



Office of Local Government

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Councillor Rhonda Hoban
Mayor
Nambucca Shire Council
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Dear Councillor Hoban

You may be aware that I have written to the mayor and councillors of Coffs Harbour City Council about the Mid North Coast Joint Organisation. Following my meeting with you and senior staff of Nambucca Shire Council at the Local Government NSW conference earlier this week, I am now writing personally to you and your Nambucca councillor colleagues in similar terms.

I know Nambucca Shire Council has an impressive track record of collaboration with surrounding councils spanning many years, and has supported the establishment of joint organisations from the outset. Council initially resolved to form a joint organisation with Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour, Bellingen, Nambucca, Kempsey and Port-Macquarie Hastings Councils in January 2018. Council subsequently advised the Minister for Local Government in April 2018 that it does not support being included in a joint organisation that does not include the Coffs Harbour local government area. It was made clear that this decision was due to Nambucca's strong community of interest with Coffs Harbour, and the desire to have a say in the strategic development of Coffs Harbour as a regional centre.

Following my discussions with you and senior staff, I understand that there are some concerns that the NSW Government has not fully adopted the Independent Local Government Review Panel's recommendations relating to joint organisations. Following the submission of the panel's report, the Government piloted the joint organisation concept in a number of regions, and consulted widely with councils and key stakeholders over a period of three years. This informed the Government's ultimate policy position, and an invitation in late 2017 to councils to nominate to form joint organisations based on design criteria developed to respond to the pilot outcomes and evaluation. As a result, 13 joint organisations have now been created. Many joint organisations cover larger areas than those originally anticipated by the Panel and include diverse communities of interest.



The rationale behind forming these larger joint organisations is that a stronger, larger joint organisation has strengthened capacity, and is better placed to advocate on strategic regional issues and secure funding for the entire region as well as any sub-regional communities. In my discussions with councils at the Local Government NSW conference, I drew on the example of the Canberra Region Joint Organisation as a region that has embraced this approach by identifying the regional issues that are common to all nine council areas, as well as identifying priorities that will deliver benefits for those communities in coastal, alpine and tablelands areas.

I note that Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour and Nambucca councils have highlighted that the proposal to create a new joint organisation comprising the three councils is consistent with the NSW Government's policy of a minimum of three councils being required to form a joint organisation, and the legislative requirement that joint organisations have a minimum of two members. However, I understand from my discussions with councillors and staff from mid-north coast councils at the Local Government NSW conference that the intention is to encourage Bellingen to join with the other three councils in a new joint organisation. This would compromise a number of the Government's other design criteria.

A single joint organisation for the Mid North Coast region provides the opportunity for delivering benefits for the communities of all six councils in the region. A single joint organisation would provide increased scale and capacity and a greater representation base for the region. Importantly, it would also facilitate sub-regional planning around established communities of interest and also provide a robust governance framework to enable councils to undertake shared services, joint procurement and other optional features enable by the joint organisation model.

The Government will be evaluating the success of joint organisations and will consider changes to the joint organisation model and membership where member councils have identified that the current approach is not working. This presents an opportunity for Coffs Harbour, Nambucca and Clarence Valley to participate in the Mid North Coast Joint Organisation, knowing that changes are possible if the joint organisation does not succeed or meet the expectations of member councils.

The Office of Local Government is available to support your council with information and assistance on the Government's joint organisation policy and implementation. Melissa Gibbs is available on 0491 225 904 to assist you in this.

Yours sincerely



Tim Hurst
Chief Executive
Office of Local Government

26/10/18