth to discuss the perceived lack of representation of country Shires in respect of issues relevant to rural local government and the possibility of forming an association representing rural interests, whether in conjunction with or independent of the existing representational structures.

Twenty-two country Shires were represented at the meeting by forty-eight delegates as listed in the *attached* report from the meeting.

As per the wishes expressed by the Meeting and in accordance with requests from many Shires who did not attend the meeting, we have enclosed a copy of the report from the meeting which summarises what was said at the meeting and details the outcomes achieved by the meeting. You are invited to comment on the report and to participate in the ongoing processes from this meeting.

9/2/13 2051

You will see from the report that a Working Group was formed to pursue a range of options to improve the representation of country local governments at a State level.

A meeting of the Working Group will be convened in the near future. So as to ensure that you are kept informed of the developments we will circulate copies of the minutes of the meetings of the Working Group to all country Shires in WA.

We look forward to your comments on the subject matter of the meeting and to your ongoing participation in this process.

Yours sincerely

Mike FitzGerald

Mike Fitz Gerald
 PRINCIPAL
 Monday, 9 August 2010

*if broken any
-LGS*

Attachment 8.5.2

Industrial Relations & Management Strategists

REPORT ON A MEETING HELD TO DISCUSS THE PROPOSED FORMATION OF A NEW WESTERN AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY SHIRE COUNCIL'S ASSOCIATION.

The meeting was held in the Karri Room at the Parmelia Hotel on Wednesday 4th August 2010, commencing at 7:00 pm.

1. ATTENDANCE

Shire of Carnamah:	Bill Atkinson – CEO
Shire of Corrigin:	Cr Lyn Baker – Shire President Julian Murphy – CEO
Shire of Cranbrook:	Cr Doug Forrest – Shire President Anthony Middleton – CEO
Shire of Dalwallinu:	Cr Robert Nixon – Shire President Peter Crispin – CEO
Shire of Dumbleyung:	Cr Gordon Davidson – Shire President Cr Ross Ditchburn – Deputy Shire President Henry Van Der Ende – CEO
Shire of East Pilbara:	David Kular – HR Manager
Shire of Goomalling:	Cr John Bird – Shire President Clem Kerp – CEO
Shire of Kent:	Cr Catherine Crosby – Shire President Cr Megan Tuffley - Councillor Peter Bentley – CEO
Shire of Kojonup:	Cr Jill Mathwin – Shire President Stephen Gash – CEO
Shire of Kondinin:	Cr Allen Smoker – Shire President Cr Lindsay Tuckwell – Councillor Peter Webster – CEO
Shire of Kulin:	Cr Jim Sullivan – Shire President Cr Barry West – Deputy Shire President Greg Hadlow – CEO
Shire of Meekatharra:	Cr Norm Trenfield – Deputy Shire President
Shire of Mt Magnet:	Cr Ashley Dowden – Shire President Cr Will Scott – Councillor David Burton – CEO
Shire of Narembeen:	Cr Stephen Padfield – Shire President Cr Rhonda Cole – Deputy Shire President
Shire of Shark Bay:	Cr Cheryl Cowell – Shire President
Shire of Toodyay:	Cr Bob Somers – Deputy Shire President Cr Bob Jackson – Councillor Cr Debbie Larkin – Councillor Cr Charles Wroth – Councillor

Shire of Trayning: Cr Geoff Waters – Deputy Shire President
Niel Mitchell – CEO

Shire of Vic Plains: Cr Geoff Erickson – Shire President
Harry Hawkins – CEO

Shire of Wagin: Cr Phil Blight – Shire President

Shire of Williams: Cr John Cowcher – Shire President
Cr David Earnshaw – Deputy Shire President
Ryan Duff – CEO

Shire of Woodanilling: Belinda Knight – CEO

Shire of Yalgoo: Cr Terry Iterbide – Shire President
Cr Len Terry - Councillor
Sharon Daishe – CEO

Fitz Gerald Strategies: Mike Fitz Gerald – Principal
Lisa Farrugia - Assistant

2. APOLOGIES

Shire of Carnamah: Cr Merle Isbister – Shire President

Shire of Mt Magnet: Cr Karen Williams – Councillor

Shire of Woodanilling: Cr Russell Thompson – Shire President

3. INTRODUCTION

Mr Mike Fitz Gerald, Principal of Fitz Gerald Strategies welcomed attendees and gave a brief overview of the reasons for this meeting.

He explained that the former Local Government Association, Country Urban Councils Association and Country Shire Council's Association (CSCA) operated under the umbrella organisation of the Western Australian Municipal Association.

About ten years ago the three associations amalgamated into the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA). From the outset there were misgivings from country Shires as to whether WALGA would effectively represent the interests of country local government.

In recent years the level of discontent with WALGA appears to have increased and Mr Fitz Gerald was asked to convene a meeting to address the concerns of country Shires.

The meeting agreed that Mr Fitz Gerald facilitate the business to be discussed this evening.

The first item of business was to discuss the following proposed motion.

That this meeting confirms its support for the establishment of a new Western Australian Country Shires Association.

Mr Fitz Gerald invited discussion and debate on the proposed motion.

Several speakers addressed the meeting and the following points were noted:

- We should not reinvent the wheel. It was a majority decision for the formation of WALGA and efforts should be made to address the shortcomings of that organisation as the representative body for country local government.
- Political Parties would not recognise the authority of a new Country Shire Councils Association.
- WALGA needs to be audited as to its effectiveness.
- WALGA could be restructured into two sections. One being to focus on metropolitan issues and the other on rural issues. Each section could be administered by individual deputy CEO's.
- Concern was expressed at the lack of information in the annual financial statements of WALGA. For an organisation of this size there should be more detail and accountability as to its financial performance.
- The former CSCA had the capacity to directly interface with State Government Ministers and carried significant influence.
- The bush is being increasingly marginalised and decisions are based around money and votes in the city. Unlike States like Victoria, the (Country) Shires in Western Australia are the heart of the community and amalgamation is not the way to go as it will not save money and infrastructure needs to be maintained.
- Local government has never been about money, it is about people.
- We need to get the CSCA going again so that the country has an effective voice.
- WALGA is too big and the bush will never be heard.
- Politicians need to be made aware of the issues by people actually living in the bush.
- WALGA did not understand the impact of one-vote-one-value. Our voice was lost and will further deteriorate.
- A suggestion was made that country Shires should formalise a representative body which would form an alliance with WALGA.
- Some concern was expressed about the cost of creating another association; however we need to send WALGA a message that we are not happy.
- Concern was expressed about the inaction of WALGA in addressing some serious issues such as loss of regional road group money.
- A former member of the WALGA State Executive for three years advised of the difficulties in getting a fair hearing at State Executive meetings. He felt that decisions were already made before the meetings were held, the country was not being represented, that agenda items submitted from the country were often not supported well in the officer's comments and were taken out of context and misinterpreted.
- An example relating to the above was on the road-rail grain freight issue which was presented to WALGA. When it got to State Council the matter was simplified into the context that "we like trains".

- Country Shires need to be mindful that through WALGA significant cost benefits are enjoyed. These are not always apparent as many subsidies and benefits are hidden.
- We need to send a signal to WALGA about our concerns without disadvantaging the financial benefits that Shires derive through their membership.
- CEO's need to advise their Councils of the financial benefits of retaining membership of WALGA.
- WALGA does not have a country focus and now it is too late. It does not have the capacity to understand country issues. There is no intention to undermine WALGA, but it is essential that the country has an effective voice.
- There is a concern that as a sector, country Shires have not made a concerted effort to question WALGA's capability. A comment was made in response that efforts have been made however we have been howled down.
- We need better advocacy. We need to repair the current arrangements rather than weakening our position by having two organisations.
- The comment was made that the country has twelve votes at the WALGA table, as does the metropolitan sector. The question was raised however that some of the so-called 'country' votes are really metropolitan focused due to the urban characteristics of their regions (e.g. Peel region). In real terms therefore the bush is underrepresented.
- We need to form an alliance and make that alliance work.
- Issues with WALGA are really of a political nature, we need to get zone members together to have State Councillors effectively present issues to WALGA.
- There are two key issues, being services and representation. There is no question of the services provided by WALGA; however there are significant issues with country representation. A new body will cost, however if we do not form an association we will be amalgamated through not having a voice.
- WALGA's secretariat comments attached to agenda items at the AGM appear to be city focused. When you speak to WALGA people they have no concept of how country Shires work and do not understand the issues of distance.
- We need to convey to WALGA areas of satisfaction and areas of concern. The principal issue is that country Shires are not being heard.
- An example was given where a CEO conveyed in writing, some concerns to WALGA, and received a phone call in response to his letter, where a WALGA staff member alleged that the CEO was presenting his own views rather than those of his Council.
- There has been ongoing significant dissatisfaction with WALGA. This has been the first collective demonstration of discontent.
- Disappointment was expressed that only approximately twenty councils were represented tonight, and to make a difference we need to have a strong team approach WALGA to effect change.
- We need to be careful to take the emotion out of the debate and deal with the issue of representation.
- Comment was made that the formation of a Country Shire Council's Association would not stop structural reform of the sector.

- It was suggested that the issue with WALGA was more of an administrative nature rather than representative nature.
- Everyone agrees that the country voice is not being heard. We need to focus on a new organisation because the issue with WALGA is that the country will always be out-voted. Another issue is that we need an organisation that can effectively lobby government. We do not need to be radical in our opposition to WALGA, however need to make the point that the current 12/12 voting entitlement is not representative as it is weighted towards metropolitan-urban areas.
- Some delegates advised that they did not have a mandate at this meeting from their Councils to contribute to a decision tonight for the formation of a new organisation.

SUMMARY OF PRINCIPAL ISSUES OF CONCERN

- Lack of an effective country Local Government voice.
- Imbalance of country representation on WALGA State Council (urban/metro vs. rural).
- Lack of advocacy for rural Local Government.
- Inadequate secretariat understanding and/or support in providing explanatory comment to agenda items submitted by rural Local Governments.
- Lack of understanding of issues facing country Local Government.

THE FOLLOWING MOTIONS WERE CARRIED

1. *That this meeting form a working group to pursue a range of options to improve the representation of country local governments at a State level.*
2. *That this meeting confirm that the working group shall comprise the following persons:*
 - Cr Megan Tuffley (Kent)*
 - Ms Belinda Knight (CEO Woodanilling-admin support)*
 - Mr Mike Fitz Gerald (Fitz Gerald Strategies)*
 - Cr Jim Sullivan (Kulin)*
 - Cr Will Scott (Mt Magnet)*
 - Cr Phillip Blight (Wagin)*
3. *That the outcomes of this meeting be circulated to all country Shires in Western Australia to allow them the opportunity to comment and participate.*

MEETING CLOSURE.

Mr Mike Fitz Gerald thanked everyone for their attendance and participation and closed the meeting at 8:32pm.