

## **Statement to Palerang Council meeting: 23 August 2007**

My name is Ros Bush, I am a resident of Burra, and I have come here tonight – via Queanbeyan – to speak to the B.U.R.R.A. submission for a boundary adjustment. I am going to concentrate on the process that our group went through in preparing this submission which was, at all times, open and inclusive.

At a meeting of B.U.R.R.A. on 17 August 2006, there was a lengthy discussion about the long term viability of Palerang. It was clear to everybody present, including the State Member Steve Whan, that there was considerable discontent about the increase in rates and charges and the corresponding decrease in services.

A show of hands asking who would rather be in Queanbeyan than Palerang was overwhelmingly supported, except for two people – one of whom was the Lady Mayoress. At that meeting, it was decided that a working group would prepare some information to circulate to the wider community regarding a boundary change.

Council is aware of this because at the very next Palerang Council meeting, Wendy Bell came here and told you of the outcome. The reports we read in the Bungendore Mirror of comments by some councillors were, to say the least, disappointing. These are your constituents that you disparaged.

In putting together our information, one of the things we specifically tried to address was that of financial implications. We made several attempts to get information from Palerang Council about the amount of rates collected from Burra, Urila and Royalla and what is spent, and were told that Council's finances were not in a form that would enable that information to be extracted.

Here we are, 12 months on, and Council has our petition in front of them and we still can't discover this information – I refer you to the last Paragraph in 4a of your briefing paper, and the last minute, back of the envelope figures provided tonight.

In September 2006, we prepared the first of our briefing papers that set out our main points and started collecting signatures. At no point have we doorknocked, baled people up or pressured anybody into signing. Some people said they'd think about it, and some later signed, and some didn't. If we got no response, or a poor response, we would have given up.

But we did get a response. An overwhelming response. Any of you who have been involved in community development will know that a voluntary petition where people have to go out of their way to post or drop off their forms that collects 315 signatures out of around 750 people is remarkable.

Since we started the process, we have produced two more flyers and letterboxed every property in the Burra Urila and Royalla area. We have held two further meetings, and put information in our local newsletter and the Queanbeyan Age.

We have not been secretive. We have never hidden our arguments or agenda. If the other Councillors are unaware of these activities, then they should perhaps ask the Mayor, a Burra resident, why he did not bring it to their attention.

I wish to correct a gross error of fact that appeared in the Mayoral Report in the Council minutes of 9 August. The meeting at Fernleigh Park was called by Queanbeyan City Council but its purpose was to hear the views of the residents, not to hear a presentation by our group. We asked to present some information to set the

scene for those present, particularly any Queanbeyan residents who may not have read our submission. I reiterate, the purpose of the meeting was for QCC to hear the views of residents.

We were heartened by the turn up to that meeting. It was reported in the Queanbeyan Age at 100, but we think it was more like 150. Moreover, the overwhelming support for our proposal from those present confirmed our belief that it has widespread – most probably majority – support of the people in Burra, Urila and Royalla.

In contrast that to the petulant tone of the report prepared by council “staff” that appeared on the Palerang website late today.

Moreover, the three recommendations – not to support the proposal, that the minister not refer the matter to the boundaries commission, and finally, that the big scare of the “super shire” be resurrected – are very telling. Those recommendations tell me, and the 315 enrolled voters who signed our petition, that whomever drafted them, don’t really care what we think and don’t know of the things that members of our community think and know is in our best interests. It is patronising in the extreme to tell us that you know better than we do what is good for us.

People did not sign that petition because they thought they would be going to a cheap rates Nirvana in Queanbeyan. As the Mayor and the General Manager should have told you at the last council meeting, every speaker in support of our submission at the Fernleigh Park meeting spoke about the Community of Interest and being in the Local Government area that we feel part of. That is what is driving this process and, quite frankly, it is time you woke up to it.

Council is faced with a choice.

It can continue with this hostage mentality and try to shout down genuine attempts by our community to put right an error that was made in 2003. It can continue to view this as a personal affront to the elected Councillors, which it is not and never has been.

Or, it can look at this proposal as an opportunity to do something constructive and recommend, as Queanbeyan City Council did, that this be referred to the Boundaries Commission for consideration.