

**Submission
No 139**

INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Community Voice - Hornsby Shire

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COMMUNITY VOICE



**A non-aligned, a-political, not for profit
community organization**

7th July, 2015

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 6
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY, NSW 2000

Parliamentary Inquiry into the State Government's Fit for Future Local Government Reform Agenda

From a community viewpoint, we wish to convey our deep concern at the Government's expressed intention of amalgamating councils. We respect the state government's intention that councils be "Fit for the Future" and some of the intentions about amalgamations. However, we consider there has been a very piecemeal approach in terms of informing communities across NSW. Some councils have informed their residents and encouraged or allowed discussion and debate, whilst many councils have not adequately informed and presented arguments.

If for no other reason, we believe the level of community input you gain will be insufficient and/or inevitably skewed.

Our primary concerns can be summarized as follows:

1. Amalgamation of council areas would lead to a massive loss of local representation of residents of specific areas – many comprising areas of unique character, heritage and/or environmental value.
2. If for instance a council area's representation was cut from say 12 to 2 and in many instances less, then logically the particular culturally, environmentally or geographically oriented concerns of residents will inevitably not be effectively covered and represented. A greater possibility of corruption would occur with fewer representatives.
3. To have "generic" coverage will inevitably result in loss or degradation over time of many of exactly those things that are most valued points of recognition that give people a sense of pride of place and identity. This may sound an emotive argument, however, it does in fact represent one of the most psychologically important factors for people. If people have pride in an area, then they respect, value and use them more.
4. Residents of varying areas should not be negatively financially impacted through rates due to higher land values of neighbouring council areas.
5. Amalgamation will cost many millions of dollars for oft questioned gains.
6. The significant savings that council amalgamations will represent have not been satisfactorily proven and indeed varying experts say these models are flawed and do not "stack up" to scrutiny.

FAVOURED ALTERNATIVE 1: Joint Regional Organisations of Councils

We submit that benefits include:

- Much of amalgamation costs can largely be saved by instead allowing formation of Joint Regional Organisations of Councils.
- The current more effective levels of representation can be retained;
- Scalability on a regional basis can still be achieved;
- On-going financial savings through increased sharing of services can still be achieved;
- Significant benefits of regional collaboration, planning and ability to ensure the dynamic 'success' of these regions can still be gained.
- Protecting against inappropriate, insensitive planning and development decisions negatively impacting on communities.
- Ensuring greater retention of highly valued character, heritage & environmental areas.
- Ensuring the needs of communities are better met.

We believe to do otherwise, will be extremely counterproductive. Many in the community believe that council amalgamation is yet another means of disempowering communities and fast-tracking development - whether or not that development is appropriate to community needs and whether or not appropriate people-friendly infrastructure is provided.

If however council amalgamations are enforced, we believe another innovation will be very helpful, if not essential.

ALTERNATIVE 2: Innovation if Mandatory Amalgamation – Precinct Committees to ensure an effective level of community representation.

We consider the addition of Precinct Committees:

1. To ensure a significantly more effective level of local community input and innovation - as in the case of Vancouver, Canada precinct committees.
2. We strongly recommend that Precinct Committees be mandatory.
3. Precinct Committees be required not to include Developers or Real Estate Agents who could likely inappropriately skew long term outcomes for communities.
4. Ensure an appropriate proportional balance of residents and local business people to balance positive livability interfaces effectively with commercial factors.
5. That political factions or party representation be barred from P/Committees; and
6. Rural and urban communities and councils be accorded the respect, assistance and training/input appropriate to their specific set of circumstance and needs.

Sincerely

Kim

Kim Mullins

Convenor

Community Voice – Hornsby Shire