

## Opening Statement Inquiry into 'Fit for the Future' reform agenda

Thank you for providing the opportunity for Marrickville Council to give evidence to the General Purpose Standing Committee No 6 regarding the inquiry into the 'Fit for the Future' reform agenda.

Marrickville Council is supportive of local government reform.

However, amalgamations featured in only a handful of the 65 recommendations of the Independent Local Government Review Panel.

What has transpired since is a fixation on amalgamation, largely at the expense of all other recommendations.

Only those who voluntarily amalgamate will have access to many of the reforms the Panel recommended and the State Government has used the Panel's final report and its recommendations to incentivise amalgamations.

The criteria being used to determine if Councils are 'fit for the future' are extremely disappointing.

The criteria are far too narrow and fail to recognise the importance of environmental and social outcomes.

In addition, the fact that there is no assessment of 'communities of interest' or community feedback is alarming.

'Communities of interest', in our view, comprise 3 parts:

1. Local spacial / geographic connections where people do their shopping, use services and schools
2. Values – for Marrickville LGA it is around valuing independent arts, GLTBIQ and a sense of belonging
3. Political representation

Councils exist to satisfy the needs of their local communities.

Yet the State Government's criteria completely ignore the views of local communities.

State Government wants large local government that is easier to deal with and too large for communities to be able to meaningfully engage with.

The costs of amalgamations for local residents and businesses is estimated to be upwards of \$80m for the Inner West Council.

250 jobs could be lost.

A big negative impact would be the increase by 3 fold in resident per councillor ratio from 6,800 residents to each Councillor to 22,000 to each Councillor.

Rates will rise by approximately 8.3% following amalgamations due to infrastructure renewal and maintenance.

Any medium to long term financial benefits would not be recouped for many years.

Evidence has shown that service levels rise to the highest level in amalgamated councils, resulting in few savings.

Marrickville Council satisfies all 7 of the key financial indicators with no additional rate increases if it stands alone.

The role of IPART in the process lacks its usual transparency as IPART will not disclose the assessment outcomes of individual councils.

The timeframes in which IPART is to make these assessments is also extremely short.

We know that Australians think that local government is the best level of government to make decisions about their local area.

We also know that Australian communities want to be involved with government in making decisions about how and what services should be delivered in their local area.

All citizens of NSW should be able to have a say in the future of local government.