

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

**Organisation:** Waverley Council Labor Councillors

**Date received:** 7/07/2015

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1. This submission is made by Cr Ingrid Strewe, Cr Paula Masselos, and Cr John Wakefield of Waverley Council.
2. Cr Strewe M Env. Ed. and Cr Wakefield B.Sc. (Hons) are Councillors of 11 years standing each and are both former Mayors of Waverley.
3. Cr Masselos is a Councillor of 3 years standing.
4. We do not agree with forced amalgamation of Councils.
5. We believe that the Fit for the Future process is an attempt to force Councils to amalgamate by another name.
6. The Local Government Act allows Councils to amalgamate prescribing a method under section **218F**

*(3) For the purpose of examining a joint proposal of 2 or more councils for the amalgamation of two or more areas under section 218A, the Boundaries Commission or Director-General, as the case requires, must seek the views of electors of each of those areas:*

*(a) by means of:*

*(i) advertised public meetings, and*

*(ii) invitations for public submissions, and*


*(iii) postal surveys or opinion polls, in which reply-paid questionnaires are distributed to all electors, or*

*(b) by means of formal polls.*

7. Given the significance of the changes being pursued by the State Government under Fit for the Future, we submit that Clause 3(b) “by means of formal polls”, in other words, by means of a referendum, is the method most appropriate to ensure that democratic principles are upheld.
8. Waverley Council is one of only a handful of Councils which has applied for merger. This was resolved by a slim majority of Councillors with 7 for, 5 against, voting to amalgamate with Randwick Council.
9. The reason argued by the Waverley Councillor majority for pursuing amalgamation with Randwick is that if we do not we will be forced to by the State Government anyway. There is clearly not genuine support for amalgamation.

10. Randwick Council resolved to amalgamated with Waverley also by only a slim majority of 7-6. ☐
11. The Waverley Council commissioned community research provided to Councillors indicated that residents and businesses preferred (in order of residents' first preference):
  - No merger – residents: 36.6%; business 38.7%
  - Merger of Waverley with Woollahra and Randwick – residents: 17.5%; business 11.8%
  - Merger of Waverley with Randwick – residents: 11.9%; business 9.7%
  - Merger of Waverley with Woollahra – residents: 13.9%; business 16%
12. The preference expressed for "no merger" was supported by 36.6% of residents, over two times more popular than the Waverley-Randwick merger option.
13. While Waverley business' preference for Waverley not merging at 38.7% of those surveyed was four times more preferred than to merge with Randwick.
14. A merger between Waverley and Randwick as a first preference was supported by 14.5% of residents - only 1 in 7. For residents this was the third preferred option.
15. For business it was the 5th (or second last) preferred option with only 9.7% first preferences. Less than 1 in 10 businesses surveyed preferred to see Waverley merge with Randwick.
16. A merger between Waverley and Randwick is not supported as is indicated in the Waverley Council community survey.
17. These slim Councillor majorities and the lack of clear community support for merger reinforce the need to hold a formal vote of the residents of Waverley and Randwick to ensure popular support for any change.
18. Fit for the Future places much emphasis on efficiencies that can be achieved by larger Councils.
19. There is a significant body of independent research from the experiences in Victoria and elsewhere to show that this is not necessarily the case.
20. Importantly this research emphasises the over-estimation of cost saving efficiencies and the under-estimation of the costs of merger.
21. Efficiencies are able to be obtained under the current configuration of Councils from various methods including resource sharing, inter council and regional.

22. Waverley Council has been a foundation participant in the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils. SSROC provides both Randwick and Waverley Councils with economies of scale as needed for bulk ordering and billing. The SSROC, one of the most successful, has 16 participating councils and savings from the ROC will, we contend, exceed any savings and efficiencies that an amalgamated council might make.
23. Fit for the Future material repeatedly highlights a perceived benefit of larger Councils in creating a foundation for more efficient, faster, easier development processing.
24. The assertion rests on standardisation of development codes and instruments and on the concept of homogenous development standards.
25. These two outcomes are quite distinct and deserve de-construction.
26. Standardisation of development codes has been pursued by State Government over a number of years.
27. Current Local Environmental Plans and Development Control Plans in all Councils in NSW share common nomenclature and standards.
28. It is not such a leap that development companies and planning consultations can not quickly familiarise themselves with differing Council codes.
29. Planning is now done to a State-wide template. State Government undertakes regional planning, local Councils undertake “micro” planning. Large regional councils are unnecessary, a redundancy in this planning hierarchy.
30. Current fine brush stroke planning allows local Councils to balance protection of local, highly valued amenity with ongoing development.
31. Homogeneous planning codes ignore local urban character. One size does not fit all in urban space.
32. The innate issue with the merger proposals is that the fine brush stroke development codes which currently protect local areas and their residents, protecting their amenity and their property values will be sacrificed in the name of “efficient” development processes.
33. The Fit for the Future program has not provided sufficient information on the future nature of the democratic process for local government. This includes a lack of information about:

- i. The voting system of how Councils will be elected
  - ii. How Mayors will be elected
  - iii. How many Councillors will remain in merged Councils
  - iv. What powers Councillors and the Mayor will have
  - v. What is a desirable level of representation at the local level, simply measured by the number of residents per councillor.
34. We do not support a compulsory Electorate at Large vote for Mayor or as it is known 'popularly elected mayor' model. Each community should be allowed to make that decision based upon a local debate around the pros and cons.
35. The Local Government Act prescribes a method to allow local communities to make that decision via referendum. It also puts in place protection against short term populist motives by prescribing that the decision to have a popular election of Mayor should occur at a subsequent election. 
36. Local government is more than roads rates and rubbish. Councils play an important role in fostering local social capital, through arts, cultural and voluntary programs.
37. Local government provides a means for local residents to become involved in political processes. Local residents feel more connected to and able to contact local councillors.
38. The quota required for election in smaller, multi-councillor, ward based Councils using proportional representation allows independents to garner support for their issues and gain election.
39. Overall improvements in efficiency by local Councils can be achieved through means other than by merger to mega-Councils. While mega-Councils will undermine local democracy and involvement by citizens.

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7 July 2015.