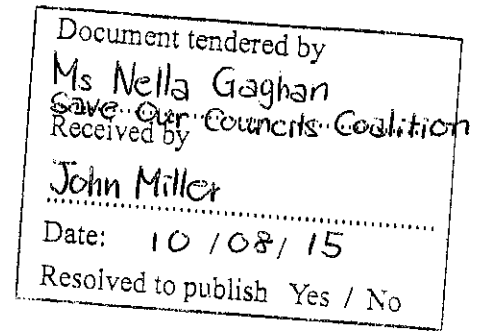


Inquiry into Local Government in New South Wales



Save Our Councils Coalition

Opening Statement 10 August 2015

1. Save Our Councils Coalition (SOCC)

Save Our Councils Coalition currently consists of over 50 community groups, as well as individual residents, Mayors, Councils and council staff. SOCC was launched on June 11th. The coalition is growing at a fast rate and is supported by metropolitan, regional and rural community groups and councils. SOCC is not politically aligned.

SOCC says:

- **We want our local councils to stay local**
- **We are calling on the NSW State Government to keep to its promise of “No forced amalgamations”**
- **Where a merger is proposed let local communities decide with a valid referendum of all electors**
- **We will fight to keep our councils local**

2. What local communities highly value about local councils

- Local councils hold our local communities together and connected.
- Local councils keep decision-making local.
- Local councils ensure the strategic direction comes from the community and is owned by the community.
- Local councils make democracy accessible and accountable.
- Our local councils value what we value - the local heritage, the local environment.
- A local council that is based upon ‘community of interest,’ and a ‘sense of belonging’ of its community to place.
- Local representation is by councillors who are accessible and know their local area well.
- Local councils provides local identity and values, including those relating to community, history, built form, natural areas, geography, services and facilities.
- Local councils support the many community groups and volunteers.
- Local councils are able to be nimble and responsive to the needs of local residents and provide the services that we - the local community – tell them we want.

3. Collaboration between councils and working strategically at a regional level

- Councils already work very closely with their neighbouring councils and within regional organisations of councils (ROCs) to achieve savings and efficiencies, and on regional matters. They also deal daily with the State Government on state and regional issues.

- Many councils have indicated a willingness to further explore opportunities for ROCs and also in developing Joint Organisation business models that provide further efficiencies and are acceptable to the local community.

4. Forced amalgamations strongly opposed

- Bigger councils created through forced amalgamations would seriously diminish the localised services and democracy provided by smaller councils. Such amalgamations would be fiercely and bitterly opposed by local communities.
- For the Government to destroy local councils through forced amalgamations in order to get their way on regional planning shows an appalling lack of understanding by Government of the value of local councils to their communities and to the State.
- The Government needs to respectfully listen to communities and their local councils and partner with them individually and through regional organisations of councils to achieve common goals in the public interest.
- For any Government to try to destroy an existing council that is effectively servicing its community and has its confidence, is poor judgement. To do so on an excuse that it can't be effective regionally is simply untrue. To do so when it promised that there would be no forced council amalgamations is an enormous betrayal of the public's trust.

5. Proposed voluntary mergers require proper referendums

- Respecting local communities means there should be no less than a full and valid referendum of all electors on any proposed merger with a majority vote required in all of the areas proposed for amalgamation.

6. We reject the “Fit for the Future” process for local government reform.

- It has failed the community by not engaging and consulting with the wider community in any meaningful way.
- It has cherry-picked recommendations from the Independent Panel's report to focus almost all the effort on one item only - council amalgamations.
- It has had a deeply inadequate timeline for each stage of the process – rushed and too short – which has further undermined scrutiny and consultation.
- It has failed to provide evidence to the community to justify amalgamations.
- It has started from the premise that there was something that “needed fixing” with local councils when in fact many councils in NSW are highly functioning, effective and financially sustainable despite the many years of cost-shifting and rate pegging.

7. Attachments

Nine USB flash drives containing the following videos:

1. Save Our Councils Coalition Launch, 11 June 2015 (20 min)
2. Save Our Councils Coalition Launch, 11 June 2015 (4 min)
3. Pittwater Public Meeting, 19 May 2015 (8 min)
4. Hunters Hill Public Meeting, 6 June 2013 (3 min)

Save Our Councils Coalition

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