

## CHAPTER 5

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMALGAMATION AND THE LACK OF A METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT: A POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

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#### INTRODUCTION

In 2015 a set of proposals for the reform and rationalisation of metropolitan Perth's local government structure (Local Government Advisory Board, 2014) was placed on hold. This sequence of events replicated a process that has played out on several occasions since the 1950s. The state government has repeatedly produced recommendations to reduce the number of local authorities in the Perth metropolitan area (Local Government Advisory Board, 2006; Local Government Advisory Board, 2014; Local Government Assessment Committee, 1968; Local Government Boundaries Commission, 1972; Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel, 2012; Royal Commission on Metropolitan District Boundaries, 1974; White, 1954). However, following invariable opposition from many of the affected local authorities, from various community groups and, characteristically, from state opposition parties, all these proposals have been shelved (Jones, 1979, 2009).

The result of these successive failures to bring about local government reform is that, following a period of local government dynamism that extended from the beginning of European settlement to the gold rush, metropolitan Perth has retained a local government structure and pattern that have remained largely unchanged for more than a century. This structure evolved to deal

with the circumstances of a small, remote colonial city that, over seventy years of European settlement, had grown to accommodate a population of less than 100,000 people. It is therefore ill-equipped to serve a rapidly expanding metropolis which is expected to contain over three million people by 2050 (Western Australian Planning Commission, 2015). This chapter will consider several questions that arise from this state of affairs. Firstly, how did what might be termed Perth's 'gold rush' local government pattern eventuate and why has this pattern survived, essentially unchanged, to the present day? Secondly, what attempts have been made to reform this pattern and why have they all failed? Thirdly, what are the implications of Perth's current local government structure and pattern for effective planning at the local and metropolitan scales, particularly given the metropolitan region's recent boom and its current aftermath?

#### THE EVOLUTION OF PERTH'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT PATTERN

The town sites of Perth, Fremantle and Guildford were designated following the establishment of the Swan River Colony in 1829. In 1838, the Towns Improvement Act authorised the establishment of town and country trusts. These bodies were intended to undertake public works, especially the development of roads, and their operations were intended to be at least partly funded from local sources. However, the colony's non-Indigenous population was so small (about 2,000) and poverty stricken that this proved unfeasible and responsibility for road works and communications outside the town sites passed back to the governor in 1849. With the exception of the granting of city status to Perth in 1856, no further local government changes occurred until the colony's economic and demographic fortunes had been boosted by the period of convict transportation from 1850 to 1868.

In 1871, the Municipalities and Road Districts Act established the ongoing basis for the local government system, not only for the Perth area but also for the entire colony. All the town trusts (including Perth, Fremantle and Guildford) became municipalities.

These were given wider powers, such as traffic licensing, and several social responsibilities, including the provision of libraries and parks. However, they were also required to collect local rates to (at least in part) finance their activities. The remainder of the colony was divided into road districts. Four of these – Perth, Swan, Canning and Fremantle – covered, respectively, the areas north west, north east, south east and south west of the City of Perth, and at least parts of them remain in existence as the Cities of Stirling, Swan, Canning and Cockburn. Since the colony's non-Indigenous population was only of the order of 25,000 at that time, it was accepted that the road districts' responsibilities would be limited to the construction and maintenance of roads, bridges and drainage works and that funding for these projects would largely come from colonial government grants.

This relatively simple local government pattern was appropriate for a situation where Perth, Fremantle and Guildford were separate nodes of urban development separated by tracts of farmland and bush and were only linked to each other by river transport and rudimentary tracks. However, this simple pattern remained in place for a mere twenty years (Berry, 1992). The boom caused by the Western Australian gold rush of the 1890s produced a surge in the Perth Statistical Division's population from 20,000 in 1890 to 73,000 in 1900. This population growth, together with the development of the railway networks linking Perth with Fremantle, Midland and Armadale (Selwood, 1979), led to suburban expansion beyond the original boundaries of the three municipalities.

In these circumstances, as the first review of local government boundaries noted (White, 1954, p. 7), there was 'every incentive to agitate for a separate board (road district) for each little centre of development that grew up'. This incentive was primarily financial. Each new road board had the potential to become a lobby group that could then agitate for colonial funds for local developments. Even new municipalities were predominantly financed by the colonial government. In 1898, the Victoria Park municipality raised £618 from rates but received £1,918 in government

subsidies and grants (Government Gazette, 18 November 1898, p. 3,386). Around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, therefore, the colonial and, after 1901, the state government authorised the establishment of twenty or so new road districts and municipalities in the Perth Statistical Division. Most of these were gold-rush-era inner suburbs such as Victoria Park or East Fremantle, but some were small urban (e.g. Rockingham) or even farming (e.g. Jandakot) settlements within what is now the outer metropolitan area (see Table 1).

This period of major and rapid change in Perth's local government boundaries was atypical and short lived. Not only did Perth's rate of population growth slow down during the early and mid-twentieth century, but the financial incentives for the establishment of new and small local authorities were gradually removed and even reversed by changes in state government policy. A series of legislative changes, including the *Road Districts Act 1905*, the *Municipal Corporations Act 1906*, the *Roads Act and the Public Health Act 1911* and the *Local Government Act 1960* progressively increased the responsibilities of local authorities and removed the functional differentials between Road Districts (since 1960, Shires) and Municipalities (since 1960, Towns and Cities). Over time, all local authorities became both responsible for a growing range of public health, recreational, cultural and social welfare services and increasingly dependent on their own (rate) revenue-generating abilities. Therefore, as the twentieth century progressed, and as the costs of providing basic urban facilities for new suburban areas devolved increasingly onto local authorities, 'secession' from existing local authorities became less of an attraction and more of a disincentive for 'each little centre of development'.

Changes to Perth's local government pattern in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have therefore generally been local and ad hoc. The early-twentieth-century expansion and late-twentieth-century contraction of the boundaries of the City of Perth will be considered later in this chapter. Apart from these events, the main changes have either been size-related or have

## Local Government Amalgamation

<b>City</b>	<b>Population</b>
Perth	27,553
<b>Municipalities</b>	
Claremont	2,014
Fremantle	14,708
Fremantle, East	2,494
Fremantle, North	3,246
Guildford	1,459
Helena Vale	1,568
Leederville	2,546
Subiaco	3,004
Victoria Park	1,267
<b>Road Districts</b>	
Bayswater	900
Belmont	600
Buckland Hill	1,500 (1902)
Canning	850
Cottesloe	1,274
Claremont	500
Darling Range	1,400
Jandakot	170
Kelmscott	530 (1903)
Peppermint Grove	532
Perth	410 (1903)
Perth, North	1,000
Perth, South	947 (1903)
Rockingham	250
Swan	5,000

*Table 1: Population of Perth Metropolitan Local Government Areas 1900. (Statistical Register of Western Australia, 1900 ff, cited in White (1954)).*

resulted from major metropolitan planning initiatives. A few of the smallest authorities have been merged with their larger neighbours, for example first Guildford and then Midland with the Shire (now City) of Swan. Conversely, in the rapidly growing north-western corridor, the City of Joondalup was separated from the City of Wanneroo in 1998; together they would have had a population of around 350,000 today. To the south, the Road

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<b>Cities</b>	<b>Population</b>
Armadale	77,586
Bayswater	70,658
Belmont	40,698
Canning	98,056
Cockburn	106,540
Fremantle	30,883
Gosnells	123,993
Joondalup	168,638
Kwinana	36,145
Melville	107,239
Nedlands	23,258
Perth	20,762
Rockingham	125,889
South Perth	46,477
Stirling	227,367
Subiaco	20,167
Swan	130,013
Vincent	31,549
Wanneroo	185,817
<b>Towns</b>	
Bassendean	16,228
Cambridge	28,365
Claremont	10,611
Cottesloe	8,713
East Fremantle	7,831
Mosman Park	9,613
Victoria Park	38,131
<b>Shires</b>	
Kalamunda	60,743
Mundaring	40,046
Peppermint Grove	1,685
Serpentine-Jarrahdale	22,698

*Table 2: Variation in Population of Perth Metropolitan Local Government Areas 2014. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Estimated Resident Population by Local Government Area 2001–2014 (ASGS 2014)).*

# Local Government Amalgamation

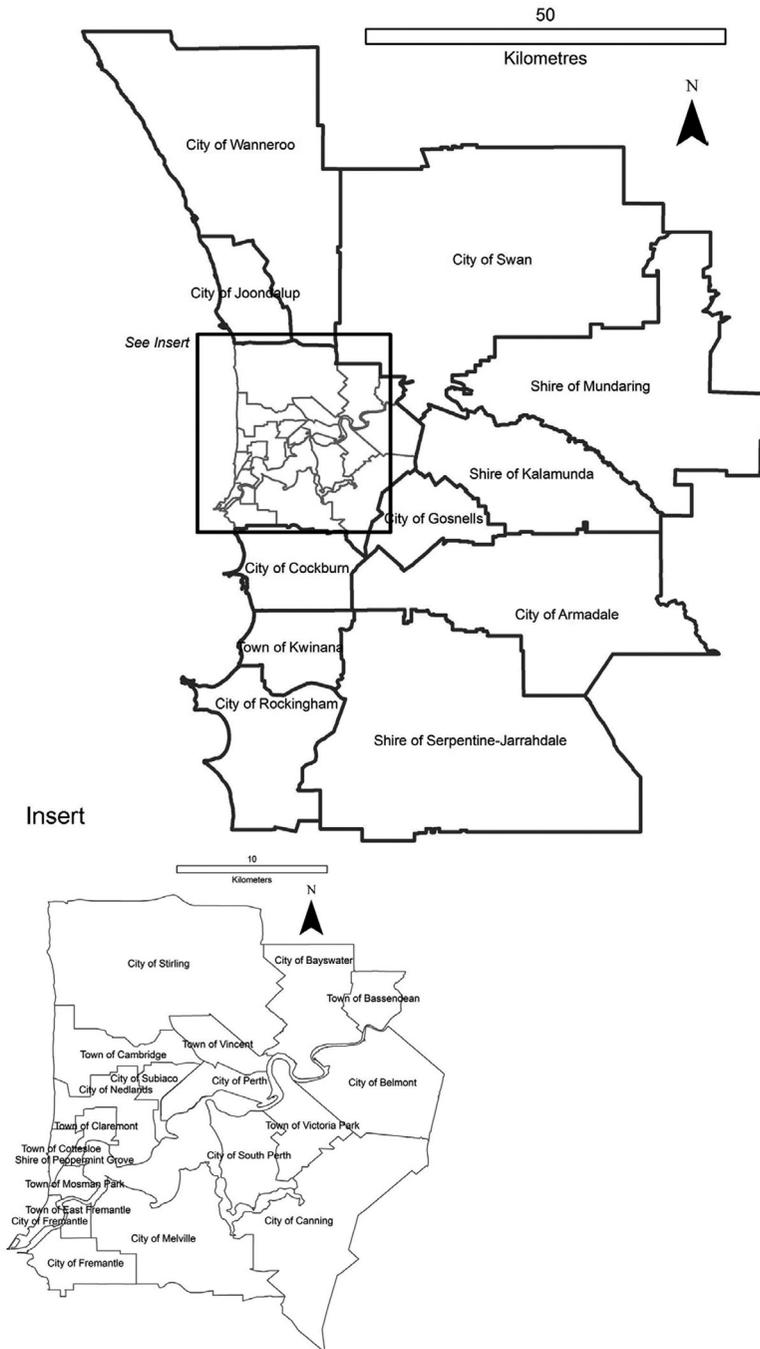


Figure 1: Local Government Areas 2014 (Jones, 2010, p. 210).

District (now City) of Kwinana was separated from the then Shire of Rockingham in 1954 at a time when this area was being developed as the state's major heavy industrial region.

As Table 2 and Figure 1 indicate, this long period of relative local government boundary inertia has produced an idiosyncratic, if not schizophrenic, pattern of local government boundaries within the Perth metropolitan region. As both Bowman (1976) and the Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel (2012) have noted, the average population of Perth's local authorities is significantly lower than those of Australia's other mainland state capitals. However, what is most notable is their diversity in terms of both population and areal size. Peppermint Grove, with a population of 1,685 and an area of 1.1 square kilometres, can be contrasted with Stirling's population of 227,367 and Swan's area of 1,043 square kilometres. Figure 1 also depicts, in spatial terms, the historical break between the era of local government boundary dynamism during the gold rush and that of local government stability that succeeded it. Perth's inner ring, particularly in those areas which experienced suburban expansion during the gold rush, is characterised by local government units that are small in both area and population size, with several having less than 10,000 inhabitants today. In the outer metropolitan area, where suburbanisation did not occur until well into the twentieth century, the local authorities now govern a much larger area and, in several cases, over 100,000 inhabitants. Even those outer authorities whose populations are currently relatively small, such as Serpentine-Jarrahdale, are experiencing, or will experience in the foreseeable future, rapid population growth (Western Australian Planning Commission, 2015).

### PROPOSALS FOR THE REFORM OF PERTH'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

The first move to rationalise at least part of metropolitan Perth's local government structure, emanated from local government itself. One consequence of the proliferation of small local authorities in

## Local Government Amalgamation

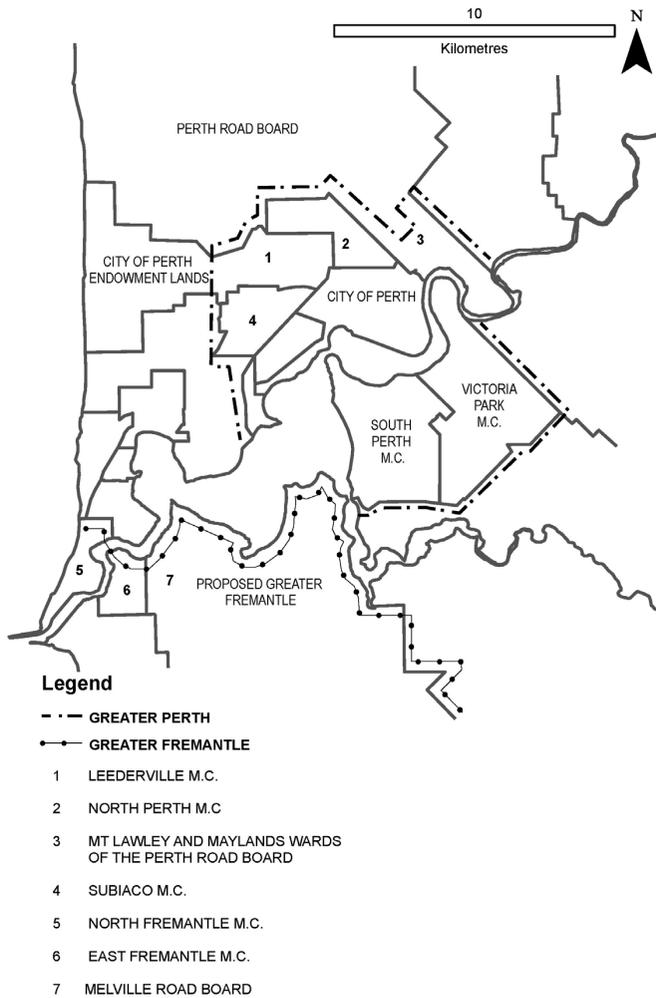


Figure 2: Greater Perth and Greater Fremantle Proposals 1910  
(Jones, 2010, p. 211).

the 1890s and 1900s was that, early in the twentieth century, the state government assumed responsibility for the management of a number of urban service functions across the metropolitan area. These included water supply, sewerage and drainage, tramways, cemeteries and some parks and reserves. Some of the larger councils, notably the City of Perth, therefore sought to guard against any further transfer of their responsibilities from local to

state level. As Figure 2 indicates, proposals for both a 'Greater Perth' and a 'Greater Fremantle' were put forward in 1910 (Johns, 1950). In contrast with later attempts at local government reform, these initiatives were at least partially successful. On the basis of these proposals, the (then) largely working class municipalities of North Perth, Leederville, Victoria Park and North Fremantle were merged with their larger neighbours. However, the relatively more affluent authorities of South Perth, Subiaco, East Fremantle and Melville remained independent.

Since then, and commencing with A. E. White's report of 1954, the state government has requested and received numerous proposals for the reduction of metropolitan local authority numbers and the rationalisation of their boundaries. Not surprisingly, and as was the case during the gold rush, these pushes for local government reform have generally occurred when both the state and metropolitan Perth were experiencing periods of rapid economic and population growth and change and strategic initiatives were being sought to respond to this dynamism. During the 'Japanese' iron ore boom period of the 1960s and early 1970s, the Local Government Assessment Committee (1968), the Local Government Boundary Commission (1972) and the Royal Commission on Metropolitan District Boundaries (1974) all presented their reports. More recently, and largely coinciding with the recent 'Chinese' mineral boom, the reports of the Local Government Advisory Board (2006 and 2014) and the Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel (2012) all received state government consideration.

Although these reports span a period of sixty years over which the metropolitan area's population has more than quadrupled, there are broad similarities between their recommendations. All favoured a modest reduction in the number of local authorities, from twenty-six to between seventeen and twenty-two in the case of the earlier reports and from thirty to fourteen most recently. They invariably recommended amalgamations, albeit to varying degrees, of the small, western suburbs authorities of Subiaco, Nedlands, Claremont, Cottesloe, Peppermint Grove

and Mosman Park. Other small authorities were also repeatedly recommended for amalgamation with their larger neighbours, e.g. Bassendean with Bayswater and East Fremantle with Fremantle.

Their greatest similarity, however, relates to the fate of all these proposals. Some of White's more modest recommendations were introduced to state parliament, but were subsequently withdrawn as a result of opposition to them in the Upper House (Jones, 1979). None of the other proposals were even formally introduced into parliament. The current situation is summarised by the Department of Local Government and Communities as follows:

In February 2015, the State Government announced that planned changes to Perth's metropolitan local government boundaries were on hold. Changes to boundaries would only go ahead in areas where the affected councils supported the changes (Government of Western Australia, 2015).

Webb postulated two reasons why the earlier rounds of reform proposals failed.

...first a colonial preference for ad hoc bureaucratic organisations rather than democratic institutions and secondly the failure of existing local governments through petty jealousies and extended ego-trips to realise the wonderful opportunities that local government could provide. (Webb, 1972, p. 32)

Certainly it verges on the axiomatic to observe that local authorities will resist proposals that threaten their own demise, but a range of other factors have combined to support the 'colonial preference' for what is still essentially the gold rush status quo.

First, Perth has long been, and is increasingly, a dominant capital city. It contains the majority of the state's population, so were the superficially logical solution of a single metropolitan local

authority to eventuate, its power and authority would severely challenge that of the state government. Capital city dominance at the state scale is a common situation in Australia. On the mainland, Brisbane is unique in possessing a single metropolitan local government just as Queensland is unique in having the majority of its population located outside its capital city. Indeed, Gordon Reid (1969), a former governor, went so far as to describe the perpetuation of fragmented metropolitan government in Perth as a form of 'divide and rule' operated by the state government, even though the extent of this division is now significantly greater than the state government would wish.

It follows then that any local government reform proposals are likely to involve the division of the metropolitan area into a number of separate local authorities. This opens the door to an infinite number of disputes as to the optimal size (and therefore the optimal number) of local authorities as well as to their optimal boundaries. The Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel (2012) acknowledged this. It noted that, presumably in the hope of keeping change to a minimum, the Western Australian Local Government Authority argued for fifteen to twenty councils (*ibid.*, p. 104). However, the Panel also observed that having ten to twelve councils would align with the metropolitan region's designated Strategic Activity Centres and that five to six councils would align with the metropolitan sub regions (*ibid.*, pp. 107). In general, protagonists of larger local authorities highlight efficiency and economies of scale arguments, while those favouring smaller authorities cite issues of community and local democracy (Soul & Dollery, 2000).

Secondly, even though proposals for local government reform have been brought forward under both Labor and Coalition governments, they have seldom if ever received multi-party support at critical junctures in their progress through the political system, often for narrow electoral reasons. Critically, the most recent proposals had Liberal, but not National, party support because the National Party feared that the abolition of small councils in the

metropolitan area could be seen as a precedent for their removal elsewhere in the state. Since large-scale amalgamations of non-metropolitan councils have occurred in most other states (Jones, 2009), such fears could well be justified.

Finally, the controversies surrounding the local government reform proposals of the late 1960s and early 1970s led to the construction of a specific barrier to local government amalgamation in the form of the 'Dadour Amendment' (Goode, 2015). Tom Dadour was the Liberal, and subsequently Independent, Member of Parliament for the seat of Subiaco, an electorate largely composed of a local authority which both then and more recently has faced the prospect of amalgamation. He secured an amendment to the Local Government Act whereby any local authority under threat of amalgamation could forestall this process by calling a poll of its electors on this issue and securing a majority of votes against it on at least a 50% turnout. In February 2015, five local authorities, Cockburn, Kwinana, East Fremantle, South Perth and Victoria Park conducted polls on the impacts on their municipalities of the most recent set of reform/amalgamation proposals. The votes against amalgamation ranged from 61.58% in Victoria Park to 87.98% in Kwinana. However, it is the turnout figures that reflect the limited basis on which these results were attained. In two of the five polls the turnouts failed, by considerable margins, to meet the 50% threshold (36.25% in Cockburn and 38.02% in Victoria Park). The turnout rates in the other three polls (50.83% in South Perth, 52.93% in Kwinana and 54.68% in East Fremantle) barely exceeded it. Although, in all five cases, far less than half the eligible electors voted against amalgamation, three of these results were valid under the parameters of the Dadour Amendment and it was this outcome that finally caused the state government to place the current amalgamation process on hold.

Commenting on the 2006 Local Government Advisory Board report, Parker (2006, p. 10) observed that 'the state government will require an exceptional amount of political will to take on the vested interests in local government and turn the report's recommendations

into reality'. Although the state government has shown considerable political will in this regard in recent years, local circumstances, and in particular the Dadour Amendment, have shown even this to be insufficient to bring about any significant reform.

#### LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND METROPOLITAN PLANNING

Lloyd-Jones (1972, pp. 3–9) summarised the major weaknesses of Australian local government as follows: 'first of all, the areas of local government are not related to the areas over which people otherwise live their lives. And secondly, many authorities are too small in resources.' In his comments on a recent Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report, Renn (2015, p. 2) reiterates these two issues. He cites the OECD's contention that 'often, administrative boundaries between municipalities are based on centuries-old borders that do not correspond to contemporary patterns of human settlement and activity' and their estimation that 'for regions of equal population, doubling the number of governments reduces productivity by 6%'. The financial issue has certainly concerned most of the protagonists for local government reform in Perth. The 1968 Local Government Assessment Committee drew attention to the large number of local authorities which, at that time, could not support full-time engineers, health surveyors or planners, and the 2006 Local Government Advisory Board's report, which stimulated the 2012 and 2014 proposals, likewise placed a heavy emphasis on the financial sustainability (or apparent lack of it) of the metropolitan area's smaller councils.

However, it is the spatial, rather than the financial issue, which has been and which remains of greatest concern with regard to metropolitan planning. In any large metropolitan area, a significant proportion of the population will characteristically travel considerable distances to satisfy their various needs. In any metropolitan area with a fragmented local government system, many people are likely to live in one local government area, work

in another, shop in a third, recreate in a fourth and so on. In these circumstances they are likely to seek conflicting ends at the local and metropolitan scales (Jones, 2010). At the metropolitan scale, they will wish for greater access to a superior range of employment and service opportunities. Particularly in a dynamic region, metropolitan planning therefore involves the management, and frequently the instigation, of change. At the local level, and particularly in established areas, people will characteristically seek the preservation of their existing quality of life. While it would be too simplistic to contend that local planning in established areas is therefore largely concerned with resistance to change, this does nevertheless lead to an inherent tension between the aims of planning at the local and metropolitan scales. Achieving, through change, the greatest good for the greatest number at the metropolitan scale (e.g. by constructing or expanding a major road, airport or industrial area) may well have adverse impacts on the specific localities most directly affected by these developments.

In a metropolitan region with a highly fragmented system of local government, this tension between regional and local planning aspirations acquires a further level of complexity as local authorities compete amongst themselves both to benefit from positive metropolitan planning initiatives (e.g. new or expanded shopping centres or major hospitals) and to ensure that regional developments with locally negative externalities (e.g. higher residential densities or a freeway through a built up area) are located elsewhere – the ‘not in my back yard’ syndrome.

In Perth, the establishment of special purpose metropolitan bodies to manage functions such as water supplies and cemeteries in the early twentieth century was followed by the establishment of the Metropolitan Town Planning Commission in 1928. Although this body produced a report in 1930 setting out guidelines and principles for Perth’s development over the next half century (Stokes & Hill, 1992), the onset of first the Depression and then the Second World War ensured that the state and local governments continued to deal with metropolitan planning issues

in a largely ad hoc manner until the 1950s. In 1952, the state government invited Professor Gordon Stephenson to devise a plan for the metropolitan region. Stephenson and Town Planning Commissioner Alistair Hepburn presented their plan to parliament in 1955. This became the basis of the 1963 Metropolitan Regional Scheme that provided the first strategic basis for metropolitan Perth's land-use and transport infrastructure and set in place a framework with which the local planning decisions of the various authorities were required to conform.

The Scheme contained generally accurate predictions of Perth's population growth, to 1,000,000 by 1984 and 1,400,000 by 2000 (Satterley, 2008). It sought to accommodate this growth by incremental and generally peripheral suburban expansion, albeit with the development of a major industrial region at Kwinana. While 'following considerable consultation, many modifications in detail were made to the scheme' (Stokes & Hill, 1992, p. 117), it did not appear to provoke any major disputes between local and state government. The same could not be said for the next metropolitan strategy, the Corridor Plan (Metropolitan Regional Planning Authority, 1970).

While the aims of the Corridor Plan were, in part, undermined by the over optimism of its demographic forecasts (it predicted a metropolitan population of 1,400,000 by 1989 rather than 2000), its implementation was also compromised by a lack of cooperation between the state and several local authorities. The plan called for Perth's growth to be largely accommodated in four transport-related growth corridors extending north west, east, south east and south west from the existing built up area; with a large proportion of the new employment and service facilities being provided in major 'corridor centres' at Joondalup, Midland, Armadale and Rockingham. In terms of growth in employment and service provision and the increased rate incomes that would result from such development, local authorities located along the corridors, and particularly those containing the proposed corridor

centres, stood to gain more from this metropolitan strategy than did those located elsewhere in the metropolitan area.

However, only half of the projected 700,000 population increase occurred between 1970 and 1989 and suburban expansion along the growth corridors was therefore not as rapid as had been predicted. In these circumstances, a number of local authorities in the middle ring of suburbia allowed massive expansions of several subregional shopping centres, notably at Innaloo–Osborne Park, Morley, Cannington (Carousel) and Booragoon (Garden City). This brought increased rate income to the local authorities in which these centres were located but also diverted investment from the state government designated corridor centres further out (Yiftachel & Kenworthy, 1992).

The shortcomings of and intergovernmental conflicts resulting from the Corridor Plan projections and strategies were acknowledged in the 1987 Report of the Review Group of the State Planning Commission (State Planning Commission, 1987). The next metropolitan strategy, *Metroplan* (Department of Planning and Urban Development, 1990), and its successors, *Network City* (Western Australian Planning Commission, 2004), *Directions 2031* (Western Australian Planning Commission, 2009), *Directions 2031 and Beyond* (Western Australian Planning Commission, 2010) and *Draft Perth and Peel @3.5million* (Western Australian Planning Commission, 2015) have all placed a greater, and indeed an increasing, emphasis on the containment of urban sprawl and on redevelopment, at higher housing densities, within metropolitan Perth's existing built-up area. Indeed, these metropolitan strategies now foresee half of Perth's increased population to mid-century being accommodated within the current (sub)urban envelope.

However, this shift in emphasis, from the peripheral expansion of the Stephenson–Hepburn and Corridor plans to the residential 'densification' proposed in the subsequent metropolitan strategies, has given rise to a whole new set of conflicts; between state and local governments; between different local governments; and between governments and their electors/ratepayers. In this case,

the conflicts are between metropolitan strategies seeking change (an increase in residential densities to avoid the adverse environmental, economic and social effects of urban sprawl) and local desires for stability (the retention of the amenity that low-density suburbia provides to its residents).

It is perhaps not surprising that these protests against higher residential densities have been most readily articulated and most widely publicised in some of Perth's smallest and most affluent local authorities. In 2015, objections to the higher-density rezoning of parts of the Town of Cambridge filled the front and letters pages of the local community newspapers for several weeks and a similar groundswell seems to be developing in Mosman Park (*Cottesloe Mosman Post*, 19 December 2015, p. 16). In 2008, protesters from the suburb of Dalkeith distributed leaflets outside the University of Western Australia Club on the occasion of the inaugural Stephenson-Hepburn Address by the state Director General of Planning, demanding 'local democracy not planner autocracy'. They were objecting to plans for multi-storey developments in the exclusive suburb of Dalkeith and had even mooted its secession from the City of Nedlands in order to achieve their aims (Thomas, 2009). The existence of the even smaller Shire of Peppermint Grove was cited as a precedent for their actions. But this group should perhaps have been cautious about what they wished for. Given the existing fragmentation of Perth's local government structure, every local authority, however small, has now been given a state government infill target and Peppermint Grove sees its allocation of 500 extra homes as excessively onerous given its extremely small area and population size (Emery, 2015).

The situation for the City of Perth is rather different in two ways. Firstly, as a 'CBD' authority, it possessed an insignificant residential population until very recently, and the City Council and the state government are in agreement over the need to increase the city's population both to add 'life' to the CBD and to ease commuting pressures on the transport infrastructure. Secondly, unlike the inner suburban councils, the City of Perth does seek

boundary changes to bring major items of central city infrastructure, such as the casino, the new sports stadium, the University of Western Australia and a hospital complex under its control. Here, too, the interests of the city and state governments coincide since more of the major items of infrastructure in the metropolitan region's centre would fall within a single local jurisdiction thus simplifying the coordination of local and metropolitan planning in this regard. However, several of these central facilities and the developments that surround them provide significant rate revenue to the small inner suburban councils in which they currently reside. The suburban councils are therefore resisting this initiative by the state government and the City of Perth.

The outer suburban councils are also likely to be in conflict with metropolitan planning strategies beyond the boom. In recent years, the capabilities of even the largest outer suburban authorities were often stretched in dealing with metropolitan Perth's rapid growth. As the boom ends, however, and as metropolitan planning strategies seek to accommodate a growing proportion of Perth's expanding population within the existing built-up areas, the outer suburban councils could well face the very different challenge of significantly slowing rates of growth. As with the conflicts associated with the implementation of the Corridor Plan in the period following the boom of the 1960s and 1970s, the fragmented nature of metropolitan Perth's local government has the potential to lead to both an undermining of the metropolitan strategy of densification and to increasing inter-council competition should even some outer suburban councils seek to maintain their current growth rates by opening up more land for development.

The inherent challenge of conflicting local and metropolitan planning interests remains in both boom and post-boom conditions. It is exacerbated by both the large number of local authorities with which the metropolitan planners are obliged to deal and by the diverse size and nature of the interests of these component local authorities. Without significant local government reform,

these issues will endure to mid-century regardless of the metropolitan region's rate of growth over the coming decades.

### CONCLUSION

'Between fragmentation and amalgamation no one actually knows what the right-sized box for local government is or how to change it – but everyone can see the problems of most of the existing governance models' (Renn, 2015, p. 1). Even allowing for this general challenge, the problems arising in the period beyond the boom from metropolitan Perth's existing local and metropolitan governance models are particularly acute.

First, whatever the 'right-sized box for local government' is, the current extreme diversity of 'box sizes' across the metropolitan area would indicate that many, if not most, local authorities diverge from any conceivable ideal. The Metropolitan Local Government Review Panel (2012) favoured local authorities with projected populations of 100,000 to 300,000. This would have produced around fifteen authorities for Perth's likely mid-century city population of 3,000,000 or so inhabitants. Conversely, if the small authorities with current populations of 10,000 or less which have campaigned for their continued autonomy are indeed the 'right-sized' boxes for local government, then the ideal number of councils for metropolitan Perth would be in the order of 300 and the current larger authorities should be broken up into much smaller units. If smaller local government units of this type are indeed superior, it would seem logical that those arguing for the retention of their own small authorities should, on the grounds of both equity and consistency, also be advocating the breakup of all the metropolitan region's larger councils.

Second, there is an approximate inverse correlation between the population size of Perth's local authorities and their per capita income levels. Perth's inner suburbs have gentrified in recent decades, a period over which the formerly working-class suburbs which were absorbed into the City of Perth a century or so ago

have since regained their autonomy as the upwardly mobile Town of Victoria Park and City of Vincent. This is relevant because it is the more affluent, and therefore the more educated, articulate and connected, sections of the population who are best able to organise and to lobby for their sectional interests. As I have argued elsewhere (Jones, 2009), as 'planning processes have become more consultative, well-organised middle class lobby groups with their greater financial, networking and administrative resources and skills have been able to wield increasing influence over planning decisions. ... If, as is currently the case, the more aware and articulate section of Perth's population has both more councils and more councillors per head than those living in the remainder of the metropolitan area, this is likely to increase their already disproportionate influence in this regard.' On occasion, as in its Dialogue with the City (Hopkins, 2010), the state planners have deliberately sought to engage groups such as the young, and those from non-English speaking backgrounds in their consultative processes, but such attempts have generally met with limited success.

Third, Western Australia is not Queensland and Perth's dominant capital city status renders the establishment of a democratically elected metropolitan body such as the Brisbane City Council politically unfeasible. The state, as the political unit that undertakes metropolitan planning, is far removed in scale terms from the local authorities with which it interacts. It is therefore particularly easy for local community/protest groups to characterise it as remote from and unresponsive to their concerns and therefore as the preserve of faceless and undemocratic bureaucrats.

Fourth, Dollery, Crase & O'Keefe (2009), who have elsewhere (Dollery & Crase, 2004) questioned the benefits of local government amalgamations, contend that the mere threat of amalgamations has characteristically obliged councils to improve their processes and to seek ways of cooperating more effectively with their neighbours, thus lessening the need for costly amalgamations to take place. While this may have been the case in New South Wales, the regularity with which amalgamation proposals

have been put forward and then abandoned in metropolitan Perth would indicate that the councils involved are now more likely to view any amalgamation processes as merely a ‘crying wolf’ problem that will simply go away in due course.

Finally, the Dadour Amendment, a legacy from a previous period of failed local government reform, remains as a further electoral barrier to any future change.

Both the need for and the barriers to local government reform in Perth are therefore considerable. In these circumstances reform is perhaps best approached in a similar manner to one required to achieve a comparably difficult political outcome, namely success in a constitutional referendum. The first prerequisite is bipartisan support, the second is extensive community consultation and the third is a targeted campaign to counter the inevitable opposition that such proposals invariably encounter. Goode’s (2015) critique of the state’s most recent attempt at metropolitan local government reform underlines just how inadequate this process was on all of these counts.

In the absence of local government reform therefore, and given the inherent tensions between the aspirations of metropolitan and local planning alluded to earlier, it is likely that a different outcome, also feared by individual councils, could eventuate over the coming decades. As the burdens of achieving agreement over metropolitan initiatives between state and local government increase, the state may well feel a growing need to assume to itself a greater range of planning powers. Councils already complain about the growing number of state government and ministerial decisions that overrule local government wishes. Nevertheless, as metropolitan Perth (and Peel) continues to expand, change and, from time to time, even ‘boom’, the region’s local authorities may well wish to consider whether they see amalgamation or increasing state government control as the lesser of the two evils that confront them.

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