



# Introduction of Bill to Amend the *Local Government Act* Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

28 August 2013

## What is different about the Regional Council compared to a Shire Council? (Isn't this window dressing?)

The Regional Council is a new form of local government council that has mandated responsibilities to establish community-based Local Authorities.

The Local Authority will have specific roles in council planning, budgeting and local area spending. These roles will be specified by the Minister for Local Government and will apply to all Regional Councils. These requirements will not apply to shire councils.

A number of shire councils (Coomalie, Wagait and Belyuen) will continue under this legislative framework. (Litchfield Council is a municipal council, though some people still refer to it as a shire.)

## Why have you kept the "super shires"? Are you backing away from your election commitment? Do you think the "super shires" are working effectively now?

The boundaries of the shire councils are not changing at this stage. However, their method of operation is changing in a major way to put community and constituent planning at the top of the Regional Council agenda and restore the "local voice" to local government in regional and remote areas.

The "super shires" have made good progress in developing professional management and financial accountability. However, it is widely acknowledged that they can do a lot more to strengthen their connection with residents. This amendment Bill will restore the relevance of local government in remote communities.

The NT Government's election commitment was to establish new Regional Councils where there was demonstrated community support and proven financial sustainability. The Department of Local Government is currently preparing a report on the sustainability of alternative council boundaries and operational methods. That report is due to be completed by 1 January 2014.

## Why haven't you included Regional Authorities in the Bill?

The Ministerial Working Group on Regional Governance considered the Regional Authority model to be a long term objective for good governance.

The future framework for a Regional Authority requires a significant body of research and negotiation between local people and both the Australian and the Northern Territory governments.

This was reflected in the community consultation where many people commented that more detail is required before considering implementing this option. Many people commented that the Regional Council should concentrate on getting local government right before moving on to other models and other services.

The Department of Local Government is preparing a paper on possible frameworks for future Regional Authorities and pathways to their implementation.

## When will people actually see anything different?

The Bill to amend the *Local Government Act* will be introduced in the August 2013 sittings of the Legislative Assembly. It is expected that the legislation will be considered and passed during the October 2013 sittings.

It is expected that the process of establishing Local Authorities will commence in November and December this year, and inaugural meetings of the Local Authorities will happen over the period January - February 2013.

The Local Authority framework sets out a new way of doing Regional Council business and people should see differences shortly after the first meetings of their Local Authority.

## Are you going to create any new councils at all?

The boundaries of the shire councils are not changing at this stage. However, the method of operation is changing in a major way to put community and constituent planning at the top of the Regional Council agenda and restore the "local voice" to local government in regional and remote areas.

The NT Government's election commitment was to establish new Regional Councils where there was demonstrated community support and proven financial sustainability. The Department of Local Government is currently preparing a report on the sustainability of alternative council boundaries and operational methods. That report is due to be completed by 1 January 2014.

The March - June 2013 period of community consultation on the ministerial Regional Governance Working Group's discussion paper "*Options for Regional Governance in the NT*" provided some comments from residents in relation to council boundaries. However, this was not a consultation designed to measure community support for any new boundaries. There will be further community consultation before any final decisions are made about future council boundaries and operational methods.

### **When can people see the detail of the proposed Ministerial Guidelines that go with this Bill?**

The draft Ministerial Guidelines have been displayed on the Department of Local Government website since 9 August 2013.

Copies of the draft Guidelines have been mailed to LGANT; the council Presidents, Mayors and CEOs; and other stakeholders.

Departmental staff are in contact with all these people to obtain their input to the draft Guidelines and to discuss implementation of the new framework for regional and remote local government councils.

### **Who is going to pay to have shire councils rebadged as regional councils?**

The NT Government will provide grant funding to councils to pay for the cost of establishing Regional Councils. This will include the cost of providing induction and training for councillors and local authority members, establishing new operating protocols and some essential changes to council signage.

The Government believes it is important that residents, councillors and council staff see the implementation of the Regional Council and Local Authority model as a new approach to local government in regional and remote locations.

The Department of Local Government will liaise with Regional Councils on the anticipated cost of required changes to council signage.

### **Will there have to be new elections?**

There are no changes to council boundaries arising from the introduction of this Bill to amend the *Local Government Act*. The currently elected councillors will continue in their positions with newly established Regional Councils.

### **Who will decide the membership of the Local Authority? Will members be elected?**

The community consultation in March - June 2013 showed a strong community preference for the Local Authority membership to be determined by a process of community discussion and consensus rather than by election.

The draft Ministerial Guidelines outline a process for establishing the membership of Local Authorities that is based on community nomination and council endorsement. The Department of Local Government will be consulting on the draft Ministerial Guidelines for local authorities.

### **How can people have a say about this proposed legislative amendment?**

The amendment Bill will be posted on the Department of Local Government website following its introduction into the Legislative Assembly.

Comments can be made through the Department's website, through the Department's "hotline" that is displayed on their website, or by contacting one of the Department's staff directly. Departmental staff will be travelling extensively through regional and remote communities over the August to October 2013 period providing an update on the Government's next steps in local government reform and seeking comment and suggested amendments to the draft Guidelines.

### **Will the Government be consulting the community and other stakeholders on these changes?**

The Minister and the Department will be writing to LGANT, council mayors and presidents, council CEO's, land councils and other stakeholders seeking their comments on these draft Guidelines.

Departmental staff will be travelling extensively through regional and remote communities over the August to October 2013 period seeking comment and any suggested amendments to the draft Guidelines.

### **How can I find out more information?**

To find out more visit [www.yourcouncil.nt.gov.au](http://www.yourcouncil.nt.gov.au)