

INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

"Fit for the Future" Submission

I wish to make the following points:

- 1.No empirical evidence has been provided that "big is better" so the key basis for council amalgamations fails.
- 2.The options for cooperation between councils also suggested in the Sansom report have been excluded by the state government for metropolitan councils. This is not acceptable as such ventures can provide real benefits while retaining local autonomy which is much desired by the majority of residents.
- 3.The "carrot" funding offered by the state government, ostensibly to assist councils with the cost of amalgamation, is woefully inadequate. Real cost estimates are of the order of four times the amount on offer so residents will have to meet the balance.
- 4.The opportunity costs of any amalgamations will be massive as many significant projects will be on hold while the technicalities of amalgamation are dealt with.
- 5.The differing service levels between councils proposed for amalgamation will inevitably result in a "lowest common denominator" under a "megacouncil" meaning that residents will be worse off.
- 6.Councils in a sound financial position should not be forced to amalgamate with those which are not. Why should residents of well managed councils have to meet the costs, with possibly higher rates, of others?
- 7.Each council has a different culture. Residents used to a consultative council approach should not have to put up with one that is less so. The example of the City of Sydney/South Sydney amalgamation comes to mind where the two differing cultures have still not been reconciled.
- 8.Residents will have vastly reduced representation under the proposed megacouncils. As a result there is likely to be less accountability and a greater possibility of corruption, for example the recent problems at Newcastle City Council. Future population increases in many of the council areas will mean this representation is diluted further.
9. While the criteria set out for the so-called "Fit for the Future" amalgamations are arbitrary with no real basis, many councils, such as Leichhardt, meet them except for population size which is in any case not proven. It has been conclusively demonstrated that the so-called megacouncils do not meet these criteria.
10. It must be recognised that many problems faced by local government are the result of ongoing cost shifting by both state and federal governments. Amalgamations will obviously not remedy this situation.

I would be happy to elaborate on these matters if required.