

Record of District Rationalisation Reference Group 18th May 2023, 1400-1600



PRESENT: Sandra Lambkin (President, New England District Council and former Committee member) (SL)
Via Teams Berdene Oxley-Boyd (President, Riverina District Council) (BOB)
Brian Willey (Lower North Coast District Council) (BW)
Derek Lesly (Chair, District Presidents Council) (DL)
David Ferry (VP & Secretary Central Coast District Council) (DF)
Ian Bubb (Treasurer, Intra Mural District Council) (IB)
Alan Barnes (VP, Far Southern Metropolitan District Council) (AB)

APOLOGIES: Andrew Moore

IN ATTENDANCE: Jeff O'Brien (State Secretary/Company Secretary RSL NSW) (JOB)
Isaac Ohlin (Head of Veterans Policy and Program Delivery RSL NSW) (IO)
Andrew Stensel (Services and Advocacy Project Manager RSL NSW) (AS)
Allen Barnes (ex-Northern Beaches District Council) (AB)
Bob Lunnon (President, Northern Beaches District Council and former Steering Committee member) (BL)

OPENING: Jeff O'Brien declared the meeting open at 2:00 pm

1. **Declaration of Conflict of interest:** No declarations of interest were declared.

2. **Minutes and Matters Arising:** 2.1 **Minutes of meeting XXX**
First meeting, no minute's pending

2.2 **Welcome, Introductions and Overview**

Introduction from all attendees in the room and online. Some of those in attendance were members on the previous Steering Committee (SL) (BL), which was formed in 2021 and went through the options, which we are going to be reviewing over the next two Reference Group meetings. Under review is the documentation used in the SteerCo, some of the assumptions, and the final recommendations that the SteerCo made to the Board. The Reference Group will make recommendations that will go to the Working Group who will reassess the process.

3. **Agenda:** 3.1 **Focus Points**

- Current DC Structure
- Strategic Objective
- Steering Committee Terms of Reference
- Steering Committee Principles and Assessment Criteria

3.1.1 **Current DC Structure**

JOB – Talks through what the Strategic Plan states about District Rationalisation.
DL – raises Conflict of Interest – that any District President has a conflict of interest because the meeting directly affects their positions on the District Council, DL wants to put on record that the conflict can be managed within the group, and secondly that the District Council Presidents can make independent recommendations, regardless of that potential conflict.

3.1.2 **Strategic Objective**

Current District Maps shared on Screen. This map shows NSW split into 23 Districts:

319 sub-Branches over 23 Districts

- 112 sub-Branches Metro and nine Districts
- 90 sub-Branches Southern Region and six Districts
- 112 sub-Branches Northern Region and eight Districts

All in the room agreed that this is the current division of Districts, per region, across NSW.

3.1.3 Steering Committee Terms of Reference

(BW) raises that the ToR do not state what it is that requires fixing. Feels it is more a list of what the SteerCo are/were going to do, not what it was that they were trying to do or what the problem is. Raised that the ToR led the SteerCo as there is a big focus on geographical redistribution, and the number ten, and no real emphasis. None of the deliberations aimed at fixing the ineffectiveness of the sub-Branch and District operations.

(JOB) clarifies that (BW) is stating that the 'ToR failed to identify the need to rationalise and how that would support sustainability and efficacy', (BW) agrees with this statement.

(SL) raises that the need to change only focused upon how to reduce District numbers to 10. (IB) agrees with (SL) on figure of 10 and that this was based on having 10 x District Support Officers. (DL) raises that the District Presidents Council was involved in the drafting of the TOR, and that the District Presidents Committee always stated that the inefficiencies identified, and the efficacy aspect all needed to be identified.

Also, that in discussions with the CEO when drafting ToR that the problem revolved around communication between sub-Branches and members and sub-Branches and District Councils in particular. Any solution would have to resolve the communication problems as you can't improve efficiency and governance without doing so.

(JOB) clarifies that **Recommendation** is for working group in terms of ToR look at sustainability, efficacy, and communication. Transcript shows agreement by (DL), (BW) and members in the Dugout.

(BW) raises that there was no consultation held with the membership. Explains that there is a need to consult with the members, explain the rationalisation process, that there is a belief there is a communication issue, and an issue of ineffectiveness of sub-Branches and District Councils, and ask the question that this is the problem how do we fix it? (DF) agrees with (DL) that there must be full consultation with members.

(BW) Talks on the issue of having only focused upon 10 Districts, that maybe consider 32 Districts with 10 sub-Branches and that this way the Districts could be very effective. That having 32 sub-Branches in each District would make governance of those sub-Branches difficult and that the solution on offer is/would be that the District Support Officer would play an administrative role. (DL) thinks that the role should be about training and putting in place a better mechanism. Suggests looking into a travelling training team, not a DSO, but a training team to teach sub-Branches how to do their admin. Thinks that SteerCo's job was difficult because they were not able to explore other ideas.

(JOB) clarifies **Recommendation** is that the working group needs to base whatever principles we use on the concept of sustainability and efficacy, and that whatever

happens needs to be tested with the membership from the beginning. Agreed by (BW), (DF).

(DL) Confirmed that there is a training and governance issue and that this need resolving. States that this does not necessarily mean that there is a requirement for District Rationalisation, and that maybe spending the \$1,000,000 (cost of ten DSOs) would be more viable spending upon 5 x two-person training teams, rather than changing any boundaries. Reinforces that there is a lack of communication, and asks the question is it a lack of transparency over sub-Branch governance matters, is it simply a lack of information being able to move around the place, what is the problem, and what is the best way to fix it? States that TEAMS are not the best way.

(BOB) raises that distances in Riverina are an issue as to travel to some sub-Branches can take up to six hours each way. Also, that there is a lack of ICT knowledge within membership, as an example on sub-Branch has 50 members and only 20 of them have email addresses. This means having to send out information by post which is proving expensive. (BOB) explains that this brings us back to communication issues with sub-Branches.

(DF) raises that Central coast has District meetings every two months, that they have a good turn out (10 sub-Branches) and that they get the message across to members.

(SL) raises that their district is about 60,000sq kms and 11 sub-Branches. (SL) makes contact via phone every month to all of the sub-Branch Presidents, and that they have a 100% turnout at District Council meetings.

(DL) raises that they don't feel that having a DSO in Districts that are working as they should be is not required, and that only districts that are not working as they should should have DSOs. States that working group needs to be flexible in their approach to the problem, Also raises that it seems like the approach that has been taken so far has been over simplified. Also, that they feel meetings which are both face to face and via TEAMS can work.

(BL) raises that moving forward ToR needs to identify Districts that need help and those that do not require so much, and possibly those that do not need to be rationalised. So part of the discussion identifying the problem should be, what, where it is, and where it lies.

3.1.4 **Steering Committee Principles and Assessment Criteria**

(DL) Comments on the waiting criteria and that it was clear that the weightings were clearly weighted heavily towards the financial side of things, how much money we have, and not directed towards the issue of communication, which has already been shown in this meeting to be an issue. Weighting, affordability is 35 and Communication had a weighting of 10, Accessibility 5, and oversight and assistance 20. Feels that weightings need changing to better reflect communication. Also suggests that there should possibly be an efficiency audit on the organisation before we get into the District Rationalisation exercise.

(IB), (BW), (DL) all agree that there should be training for reporting offered.

(JOB) seeks clarification as to **Recommendation** that an efficiency audit is required of each District to identify where the problems are . (DL) confirms.

(DL) states that the Principles should be stated as have been discussed in this meeting, not as written. Resolution of the problem should be the first principle, to identify and resolve the problem.

(DL) raises that any form of pilot wasn't considered, and that the group may wish to look at some kind of phasing. Identify where the problems are, and which District Councils have the problems. Identify a timeline that has a flying squad confirming, and then identifying timeline that would go with a phased implementation and/or creation of DSOs so that we are not implementing ten at once.

3.2 **Recommendations**

- 3.2.1 **Recommendation** is for working group in terms of ToR look at sustainability, efficacy, and communication.
- 3.2.2 **Recommendation** is that the working group needs to base whatever principles we use on the concept of sustainability and efficacy, and that whatever happens needs to be tested with the membership from the beginning.
- 3.2.3 **Recommendation** that an efficiency audit of each District be completed to identify where the problems are
- 3.2.4 **Recommendation** ToR to have full communications plan with full consultation with members.

4.

CLOSURE:

There being no further business, the meeting was declared closed at 3.52pm