

# MINUTES

## Belyuen Coomalie Wagait Local Government Advisory Group

### Extraordinary Meeting 9<sup>th</sup> November 2016

#### Attendee's:

Belyuen Council:	Cathy Winsley: CEO (CW) Bill Stuchberry: Official Manager (BS)
Coomalie Council:	Andrew Turner President CCGC (AT) Leigh Ashford: CEO (LA) Melissa Kerr CCGC (MK)
Wagait Council:	Peter Clee: President (PC) Deborah Allen: CEO (DA)
DHCD - Local Govt Division:	Shaun Hardy: A/Executive Director (SH) Peter Wyatt: Project Officer, DHCD (PW)
LGANT:	Mark Hagger (MH)(proxy for Tony Tapsell)
Dundee Progress Assoc.	Leanne Dix (LD) Dean Wolfenden (DW)
Consultants:	Sharyn Innes (SI) Allan McGill (AM)

#### Meeting Opened at 10:05pm

#### 1: Attendees welcomed by Chair.

1: Chair SH asked participants to introduce themselves.

2: Consultants SI & AM introduced themselves and provided some introductory comments about the options they had identified to date.

Perusal of previous reports informed SI and AM about options previously considered. Recent discussions with each council had revealed that some of the options would not be acceptable including for example, the inclusion of the Marrakai area. The need for community consultation in unincorporated areas before any changes would be made, which was expected to be a large body of work, was also identified. There will likely need to be a progressively staged approach over a period of time, while recognising the immediate urgency to resolve the current official management status of Belyuen. Whilst it was clear that some options were not favoured there was still work to be done to determine what would be acceptable to include in the report.

3: SI invited comment from attendees.

AT – understood from the group's terms of reference that the focus of BCWLGAG discussions should be on existing councils.

Extensive consultations needed for unincorporated areas and noted experiences in Douglas Daly area.

Communities of interest are very important.

PC – council representatives cannot make decisions today as we need to take info back to our councils and communities to seek endorsement.

SI – we recognise that it will take time. Perhaps 5 years.

CW – Regarding the Belyuen situation, cannot see solution whilst we are all separate councils. NT Govt needs to “bite the bullet” and bring all areas together.

BS – provided background to Belyuen situation.

Council suspended in May 2007.

Report went to the then Minister in February 2010. No action taken.

Belyuen has not sat on hands but has tried to foster relations with other councils such as Darwin but without success.

Has investigated option after option without success.

Something needs to be done soon not 5 to 10 year time frame.

Considers two clear immediate options for Belyuen: wrap into Coomalie; or hold an election.

AT – No need to have all unincorporated areas included immediately.

A council with non-contiguous boundaries could be an interim measure.

Some areas i.e. Marrakai do not fit with the community of interest of our councils.

Previous consultations for Top End Shire may not have captured the feelings of all residents of unincorporated areas.

PC – Consultants need to ascertain what residents of unincorporated areas, such as Dundee, want. Need consultants to undergo extensive consultation with Dundee then BCWLGAG Members can take the proposed options back to constituents and report back to the group.

SI – Will not be consulting with Dundee residents at this stage, not in the scope of the consultancy.

AT – Interim steps could include shared development with communities of interest.

Is a solution for Belyuen to dissolve the council and incorporate as a local authority of another council?

SH/AM – Legislation placed a finite timeframe on earlier provisions for Transition arrangements used in the example of creating the new West Daly Regional Council, which have now ceased. Limits options for Belyuen solution.

BS – One issue that needs to be considered is that there are significant issues relating to the land trust for Belyuen that any new council would need to take into account. E.g. lease arrangements could cost up to \$60,000 pa. going forward and a liability for claimed backpay.

Belyuen services such as aged care, meals on wheels and mechanical workshop could be extended to other council areas.

SH – Resource sharing arrangements and cooperative service delivery could continue to be considered during a staged approach towards desired end result of a single council in the medium term.

Immediate issues for Belyuen need to be addressed.

PC – Wagait do not have fixed ideas, are open to consultation.  
Delegates promised community to go back to them with future options.

SH – asked consultants to advise time frame for completion of report.

SI – responded end of the month.

Asked group is the vision for all councils and unincorporated areas to eventually be one body? Consultants need guidance on preferred options.

PC – We have to consider the big picture. No point in taking short term view.

AT – we need the Ministers “buy in”. Task more likely to take 9 years not 5.

SI – may need to seek Govt support for resources to move forward.

AM – govt focus on community consultation.

Suggested that Belyuen be brought out of administration and each councils boundary extension requests to be put to the Minister in July next year.

Longer term goal to create new council from existing 3 councils plus unincorporated areas but without Marrakai – which should be added to West Arnhem after community consultation.

DW – Has never heard of anyone putting their hand up to pay more taxes and not likely that the Dundee residents, currently unincorporated area, would do so.

PW – the issue is that Dundee residents have some local government services provided by the NT Govt, funded by taxes paid by other NT residents.

PC – Dundee residents not being in a local government area costs the NT who do not get financial assistance for residents outside a LG area.

Dundee residents do not have local government electoral representation.

AM – Group should work towards an agreement on sharing resources and service delivery as first step.

PC – Consultants still need to come up with a couple of preferred models for consideration.

SI – now a lot clearer on what models are definitely ruled out and what may be preferred.

Need for written agreements around process to go forward.

Need to have commitment from Government.

SH – in relation to concern expressed about the future of Belyuen, if a solution does not emerge from the result of this consultancy, the NTGovt will have to reinstate the council have new councillors elected at the August 2017 LG Election.

4: SH – It appears that there have been some principles agreed:

Next steps:

- a. Consultants report will be refined and circulated to all attendees.
- b. Report to focus on the preferred options identified.

- c. Councils and Dundee PA to review and circulate as necessary to prepare comment reflecting views of community.
- d. Forward comments back to Department.
- e. Department will submit report and responses from members to the Minister for consideration.
- f. Future BCWLGAG to consider further actions based on Ministers response.