

INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 6
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Dear Director

INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

I refer to the above inquiry and in accordance with Council's resolution of 16 June 2015, make the following submission on behalf of Newcastle City Council (NCC).

During discussions supporting Council's submission of a Fit for the Future Template 2 - Council Improvement Proposal (Proposal), Councillors raised concerns regarding the short time frame between finalisation of IPART's Methodology for Assessment of Council Fit for the Future Proposals (released 5 June 2015) and the due date for submission of those proposals (30 June 2015). This provided very limited time for the active engagement with the community or the Councillors in the finalisation of the Proposal.

In its resolution of 16 June 2015 Council noted "that the process of fulfilling the requirements for Fit for the Future demanded by the State Government have been onerous and not conducive to open, transparent and accountable governance".

Furthermore on 28 May 2013 the following resolution was endorsed by Newcastle City Council:

- 1 *Commit to continue to strongly support local government as the level of government with the greatest grassroots participation and closest connection to people.*
- 2 *Maintain the right of local residents in local councils to determine the future of their councils and their local representation.*
- 3 *Work with our community and other councils to implement those recommendations of the Local Government Review Panel that increase the financial autonomy of local councils by ending rate pegging; and*
- 4 *Oppose the long-term agenda of the Local Government Review Panel to merge metropolitan and regional councils regardless of the wishes of local residents.*
- 5 *Notes that:*

- a) *It has strong concerns that the Local Government Review Panel is proposing the merger of Newcastle City Council with Lake Macquarie council without consulting the residents in either of these local government areas.*
- b) *Newcastle City Council has strong community support and that there is no clear case for it to be merged with neighbouring councils; and*
- c) *That any merger of Newcastle City Council with neighbouring councils will inevitably reduce the level of local representation and strength of local democracy in the Hunter.*

- 6 *A workshop be held for Councillors to better inform them of the status of the Panel's work and its latest report. Council can develop a set of principles, upon which a submission can be written by Council Officers and submitted to the Panel.*

NCC remains of the view that the community must be actively engaged and have a say in the outcome of the Fit for the Future assessment. NCC is aware of the situation that arose in Western Australia whereby a number of proposed amalgamations of councils were subject to a referendum and rejected by the community. This demonstrates that the views of the community cannot be anticipated with any degree of accuracy and that the input of the community should be sort via a formal referendum process, should non-voluntary merger proposals be further contemplated.

For completion, a copy of Newcastle City Council's submission to IPART in respect to Fit for the Future is attached.

Yours faithfully

Ken Gouldthorp
GENERAL MANAGER