

19 July 2017

Committee Secretary

Infrastructure, planning and Natural Resources Committee

Parliament House

George Street

Brisbane. Qld. 4000

Dear Sir/ Madam

As secretary of the South Burnett Community Forum, I would like to present to you some local information regarding the South Burnett Regional Council that may be of benefit in your deliberations.

The South Burnett Community Forum is a ratepayer and residents representative, not for profit, incorporated association with the following objectives

- 1 Offer an organized platform on broad issues affecting the South Burnett Regional Council's geographic community to voice ideas and concerns.
- 2 To assist the South Burnett Regional Council towards achieving financial efficiency, sustainable rates, charges and satisfactory services.
- 3 To act as an information and forum facilitator when needed between the community and other interested groups and parties.

The areas of most concern to our members are, (1) Council rates and charges, (2) Council debt, (3) The lack of transparency in Council's financial reports and (4) The deteriorating condition of our roads (both State and Council controlled roads).

### **Council's rates and charges.**

Since the South Burnett Regional Council was created by the amalgamation of Nanango, Kingaroy, Wondai and Murgon Shire Councils in 2008, Council rates and charges have been rising at a rate that is an unsustainable burden to residents in a low socio-economic area such as the South Burnett. In November 2014, Cr. Keith Campbell advised his fellow Councillors that 9.5% of South Burnett ratepayers were now late with their rate payments, that 96 properties were three years in arrears and that outstanding rates totaled close to one million dollars.

Of even greater concern is the South Burnett Regional Council's Long Term Financial Forecast which indicates rates will rise 50.2% by 2023-24.

<http://www.test.southburnett.qld.gov.au/documents/12544/40038750/sbrc%20Budget%202014-2017.pdf>

### **Council's debt.**

At last year's Council election the South Burnett Regional Council had a debt of some \$42 million. Since then, the new Council has shown no willingness to reduce this debt or restrict further borrowing.

### **Lack of transparency in Council's Financial Reports.**

The South Burnett Council financial reports lack consistency and transparency. The lay-out of these reports makes it difficult, if not impossible, for qualified accountants to understand and compare with previous years. Surely Councils have a responsibility to ratepayers to present their financial reports in a manner which can be easily understood by the people who fund Council operations and Councillors' salaries.

### **The deteriorating state of our roads.**

Following the 2013 floods, the South Burnett Regional Council introduced a \$200 per rate notice levy on our rates to repair flood damaged roads. The, then, Mayor promised that the levy would be for one year only. However the Council went back on that promise and has continued to charge ratepayers the levy. Although the Council received funding from Government for flood damaged roads and the extra funding from the road levy, our roads are still in a worse condition than prior to the Council amalgamation.

### **Our recommendations.**

Our membership would like to see the State Government introduce legislation requiring

- 1 Councils to perform to a set level of financial and managerial efficiencies that will be sustainable into the future.
- 2 Councils to aim to be long term debt free by 2025.
- 3 Councils to present their financial reports in a standardized format that can be understood by ratepayers and can be compared with reports from previous years. and
- 4 Councils who receive payments from the State Government to maintain State roads, to spend that funding on Council roads as well as their normal maintenance.

Yours sincerely

Terry Gordon  
Secretary  
South Burnett Community Forum.Inc.

Member group of The Queensland Local Government Reform Alliance. Inc.(QLRGA.)