

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 6

INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Questions on Notice: LGNSW

Answers are to be returned to the Committee secretariat by Friday 21 August 2015

1. **The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** May I ask in relation to that allegation if you can come back to us with maybe some more comment and more details because that \$1 million a day has been and is repeated constantly. I mean every time the Minister speaks he raises it. You are correct, we have sought information numerous times and I know many other councils have asked for clarification and have not received it. I think it would be good if we had some advice from you.

Answer: LGNSW draws the Committee's attention to Ms Rygate's comments immediately below (on page 21 of the transcript), and to the Minister's response to Legislative Council Question on Notice 0172, lodged the day after the Committee hearing.

2. Perhaps you can take this on notice but you mentioned earlier the issue that amalgamations have not led to lower rates in any location, particularly as we have the Minister proposing that any amalgamated councils would in fact be given additional responsibilities which, I presume, would be additional costs. Could you come back to us with your comments on that?

Mr RHOADES: We can and we will back that up with consultation we have had, for argument sake, with the Local Government Association of Queensland. We have done our research. I mentioned before that since 2008 an increase of approximately 24 per cent to 27 per cent in rates on average across the State of Queensland; Victoria was not much different. When it comes back we will get that information for you.

Answer: LGNSW draws the Committee's attention to page 9 of its submission.

3. Market research conducted across 14 local government areas in Sydney between January and June this year, of about 7,000 people representing local government areas of more than one million people in total, found that 59 per cent of them were aware of the Fit for the Future recommendation about councils being amalgamated, 85 per cent supported councils standing alone and 61 per cent identified the no delete change as their first preference.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can you provide us with a full copy of those?

Ms RYGATE: Certainly.

Answer: Please see the attached media release and fact sheet.

MEDIA RELEASE

30 June 2015

Government ignores community on Council mergers

Less than one in five Sydney residents support the merger of their Council as outlined in the State Government's *Fit for the Future* reform package, new research has shown.

Local Government NSW today released opinion polling carried out over the over the last 4 months which found only 18% of the community supported the Mega Councils proposed by the Baird Government.

The polling also found more than 60% of Sydneysiders preferred their Council to stand alone.

Local Government NSW President Keith Rhoades AFSM said the polling clearly demonstrated the strength of community opposition to the forced amalgamation of Councils.

"The State Government has failed to convince residents that forced amalgamation is a good idea," Cr Rhoades said.

"The majority of residents feel that their local Council is doing a good job and they have concerns that the proposed Mega Councils will not have capacity to address local issues.

"Residents and ratepayers recognise their Councils are about far more than just rates, roads and rubbish collection – they are grassroots democracy at its most fundamental.

"Local Government is the only way the majority of ordinary individuals can have a direct input into the future of their neighbourhoods and the way they live their lives – and they don't want *any* sphere of Government riding roughshod over this right.

"They don't want to be forced to give way to big developers, or to see their lifestyles impacted by decisions into which they have no meaningful input.

"The Government would be wise to heed this expression of public opinion, and to think twice before they force financially sustainable Councils to merge against community wishes."

Cr Rhoades said the polling was conducted by Micromex Research and Consulting and covered 14 diverse Local Government Areas with a combined population totalling around 1 million residents.

Respondents were selected by random telephone interview and asked to rate their support on a range of options for their Local Council – from the no change/stand alone option through to the amalgamation proposed in the Baird Government's *Fit for the Future* program.

For each option they were asked to indicate whether they were "very supportive", "supportive", "somewhat supportive", "not supportive" or "not at all supportive".

Respondents were also asked to rank the options in order of preference, with 61% nominating the Stand Alone option as their first preference.

Cr Rhoades said the sample size of 7,416 respondents of the research was significantly larger than that used by pollsters conducting the research used for political opinion polls published regularly in the media.

"These people are telling us they don't want to be forced into Mega Councils with populations the size of Tasmania," he said.

"Why is the Government refusing to listen?"

"The Government has either misunderstood public opinion, been misled by vested interest groups such as the development lobby, or deliberately chosen to raise the spectre of forced amalgamations on strictly ideological grounds."

Cr Rhoades said LGNSW supported Local Government reform which genuinely benefited residents and ratepayers. Voluntary amalgamations, backed by community opinion and a solid business case, are strongly supported and should proceed.

But he said the Association opposed forced amalgamations of financially sustainable Councils whose residents were opposed to any merger.

Media Enquiries

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Attachments: Micromex Community Polling Fact Sheet

FACT SHEET

Micromex Research and Consulting

is a full service market research and community consultation agency with more than 20-years experience. The agency operates its own in-house call centre and nationwide field team. In the past five years it has undertaken community consultation and community polling for around 60 Councils across NSW.

More information can be found at <http://www.micromex.com.au/>

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

- This market research is the consolidated results of opinion polling conducted by Micromex across 14 Local Government Areas (LGAs) between January and June 2015.
- The 14 LGAs polled constitute one-third of all Sydney Councils involved in the Fit for the Future process. These 14 Councils represent almost half of Councils recommended for amalgamation.
- Total population of the combined LGAs polled is 1,156,417.
- Sample size was 7,416 – significantly more than the sample sizes used in regular Opinion Polls on voting intention which commissioned and published by mainstream media outlets. Such polls usually operating on a sample size ranging between 1,000 and 2,000.
- The larger sample size reduces the margin of error from the standard +/-3% to +/-1%.
- Polling was conducted by Micromex Research, primarily by random telephone interview. However results also contain small number of face-to-face polling undertaken in one LGA.
- Respondents were weighted to accurately reflect ABS demographic figures, as per standard opinion polling process.
- Respondents were presented with a range of options for their Council and asked to indicate their level of support on a scale of 1-5, in which:
 - 1 = Very supportive
 - 2 = Supportive
 - 3 = Somewhat supportive
 - 4 = Not very supportive
 - 5 = Not at all supportive
- Respondents were also asked to rank up to eight options for the future of their Council in order of preference. The options included no change/stand alone and the amalgamation option recommended under *Fit for the Future*.

RESEARCH RESULTS

- **59% were aware** of the *Fit for the Future* recommendation that Councils be amalgamated.
- **85% supported the stand alone option** (includes respondents who said they were very supportive, supportive or somewhat supportive).
- **61% identified the no change/stand alone option** as their first preference.
- **18% identified the Government's recommended amalgamation** as their first preference

- **21% identified a different option** (neither stand alone nor the Government's recommended amalgamation) as their first preference – the majority of these outcomes either embraced a 'stand-alone with joint regional services' option, or a much smaller amalgamation outcome than recommended by the State

Example Concept Statement and Questions

Read Out

Fit for the Future is the name given to the review of Local Government being carried out by the NSW State Government, in an effort to reduce the number of councils in NSW, and to make local government sustainable, efficient, and effective for future generations.

The argument for amalgamation is that bigger councils could be more economically efficient in the delivery of services, whilst an argument against amalgamation is that bigger councils will be less responsive to the local community's needs and local issues.

Under the review, councils need to demonstrate how they will become sustainable, provide effective and efficient services, create the scale and capacity needed to meet the needs of communities, and partner with the NSW Government.

Council has 2 options, being:

OPTION 1: The recommendation of the state government (insert specific merger details, i.e. Councils and projected population)

OPTION 2: To put forward a proposal to stand alone and not merge with any other council

Q1. How supportive are you of Council being merged into with (insert specific merger details)?
Prompt

- ☐ Completely supportive
- ☐ Supportive
- ☐ Somewhat supportive
- ☐ Not very supportive
- ☐ Not at all supportive

Q2. How supportive are you of Council standing alone? Prompt

- ☐ Completely supportive
- ☐ Supportive
- ☐ Somewhat supportive
- ☐ Not very supportive
- ☐ Not at all supportive

Q3. Thinking about the options we have just discussed, which is your preferred option? Prompt

- ☐ The recommendation of the panel
- ☐ Standing alone
- ☐ Other (please specify)