

**Submission  
No 161**

## **INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Name:** Ms Niki Huang

**Date received:** 6/07/2015

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To the members of the General Purpose Standing Committee No 6,

I wish to make a submission to the inquiry into Local Government in New South Wales.

My submission relates specifically to the following inquiry terms of reference:

- 1g) costs and benefits of amalgamations for residents and businesses,
- 1k) the known and likely costs and benefits of amalgamations for local communities, and
- 1n) protecting and delivering democratic structures for local government that ensure it remains close to the people it serves.

Almost six years ago I successfully applied for a community education position in local government. I was originally interested in this role because I was excited about the subject matter which I would be working with the community on. However, my enthusiasm for my job quickly became much more about the community I was working with than about what I was working with them on.

I have found the relationship between local government staff and community members to be very rich, strong, trusting and fulfilling. No other level of government has such a direct interface with the people they serve. Community members know they are able to speak directly to local government staff if they have ideas or concerns relating to their local area (community members therefore feel empowered to create change in their community). The physical location of local government within their community also means that those in the community who might not be comfortable with more remote forms of communication, like email and phone calls, are able to easily engage face-to-face with staff members. In the culturally diverse community that I work in, being available through a range of communication channels is critical for inclusion.

The community that I work in is incredibly diverse within itself and I cannot even begin to imagine how we will be able to effectively respond to a larger, and likely more diverse, community. I believe that if councils became too large (the council I work for serves a population of around 80,000) all the richness and specific needs of the various community groups will be “smoothed out” resulting in programs that designed for the “average resident” who actually doesn’t exist. This would be a great shame and would in no way improve efficiencies.

From the perspective of a resident, I also would not want to see my council (not the same as the council I work for) amalgamated with any other. The services that are provided by my council – amazing child care centres, parks, aquatic centres, libraries, programs of activities for all ages - are wonderful but are only just able to cope with community demand. If we were to amalgamate with neighbouring councils that do not offer anywhere near as great a suite of services, then I imagine residents will be disadvantaged.

As a resident I have a really good relationship with my local council and value the services they provide, and as a council staff member I have a really good relationship with my community and strive to deliver programs that will address issues specific to their needs. The way it stands I believe that local government areas are scaled perfectly to foster this good, trusting, connected relationship and the delivery valuable services to all their residents.

Kind regards,  
Niki Huang