

## **The Concept of Community of Interest**

In preparing our boundary submission, we looked at a paper by Helen Fulcher called *The Concept of Community Interest*, which we found on the Boundary Commission website<sup>1</sup>.

The paper talks about three elements of the concept of Community of Interest.

The first element is a perceptual community of interest, which is a sense of belonging to an area or locality which can be clearly defined.

The Mayor and the GM would have been left in no doubt from the Fernleigh Park meeting where the attendees perceptual community of interest lies – that is, with Queanbeyan.

The second element, functional community of interest, is the ability of the area to meet the community's requirements for comprehensive physical and human services with a reasonable level of economy

The measure of a strong community of interest is where the vast majority of people go to a common centre for services, and have common membership of sports clubs, and other community organisations.

The paper comments that "Units of local government will be more effective if they cover the same area as that in which people live, work and play."

There is no doubt that Palerang Council does not cover the area in which Burra, Urila, and Royalla residents live, work and play. It is difficult to see how a Shire with its Headquarters 100kms away could possibly meet our needs for physical and human services as effectively and economically as Queanbeyan.

The final element of community of interest is the political element.

It is important that constituents feel or perceive that their views are represented, or that they can participate in decision making if they choose to do so. Palerang Council holds two meetings each month, one of which is held in Braidwood. This is a three hour round trip for most residents of Burra, Urila and Royalla. Even the trip to Bungendore represents a two hour round trip in traveling time for most residents.

Our geographic isolation makes participation in decision making difficult to the point of almost impossible for people with today's busy lives and responsibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> < [www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/DLG/DLGHome/documents/CommissionsTribunals/bconcept.pdf](http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/DLG/DLGHome/documents/CommissionsTribunals/bconcept.pdf) >

Moreover, we use Queanbeyan's shops and services, so our views matter there. Our views simply don't matter to the vast majority of Palerang Shire which we rarely visit except as a corridor on the occasional trip to the coast.

Our hope is that Palerang's Councillors do not focus solely on financial issues and allow this to override the most important aspects, perceptual, functional and political community of interest.

In a properly democratic local government system, finance should not be the final determinant of whether we can participate in our community, playing a proper part in the democratic process.

In the words of the SA Royal Commission (1974)

"if community of interest is to be disregarded, that is, if units are to be set up as mere areas of administrative convenience, then that would not be local government as we understood it".

We ask for support for this boundary proposal. Surely, it is not beyond the capability of intelligent people in local and state governments, acting with goodwill, to create a boundary that recognises our community of interest with Queanbeyan and, at the same time, establish financial arrangements that result in at least neutral financial outcome for the communities of both council areas.

Burra Urila Residents and Ratepayers Association Inc  
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