



CHERBOURG ABORIGINAL SHIRE COUNCIL

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22nd May 2007

Mr B Longland
Chairperson
Local Government Reform Commission
PO Box 16325
City East Qld 4002

Dear Sir

Attached is a submission from the Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council in relation to the Local Government Reform process in Queensland.

Any further information can be obtained by contact with either myself or our Mayor Ken Bone.

Yours faithfully

Ross Higgins
A/Chief Executive Officer



A SUBMISSION BY

CHERBOURG ABORIGINAL SHIRE COUNCIL

TO

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMISSION

QUEENSLAND

HISTORY AND SHIRE PROFILE

Under the Aborigines Protection Act of 1897, an aboriginal settlement (known as Barambah) was established on Barambah Creek in 1904. In 1931/32, the name of the reserve was changed to Cherbourg.

The history of Cherbourg is one of people being forcibly removed and transported from all over Queensland and northern New South Wales and amalgamated to the new reserve/settlement area. Because of the Government push for assimilation, people were institutionalised without regard for family, kinship and language groups. Amalgamation of tribal groups created disharmony and to this day, some problems still exist.

Cherbourg is located in Wakka Wakka tribal boundaries near the border of Gubbi Gubbi territory. However, due to the actions of the Government in relocating people, residents have connections to many other tribal groups throughout Queensland. Today, Cherbourg people are proud people who are not afraid to identify themselves as Cherbourg people.

In the late 1980's, the Government introduced the Community Services Act specifically for indigenous Councils to be established and Councils were provided with some powers similar to other local governments in Queensland. This Act also allowed for the issuing of a Deed of Grant in Trust of the old Government reserve area. Councillor elections also came into line with local government. This legislation allowed Council (and the people of Cherbourg) to move towards its self-determination and self-management goal. This move to local government was further enhanced in 2004 with the passing of the Local Government (Community Government Areas) Act. This legislation allows for a transitional period for Council to move totally to the Local Government Act.

Cherbourg is located in the South Burnett Region of South East Queensland about 3 hours drive north west from Brisbane.

The population of Cherbourg is estimated at 2000 residents however this figure fluctuates due to the transient nature of the community.

POSITION STATEMENT OF
CHERBOURG ABORIGINAL SHIRE COUNCIL

The Cherbourg Aboriginal Council strongly believes that any amalgamation of this Council with other mainstream Shire Councils will have a detrimental affect on this Community. This Council is against any amalgamation in any shape or form.

The reason for this decision is based on the following:

Cultural

We have different cultural values, beliefs and customs to other Shires in our area. There is no recognition or understanding of cultural differences in mainstream local government.

Autonomy

Through amalgamation we would lose our autonomy that has taken many years to gain.

Land

As the land is Deed of Grant in Trust this Council has difficulty in contemplating relinquishing title to this land or how it could be handed to another body other than Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council. As the trustees of the land for the benefit of the residents of this community, Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council is best situated to continue as trustees of the land.

Housing

Council is the owner of the housing at Cherbourg and provides a major service in the provision of affordable housing to the residents of this Community. There is no evidence that this will be improved through the amalgamation process.

Economic

Council is the core organisation in relation to the economics of this community. Council has in the past been involved in major training initiatives for the people of this community. It has also been actively encouraging people to start small business within the community to get away from welfare handouts.

Rate Base

There is no rate base within this community therefore amalgamation could result in the township being neglected by a new council.

History

The history of Cherbourg is well documented. There are both traditional owners for this land and people with historical relationships to this community all living at Cherbourg. At present all groups work together for the benefit of Cherbourg. Any proposed changes would be to the detriment of the community.

Uniqueness

Cherbourg is unique both in identity and location. Cherbourg is one of only a few Aboriginal Councils that are situated within mainstream shire areas. There is also our identity as Aboriginal people.

Identity

Our identity is unique to this community. Cherbourg people are proud people who are not afraid to identify themselves as Cherbourg people.

Remoteness

Cherbourg is very remote in relation to other Aboriginal Shires. As the most Southern of the Aboriginal Shires we are a long way from other Aboriginal Shires.

Justice System

Our community has a unique Justice system that deals with the problems of this community. It has only been established and faces an uncertain future under amalgamation.

Law and Order/Policing

Council employs a number of community police to assist State Police in their duties and to have locals employed in this very important position. Their future will be in doubt if we are forced to amalgamate. The role of State Police Officers in this community is also under question. They currently work under the Murgon State Police roster. Cherbourg is supposed to be an independent station. Amalgamation poses a risk to the future policing in this community.

Role of Council

This Council has a very different role in this community compared to other mainstream Councils. Council is the main employer and provides many other services through both State and Commonwealth funded programs. Many of these programs have an uncertain future if this Council no longer exists.

Council not only looks after local government functions but is also the provider of many welfare/social programs.

Responsibility

This Council has different responsibilities to other mainstream Councils. Council is seen as providing leadership on many issues in the community and is often called upon to support residents with issues outside the normal Local Government sphere.

Welfare/Social Responsibility

Our community is highly dependent on Government funding and programs. Many of these programs are delivered by Council who have taken on the welfare and social responsibilities to residents of this community.

Racism

Our community and residents still face racism in everyday life. Getting and maintaining employment outside of this community is difficult for our residents and statistics will prove that only a small percentage of residents hold jobs outside of the community.

Employment

As stated earlier Council is the main employer of Aboriginal people in this district. It is difficult for Aboriginal people to gain employment outside of this community.

Marginalisation

Aboriginal people have been marginalised throughout this country. Our community has fought hard to maintain its identity over the years and the threat of amalgamation will only further marginalise Aboriginal people. If Cherbourg is amalgamated into a larger shire, we believe that Cherbourg will have little or no representation on this Council which will further marginalise the people of Cherbourg.

CONCLUSION

History shows that people were forcibly removed from their traditional lands to be settled in Cherbourg. Any amalgamation of Cherbourg to any mainstream shire can be seen once again as Cherbourg people being forcibly amalgamated from their current existence into a main stream culture that will fail to cope with the cultural differences evident in this community. There will be little or no representation for Cherbourg people resulting in the increasing marginalisation of indigenous people from this area.

One of the objectives of the reform is to better manage economic, environmental and social planning consistent with regional communities of interest. Whilst Cherbourg shares its location with other South Burnett Shire Councils and we add to the economy and the environment of the region, there is no other "community" in the region that has the same cultural needs or interests as Cherbourg.

The Government has already presented this Council with the opportunity to move towards full local government status however this would be removed if we are amalgamated. We believe that this opportunity should still exist and the transition period should continue until all issues are finalised.

This Council is very interested in signing a negotiated Indigenous Partnership Agreement with the Queensland Government which hopefully will achieve better outcomes for our community. Any form of amalgamation would destroy any hope of the Partnership Agreement working.

As part of the now defunct Size Shape and Sustainability process, the issue of resource sharing had been discussed in detail between all Councils of the South Burnett. Our Council supports this as part of a skill sharing process and even with autonomy from any amalgamation, we would continue to work together with a new Council/s to share resources when required.

Our Council also sees this reform process as an opportunity to review the Shire's boundary. There are 2 freehold parcels of land adjacent to the north western boundary of the Cherbourg DOGIT. One of these (Lot 47 on Plan FY274, including Lot 17 on SP 136540) is owned by the Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council whilst the other (Lot 46 on Plan FY272) is owned privately and completely surrounded by either Council DOGIT or freehold land.


Also, to the south west and again adjoining our DOGIT is the Wondai State Forest (Lot 12 on FTY 1580).

We see that the inclusion of these parcels of land into our Shire boundary would assist with improvement of our economic future.

It is for these reasons that Cherbourg should not be amalgamated with any other mainstream shires as part of this reform process.

Signed:


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Mayor Ken Bone


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Ross Higgins – Acting Chief
Executive Officer

On behalf of the Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council