

JA 2/09/09

# comment

with Mayor Bill Shannon



## State Government adding to burden

**T**HERE has been a well documented transfer, over many years, of responsibility for enforcement of State Government regulations to local government. This has occurred, very often, without the corresponding resources to implement them.

Three examples are:

- There has been an outcry recently over local government inspectors advising business owners that the grease traps installed on their business premises require upgrading. This requirement stems from State Government demands that connections to the sewer comply with their standards. Even if a small commercial kitchen, for example in a motel, operates perfectly well with a 250 litre grease trap, the Government requires a 500 litre grease trap. There is no flexibility, only the ability to negotiate to undertake the changes over several months.

We are aware of the angst being felt by the local business operators affected and concerned about commercial kitchens that will close, threatening the viability of businesses and reducing vital local incomes and employment.

I will write to the Government seeking relaxation of the laws and some flexibility in their implementation. The number one priority for all levels of government at this time should be job creation and retention.

- A second example is to do with domestic animal control. Shortly, every new family dog or cat will have to be micro-chipped and registered. It's all to do with State Government regulations, again required to be administered by local government, but with fines determined by the State. Domestic animal controls already cost ratepayers dearly and costs are set to rise.

- A third example concerns the 2031 Plan which has the power of law and which overrides new local government planning decisions. In fact, local government must advise the State Government by November 2009 as to how to apply these rules to our planning schemes.

Council is likely to have to prepare a new planning scheme for the region. This would not normally be required at this time, as both the existing schemes are recent. However, State Government regulation, unrelated to amalgamation, will require the cost of a new scheme to be brought forward. There is of course a clear advantage in having one scheme for the whole region. The issue is the timing of its introduction, given the many costs of amalgamation.

We need development in this region to boost employment, diversify the economic base and to spread the burden of infrastructure costs. Unfortunately, our ability to approve new residential, commercial and industrial subdivisions is constrained by the lack of capacity in the sewerage treatment plants in Tully and Innisfail — a classic circular dilemma.

The solution will be to approve developments within the existing sewered areas, continue to press the State Government for immediate reinstatement of the subsidy scheme and seek long-term funding at concessional interest rates.

The problem with borrowing to upgrade the sewerage infrastructure is that already high sewerage charges will have to increase. I made it clear to State Government officials last month that council is not unwilling to address environmental requirements. It is simply financially unable to. Hopefully this will protect council from prosecution.

We will do all that can reasonably be done and press the State Government to do likewise and relax expectations from "ideal" to "realistic".