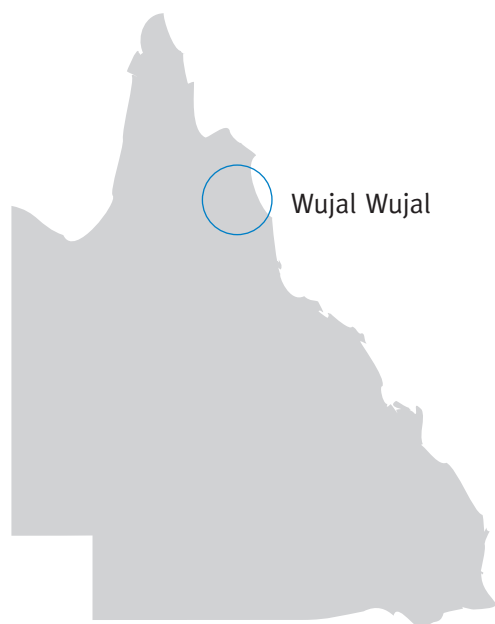


# Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council



## 1. Recommendation

### The Commission recommends:

- (i) the existing local government area of Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council remain unchanged;
- (ii) the local government continues to be called Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council\*;
- (iii) the local government remains undivided however the number of councillors be reduced from five 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	Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council
Class	Shire
Size	11 sq km
Population 2006	379
Electors 2007	219
Electoral arrangements	Undivided 4 councillors plus mayor (a)
Electors per councillor excluding mayor	55
Net assets 30 June 2006	\$20.4 million

(a) Currently there are five councillors including the mayor. Adopting the Commission's recommendation would see councillor representation reduced from one councillor per 49 electors to one councillor per 55 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 Wujal Wujal and adjacent local governments. However, the Commission has not recommended the amalgamation of any mainstream and Aboriginal councils because of the different land tenure and rating arrangements existing 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 has identified a regional community of interest between Wujal Wujal and the existing Councils of Douglas and Cook. However for reasons outlined in section 3 above and in Part 7 of its report, the Commission is of the view it cannot recommend an amalgamation involving Wujal Wujal at this time.

#### 3.3 Other

The Commission has identified 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

Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council did not participate in the Financial Sustainability Review by Queensland Treasury Corporation. While there is the potential for an amalgamation involving Wujal Wujal to improve its financial sustainability the key issues relating to land tenure and the rateability of land require resolution before this can be properly analysed.

Key economic elements of the shire include:

- close economic linkages with Douglas and Cook Shires;
- high dependence on grants funding and provides a range of services which are not normally undertaken by most mainstream councils; and
- 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 notes the boundary anomalies detailed in the Douglas Shire suggestion which may require future review. The Commission also notes the suspended limited reviewable local government matter for Cook/Wujal Wujal as outlined in section 10 on suspended reviewable local government matters.

### 7. Suggestions

The Commission considered the 14 suggestions it received in relation to Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council.

#### 7.1 Details of suggestions

- Douglas Shire Council opposes amalgamation and wholesale boundary realignment with the preferred option being to complete minor boundary adjustments between Douglas Shire, Cook Shire and Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Councils

and consult with the communities living north of the Daintree River to determine the extent of support for a realignment of boundaries.

Douglas Shire Council also makes a large number of observations in relation to the three following options:

1. SSS review group amalgamations – Douglas, Cook and Wujal Wujal (or other permutations):
    - vast social, cultural, economic, financial and geographic differences between the three councils; and
    - community wealth accumulated and paid for by the Douglas Shire community would be transferred as subsidies and service improvements to the other communities.
  2. Wet Tropics amalgamation which includes 14 councils from Thuringowa City and Dalrymple Shire in the south to Cook Shire in the north:
    - questionable whether a Wet Tropics local government would add anything to the management of this World Heritage area;
    - massive realignment and could not be completed within the timeframes given to the Commission; and
    - success would be dependent on reform and alignment of State and Federal Government services.
  3. Far North Queensland Regional Council amalgamation which includes Douglas, Wujal Wujal, Yarrabah, Mareeba, Atherton, Cairns, Eacham, Johnstone, Herberton and Cardwell Shires:
    - less onerous than a Wet Tropics amalgamation but still a massive undertaking; could not be completed within the timeframes given to the Commission, and complexity of implementation would be significant.
- Communiqué from Indigenous mayors forwarded by the State Government outlines opposition to any forced amalgamations.

- Regional Organisation of Cape York Councils oppose amalgamation of Cape York Councils and 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 Wujal Wujal 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 require resolution before any amalgamation proposals for Wujal Wujal could be properly evaluated.

## 8. Other Commission considerations

While the Commission recommends that Wujal Wujal Shire 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 Wujal Wujal 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/Wujal Wujal should be resubmitted to the Electoral Commission of Queensland following the 15 March 2008 elections.

## 9. Objectives set for the 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.