

# Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel Draft Findings Paper April 2012

Committee for Perth Submission

## Introduction

### Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel Draft Findings

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel's Draft Findings Report.

The Committee for Perth strongly supports the *majority* of the draft findings of the Review Panel.

We believe that they are primarily robust, address the major challenges facing governance of the Perth region, and if properly implemented will provide the region with the type of governance structure that is needed to address the major challenges of population growth and change and set Perth on a pathway to a positive future.

This submission therefore supports the majority of draft findings however we also believe that the critical issue will be how, and how quickly, the findings are implemented, particularly to ensure that, regardless of the number of local authorities in the metropolitan region, there are formal and effective structures for integration and collaboration between local authorities, and local authorities and state government.

This submission provides specific comments on the findings that we believe are *most critical* for the future of Perth and provides the views of the Committee for Perth on their implementation.

### About the Committee for Perth

The Committee for Perth, established in 2006, is an influential member-based organisation driven by Perth's business and community leaders. We promote and enable change that improves the cultural diversity, economic prosperity, sustainability and world-class amenity of Perth.

Our vision is a city with an integrated strategic plan which ensures that metropolitan Perth:

- promotes the high value of its people;
- embraces its natural environment;
- is vibrant and innovative;

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A complete list of current members is available at: [www.committeeforperth.com.au](http://www.committeeforperth.com.au)

- participates on the world stage; and
- has a strong sense of place.

The Committee for Perth believes that the current fragmented system of local government in the metropolitan region is hindering the potential to achieve this vision.

The Committee therefore supports structural reform of local government through appropriate amalgamation however we also believe that this should be accompanied by mechanisms to enable improved co-operation and collaboration between local authorities and state government agencies in the region.

### **The Panel's Draft Findings**

#### **Findings 1-5**

The Committee for Perth strongly supports these findings.

As outlined in our submission to the Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel Issues Paper, current research indicates that strategic and integrated thinking, and leadership across all levels of government, as well as the business and community sectors, are key components of some of the world's most liveable and successful cities. Understanding this is critical in that it provides the basic impetus for governance change in our region.

It is also clear that the Perth region currently suffers from local government fragmentation, inefficient service delivery and inequity as well as a lack of correspondence between existing administrative borders and the spatial and functional organisation of social-economic relations.

This is having a significant negative impact on the region today, an impact that is evidenced in the major disparity between levels of service and resources between different local authorities, the ability to address regional issues, such as population growth, housing diversity and urban sprawl and plan for future regional infrastructure.

We believe that this review will provide the potential for a stronger, more effective and more capable local government sector, as long as the findings of the Panel are implemented in a timely and effective manner.

#### **Finding 6 – A shared vision for the future of Perth should be developed by the State government, together with local government, stakeholder and community groups**

Since establishment in 2006, the Committee for Perth has been advocating for a shared regional vision for Perth.

We are therefore very encouraged and strongly concur with the views expressed by the Panel that *“it is surprising that Perth lacks an overarching regional vision”* and agree that a community visioning process should be initiated as a priority.

#### **Finding 7 – A sense of place and local identity can be maintained through appropriate governance regardless of the size of a local government**

It is the view of the Committee for Perth that 'sense of place and local identity' is more about the characteristics of the landscape, environment, urban form and community demographic than it is about the form of governance for a local area.

It is also the view of our members that a strong regional approach to improve the quality and focus on urban design and on meaningful, informed community participation in decision making will have far more potential to protect and enhance local identity and character than retaining the status quo.

**Finding 8 – The primary benefits to be achieved by the reform of Perth’s local government arrangements...**

The Committee for Perth supports the listed benefits and believes that an additional key benefit is enabling the establishment of a strong central local authority that represents the functional central area of the region by geographically incorporating the main economic generators, retail, cultural, education and inner residential hubs to enable integrated planning for the city as a single functioning economic and social entity. It also provides the basis for the City’s local authority to act as an advocate for the city and the region on a national and international stage.

**Finding 9, 10 and 11**

We concur with the view of the Panel that local government re-structuring needs to be accompanied by improved formal processes for partnership and improved co-ordination between local government and state government and between State Government agencies.

While we acknowledge that there are some existing formal processes through the Western Australian Planning Commission to provide for regional infrastructure and land use co-ordination in particular, and for policy consistency between state and local government, these have not always been effective in achieving outcomes on the ground and it is clear from the Panel’s review that local government effectiveness has also suffered from a lack of State Government co-ordination or conflicting agency advice.

Given these findings, we very strongly support **Finding 11** which proposes the establishment of a Local Government Commission to manage the critical relationship between State and Local Government. The Commission should also serve to act as a co-ordinating body between local authorities themselves.

**Finding 12 – A re-defined local government would have its role enhanced including re-empowerment in local planning**

The Committee for Perth understands that the move toward strong local government could provide a basis for a change of functions, however we believe that there will be need for caution and careful consideration regarding the return to a locally based planning process.

It is our view that there are many benefits of a state based planning system including enabling strong regional strategic planning and a streamlined, consistent approvals process.

Any proposal to move towards a more locally based planning system needs to be accompanied by detailed research, investigation and consultation with stakeholders to establish both the costs and benefits for such a change in the context of the actual model for

local government that is being proposed. For example, there may be a considerable case for a more locally based planning system if there is one local authority for the metropolitan region, than if there are five or ten to twelve.

**Finding 13 – The most appropriate options for local government in metropolitan Perth are:**

- a) 10 to 12 councils centred on strategic activity centres**
- b) five councils based on the central area and sub regions**
- c) one single metropolitan council**

The Committee for Perth believes that all of these options represent viable and positive changes for the governance of the Perth region and we will support the Panel in recommending any of these options, on the basis that:

**Option a) or b):** If Option a) or b) is the preferred option for reform we believe that it is essential that this be accompanied by/dependent on all of the following:

- the establishment of the Local Authority Commission as a formal structure for integration and collaboration between local authorities and between local authorities and state government;
- that the size of the City of Perth is increased and its role enhanced (Finding 14);
- that there are periodic boundary reviews (Finding 16);
- that it is accompanied by additional reforms aimed at addressing shortcomings of the existing system that are not related to size (Finding 17);
- that there is a formal regional strategy or process for informed public participation established to guide, and require strengthened and consistent levels of, community engagement across the region (Finding 18);
- that a Forum or Council of Perth Mayors is created to encourage and enable improved integration and collaboration of decision making (Finding 20); and
- that some functions are managed from a regional wide perspective such as waste disposal and treatment and land use and transportation planning (Finding 10).

### **Findings 21 – 23**

The Committee for Perth supports Findings 21 and 22.

In regard to Finding 22, we strongly support the establishment of Local Government Trading Enterprises.

It is our view that Local Government Trading Enterprises could become crucial in relation to developing, selling and/or leasing so far un-used/under-utilised parcels of land in local government ownership in particular in the suburbs closer to the city. This, in turn, would allow the creation of shared-equity ownership housing that is desperately necessary to help people and families on average incomes to co-own a home in a more central location.

This issue was considered in FACTBase 26 'Perth's Continuing Population Growth' that advocates for an increase in the number of people living in suburbs closer to the city and the ability "to offer people a range of housing options, including affordable housing that are

within a reasonable distance of where they might work or near existing public transport systems”.

It was also raised in the FACTBase Bulletin 23 ‘Managing Boomtown Perth: Policy Challenges for Adequate Housing Provision’, page 5 (“Newly established Local Government Housing Trading Organisations as key stakeholders in affordable infill-housing provision”).

In regards to Finding 23, we support findings b. to f. however we have some reservations regarding the costs and benefits of recommendation a) which is the introduction of compulsory voting for local government elections, and we believe that this requires detailed investigation and consideration of cost versus potential benefit before being recommended by the Panel.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission to the Metropolitan Local Government Review.

The Committee for Perth congratulates the State Government in initiating the review, and the Panel in producing a comprehensive and positive suite of findings to date. We look forward to receiving the final recommendations of the Panel.

Yours sincerely



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CEO