

Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council



1. Recommendation

The Commission recommends:

- (i) the existing local government area of Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council remain unchanged;
- (ii) the local government continues to be called Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council*;
- (iii) the local government remains undivided however the number of councillors be reduced from seven to four plus a mayor; and
- (iv) the local government continues to be classed as a shire.

*Under the *Local Government (Community Government Areas) Act 2004* the 15 local governments covered by the Act may call themselves either:

- 'council of the shire of... (insert name of community government area)';
- '...(insert name of community government area) Shire Council';
- '...(insert name of community government areas)...Aboriginal Shire Council'.

It is not the intention of the Commission to alter this naming convention. Throughout the report councils will be referred to as Aboriginal Shire Councils for simplicity.

2. Local government metrics

KEY LOCAL GOVERNMENT METRICS

Name	Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council
Class	Shire
Size	1,118 sq km
Population 2006	914
Electors 2007	489
Electoral arrangements	Undivided 4 councillors plus mayor (a)
Electors per councillor excluding mayor	122
Net assets 30 June 2006	\$38.9 million

(a) Currently there are seven councillors including a mayor. Adopting the Commission's recommendation would see councillor representation reduced from one councillor per 69 electors to one councillor per 122 electors.

3. Rationale for local government remaining the same

3.1 Service delivery, operations and management

- There are potential service delivery, operations and management improvements involving an amalgamation of Hope Vale and Cook Shire councils. However, the Commission has not recommended the amalgamation of any mainstream and Aboriginal councils because of the different land tenure and rating arrangements that exist between the two. These issues present impediments to amalgamation at this time and require examination and resolution before amalgamation could be contemplated.
- The Commission also recognises the unique service delivery requirements currently undertaken by Aboriginal councils.

3.2 Communities of interest

The Commission identifies a regional community of interest between Hope Vale and the existing councils and Cook. However for reasons outlined in section 3 above and Part 7 of its report, the Commission is of the view it cannot recommend an amalgamation involving Hope Vale at this time.

3.3 Other

The Commission identifies there are two fundamental issues that need to be resolved before Aboriginal councils could be amalgamated with mainstream councils, namely:

- ensuring trusteeship remains with the existing community (as outlined in *Lands Act 1994*); and
- that any new local government is not financially disadvantaged due to the restrictions on the use of this land.

4. Financial sustainability

Hope Vale did not participate in the Financial Sustainability Review by Queensland Treasury Corporation. Analysis of an amalgamation of Hope Vale with Cook suggests that a change would not remove any existing structural inefficiencies, or improve the financial sustainability of the shire particularly given Cook's already large geographic base.

Key economic elements of the shire include:

- micro enterprise activities and traditional agriculture make up a large part of the local economy;
- close economic linkages with Cook;
- local government area is largely dependant on grants funding and provides a range of services which are not normally undertaken by most mainstream councils; and
- local government has a very small population base.

5. Implementation issues

The Commission did not identify any specific issues relating to implementation.

6. Boundary issues

The Commission also notes the suspended limited reviewable local government matter for Cook/Hope Vale as outlined in Part 10 of its report.

7. Suggestions

The Commission gave consideration to the seven suggestions it received in relation to Hope Vale.

7.1 Details of suggestions

The Commission has examined relevant suggestions relating to Hope Vale. Key suggestions include:

- The Hope Vale suggestion opposes amalgamation of Hope Vale and local governments in Cape York. Outlines land tenure issues need to be resolved and all existing councils should be retained, pending an independent review of service delivery by

Indigenous councils. Supports boundary change of freehold land purchased by Hope Vale within Hope Vale borders.

- Communiqué from Indigenous mayors forwarded by the State Government outlines opposition to any forced amalgamations.
- Regional Organisation of Cape York Councils opposes amalgamation of Cape York councils with preference for establishing a regional model to be managed by the State Government to assist all existing Cape York councils.
- Cook Shire suggestion outlines difficulties in the amalgamation of Aboriginal and Island councils with mainstream local governments.

7.2 Commission’s comments on suggestions

The Commission bases its recommendation to not amalgamate Hope Vale on the rationale outlined in section 3 above and Part 7 of its report. The Commission recognises the issues raised in suggestions relating to land tenure and the level of services indigenous councils provide requires resolution before any amalgamation proposals for Hope Vale can be properly evaluated.

8. Other Commission considerations

While the Commission recommends that Hope Vale is not amalgamated with another shire, it offers the following observations:

- a Financial Sustainability Review or equivalent should be conducted;
- consideration should be given to ensuring Hope Vale is an ongoing priority in respect of efforts by other spheres of government to improve the expertise and capacity of this council; and
- the suspended referral involving Cook/Hope Vale should be resubmitted to the Electoral Commission of Queensland following the March 2008 elections.

9. Objectives set for Commission

OBJECTIVES	OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED
Facilitates optimum service delivery to Queensland communities.	Yes to the extent possible given the very small population, the shire area and its resources including financial and human resources.
Ensure local government effectively contributes to and participates in Queensland’s regional economies.	Yes to the extent possible given the very small population, the shire area and its resources including financial and human resources.
Manages economic, environmental and social planning consistently with regional communities of interest.	Yes to the extent possible given the limitations of council as a consequence of council’s capacity constraints in respect of resources, access to expertise and finances.
Effectively partners local government with other levels of government to ensure sustainable and viable communities.	Yes but more robust and better resourced local governments have the capacity to participate on a more equal basis in representing local government and community interests.