

**Submission
No 60**

INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: City of Canterbury

Date received: 30/06/2015



City of Canterbury
City of Cultural Diversity

Our Reference:

Ms Madeleine Foley
Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 6
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Ms Foley,

Subject: Inquiry into Local Government in New South Wales

Please find attached the City of Canterbury Submission to the NSW Legislative Council's Inquiry into Local Government in NSW. This submission was endorsed by Council at its meeting on Thursday 25 June 2015.

If the Committee has any queries regarding our submission please do not hesitate to contact

We thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Jim Montague PSM
GENERAL MANAGER

29 June 2015

Encl)

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OFFICERS REPORTS**12 LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT – SUBMISSION****FILE NO:** L-40-3 PT3**Attachments:** Terms of Reference
Draft Submission**REPORT BY:** GENERAL MANAGER

Summary:

- This report provides our submission to the Legislative Council's Inquiry into Local Government in NSW, specifically focussed on the 'Fit for the Future' Reform Agenda.
- It is recommended that this submission be endorsed for lodgment with the Inquiry by the 5 July 2015 deadline
- It is also recommended that a copy of our submission be placed on the 'Canterbury Connects' website to inform the community of our position.

Council Delivery Program and Budget Implications:

The outcome of the 'Fit for the Future' process will have ongoing impacts for our Community Strategic Plan and Budget.

Report:

As part of the Fit for the Future Reform process on 22 April 2015 the NSW Government advised that the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) would fulfil the role of the Expert Advisory Panel and undertake the review of NSW councils' 'Fit for the Future' proposals.

The NSW Government provided the Terms of Reference for this review process, and IPART subsequently released a Consultation Paper outlining their proposed methodology to assess the proposals. The release of this methodology and the accompanying consultation process prompted a lot of public debate regarding the Fit for the Future Program and the intentions of the State Government.

In response to a number of these concerns expressed by councils, the NSW Legislative Council has resolved to convene an Inquiry into Local Government in NSW, and in particular, the Fit for the Future Reform Agenda.

The timeline for this Inquiry is as follows:

Inquiry referred:	27 May 2015
Call for submissions:	28 May 2015
Submissions close:	5 July 2015
Final report due:	17 August 2015

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT – SUBMISSION (CONT.)

Five Public Hearings have been scheduled as part of the Inquiry and they will be held on 27 July, 10 August, 17 August, 18 August and 25 August 2015.

The Inquiry is chaired by The Hon Paul Green MLC, (Christian Democratic Party) who is a former Councillor and Mayor (2009-2012) of Shoalhaven City Council.

A copy of the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry has been circulated previously to Councillors and is provided in the Attachments.

A draft response has been prepared for Council's endorsement, in accordance with Council's endorsed position and the material that has been prepared for our own Fit for the Future submission.

It should be noted that the purpose of this Inquiry is to investigate the reform process, the financial sustainability of the NSW local government sector and the impacts forced amalgamations would have on the sector. In accordance with that stated purpose, our submission focusses not on our Fit for the Future submission, or our position on potential amalgamations with our neighbours, but on the overall reform process and IPART assessment methodology.

It is recommended that this submission be endorsed by Council and submitted by the 5 July 2015 deadline.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the submission in the Attachments be endorsed for lodgement with the Legislative Council Inquiry by 5 July 2015.

**COUNCIL MEETING
RESOLUTION - 25 JUNE 2015**

12 LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT – SUBMISSION

FILE NO: L-40-3 Pt3

Min. No. 235 RESOLVED (Councillors Adler/Kebbe)

THAT the submission in the Attachments be endorsed for lodgement with the Legislative Council Inquiry by 5 July 2015.



City of Canterbury
City of Cultural Diversity

The City of Canterbury

Legislative Council
General Purpose Standing Committee No 6
Inquiry into Local Government in NSW

City of Canterbury Response

June 2015

City of Canterbury Response

The City of Canterbury is pleased to have the opportunity to make this submission regarding reform to local government in NSW. We have been active participants in the current local government reform process that commenced with the Destination 2036 meeting in Dubbo in 2011. It is our belief that the local government sector is in need of appropriate reform that can ensure all councils are well placed to provide responsive, effective services for our communities now and into the future.

In the current reform process, our intention has been to collaborate effectively with the NSW Government to ensure a strong, financially robust and sustainable local government sector. To that end, we have responded in detail to each opportunity to participate, providing detailed submissions to the consultation and discussion papers of the Independent Local Government Review Panel (ILGRP) and the Local Government Acts Taskforce.

In early April 2013 we convened a forum of Sydney Councils which led to the establishment of the Sydney Metropolitan Mayors – a group intended to focus on the Sydney Metropolitan area, to collaborate and consult with the Federal and NSW Governments to represent the common and emerging issues affecting councils in the Sydney metropolitan area. This group continues to grow; now representing 26 councils in the metropolitan area.

Our consistent position, echoed by 26 members of the Sydney Metropolitan Mayors, has been that we are committed to the reform of the local government sector and supportive of the majority of the reforms recommended by the ILGRP including amalgamations. We are, however, opposed to the forced amalgamations of councils.

Focus of our response

The key focus of our response to the Inquiry is that the Fit for the Future Reform process does not address the broader issues of local government reform needed by the sector.

Reform of the sector requires a package of measures which would encompass systematic responses to address the long term financial sustainability of councils.

Structural reform, including potential amalgamations, needs to sit alongside these other key reforms, and cannot be considered in isolation.

Our concern, and the focus of this response is that Fit for the Future package initiated by the State Government has narrowed the broad scope and focus of the ILGRP's recommendations to focus on one - to amalgamate or not.

Background

Reform in the local government sector in NSW has been a key feature of modern local government since the release of the “Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Local Government Area and Administration in NSW (1974),” known as the Barnett Report.

While it is more than 40 years since the release of this report, the issues and principles it identified are relevant to the current reform agenda.

“It is important to note that the two subjects of areas and administration...are very much interrelated. A proper, economical and efficient local government is dependent not only on the appropriateness of the local government area, but also on an effective system of administration. It is not possible to have one without the other...” (P13 Barnett Report).

The Barnett report highlighted two key issues: “areas” addressing geographic size, population and public participation and “administration” addressing organisational practises, systems and resourcing.

In today’s terms, two words that have become a feature of this debate: Scale and Capacity.

Independent Local Government Review Panel (ILGRP) -

Since the release of the Barnett report there has been any number of investigations, research reports, studies and surveys investigating local government practise across the country.

We welcomed the establishment of the ILGRP led by Professor Graham Sansom in 2012 with the aim of *“investigating and identifying options for governance models, structural arrangements and boundary changes for local government in NSW, taking into consideration:*

- 1. ability to support the current and future needs of local communities*
- 2. ability to deliver services and infrastructure efficiently effectively and in a timely manner*
- 3. the financial sustainability of each local government area*
- 4. ability for local representation and decision making; and*
- 5. barriers and incentives to encourage voluntary boundary changes. “ (ILGRP Terms of Reference)*

The work undertaken by the independent panel provided us with opportunities to comment upon their conclusions and to offer support for the majority of the recommendations contained in the final report, subject to further development of the processes with the input of the sector. This view was supported by the Sydney Metropolitan Mayors and by many other councils in the sector.

It has been our consistent response that if the majority of the proposed reforms outlined by the ILGRP were implemented, amalgamations could ultimately prove to be unnecessary.

Fit for the Future Reform Agenda

In October 2014 the NSW State Government announced that the “Fit for the Future” package was their response to the final report of the ILGRP. A detailed package was released, including financial incentives but with an obligation for Councils to embark upon a consultation process leading to a formal Fit for the Future submission. The templates for this formal submission released by the Office of Local Government required councils to either propose an amalgamation, or to prepare an improvement plan to ensure they are ‘Fit for the Future.’

What has been lost in the sequence of events between the ILGRP’s final report and the State Government’s Fit for the Future package are the other detailed recommendations of the ILGRP. Of the key areas, only seven recommendations out of the total of 65 recommendations deal directly with recommendations for mergers within the Sydney Metropolitan Area. A range of recommendations deal with the establishment of Joint Organisations and the creation of community boards and other structures, many of which provide the opportunities for and benefits of reform without the significant costs of amalgamation. This will be discussed in detail in a later section of this submission.

Despite this, the entire Fit for the Future submission process relies upon whether Councils are submitting standalone or merger proposals based upon the ILGRP’s recommendations on this issue.

It is our view that the Fit for the Future process, which deals with the narrowest of the recommendations, is flawed and would be best deferred until the Government provides a further response to the full range of recommendations made by the ILGRP.

A comprehensive review and reform of the rating system; improvements to infrastructure and asset management; expansion of the revenue base; establishment of financial sustainability benchmarks and development of uniform performance indicators for the sector; a whole-of-government review of the regulatory, reporting and compliance burden on councils; strengthening of auditing requirements; strengthening management and corporate, political and democratic governance are all issues that were recommended by the ILGRP and supported by councils.

Primarily, the Government needs to provide clarity on the role and authority of councils in NSW. The focus of these reforms must address where local government sits within the framework of government in Australia, and consider how these inter-governmental relationships are recognised and managed through either constitutional recognition or through legislative reform.

This point of view is supported by the Chair of the ILGRP, Professor Graham Sansom, who provided the following statement in his response to the IPART methodology -

“The ILGRP sought to consider the future of the local government sector as a whole, and of local government in the inter-government framework, and thus formulated a package of measures comprising both systemic changes and council- or region-specific reforms. In particular, the Panel considered it essential that any structural reform be accompanied by further improvements to Integrated Planning and Reporting, financial and asset management, the revenue base (including ‘streamlining’ rate-pegging), management skills, productivity, and both corporate and political/democratic governance. Such improvements were also fundamental to the Panel’s understanding of ‘strategic capacity’.”

However, whilst inherent in the FFTF criterion of 'scale and capacity', the ILGRP's broader package been somewhat overshadowed by FFTF's perceived focus on financial ratios and benchmarks. Anecdotal evidence suggests that as a result the need for wide-ranging, longer-term measures to build sustainability and capacity is often being confused with short-medium term 'budget repair', which is not what the ILGRP intended. The latter would represent a much narrower (and almost certainly less fruitful) approach.

The Panel envisaged a staged implementation process along the following lines:

- Review and amend systemic policies in the areas mentioned above as a precursor to, or in parallel with, structural reform
- Fine-tune and implement the concept of regional Joint Organisations to advance sustainability and provide an essential foundation for structural reform in non-metropolitan regions
- Undertake group-by-group assessments of potential mergers/major boundary changes over a period of several years. "

(G. Sansom Online Submission to IPART Methodology 25 May 2015)

The role of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) in reviewing the Future of Local Government in NSW

IPART has been tasked by the NSW Government to play two roles in the Fit for the Future process.

Firstly, to review the Fit for the Future criteria in September 2014 and secondly, to perform the role of the expert panel and assess the proposals submitted by Councils under the Fit for the Future program.

In their first capacity, as reviewers of the Fit for the Future criteria, IPART recognised that the Fit for the Future package contained no measure of assessing service delivery.

"The current list of measures does not assess effective service delivery. Given the role of councils in providing agreed levels of services to their community, a regular community satisfaction survey concerning infrastructure and service delivery would provide an ongoing measure of the council's success in terms of the Government's stated objectives." (P15 – IPART Review of the Fit for the Future Criteria)

Despite this, no change was made to the Fit for the Future package, and the issue of assessment of service delivery, agreed or uniform service levels, community satisfaction or the difficulties, differences and costs associated with differing service delivery standards across the state is left unassessed.

In their second capacity, as the Fit for Future assessment body, IPART released its draft methodology for consultation in April 2015, followed in early June 2015, by their final methodology.

As will be outlined in the following section in detail, the differences between the development of TCorp's benchmarks, the 2014 Fit for the Future Criteria, the IPART Draft Methodology (April 2015) and the IPART Final Methodology (June 2015) have been well-described by Professor Brian Dollery as "*a chaotic way of conducting public policymaking*" and make it difficult to see how any Council could be deemed to be "Fit for the Future."

The appropriateness of the deadline for the “Fit for the Future” proposals & the Performance Criteria and benchmarks used to assess the “Fit for the Future” submissions

The Fit for the Future Package was released in September 2014 by the Minister for Local Government, with templates and other guidelines provided by the Office of Local Government following soon after in December 2014.

A majority of Councils reacted immediately to this release of information and commenced a comprehensive and detailed response program. For many, this involved the use of external consultants, liaison with neighbouring councils and regional organisations (ROCs), businesses and community organisations. For most, they embarked upon what is possibly the largest community engagement strategy ever undertaken by councils in metropolitan Sydney.

These response strategies were focussed upon the 30 June deadline which had been announced at the release of the package in September 2014.

On 27 April 2015, the State Government advised *“the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART), supported by South Australian local government expert John Comrie, will act as the Expert Advisory Panel to review local councils Fit for the Future submissions.”* (Ministerial Press Release 27 April 2015). The Minister further advised that *“The Independent Tribunal will conduct the assessment in line with the Terms of Reference developed in consultation with the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG). The MAG is made up of representatives from Local Government NSW, United Services Union and Local Government Professionals Australia.”*

Simultaneously, IPART released a Consultation Paper, outlining their proposed methodology and providing Councils and the community with the opportunity to provide comments by 25 May 2015. They further advised that they would provide feedback on the comments in the first week of June. Subsequently IPART released their Final Methodology on Friday 5 June 2015.

The release of this initial methodology unleashed, unsurprisingly, a firestorm of complaints from across the sector regarding the changes to the process which Councils had been working on, with considerable diligence, since September 2014.

The proposed methodology from IPART differed from the information provided by the OLG in their templates and guidelines which in turn had differed from the benchmark development information that TCorp had been working on with Councils since 2011. The differences between the OLG Guidelines and the IPART Methodology are shown in the table overleaf. TCorp made this point in their submission to the IPART methodology consultations -

“TCorp has been in attendance at nearly twenty FFFTF workshops with council representatives between October 2014 and February 2015 to discuss various aspects of the FFFTF program, including the benchmarks.

At these workshops the TCorp and OLG representatives have advised the council representatives, that we do not view the achievement of the benchmarks on the basis of “Pass or Fail”

By promoting a “Must Meet” methodology, IPART’s methodology can be viewed as not consistent with the ‘guidance material’ provided to councils and their representatives.”
(TCorp Online Submission to IPART Consultation 22 May 2015)

In May 2015, Dr Brian Dollery of the University of New England went further in his assessment of the IPART Methodology. He was commissioned by Ryde City Council to provide commentary on IPART's Draft Methodology for Assessment of the Fit for the Future Proposals, on behalf of the Councils of Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove.

"In the same way that significant differences exist between TCorp (2013) and Fit for the Future Performance criteria (2014), substantial differences are also evident between Fit for the Future (2014) and IPART (2015)... In addition, the benchmarks which must be met diverge widely between IPART (2015) and Fit for the Future (2014).

This presents acute problems for councils which have already undertaken Fit for the Future analysis of their performance on the existing Fit for the Future criteria and associated benchmarks. Quite apart from the procedural problems derived from 'changing the rules of the game' towards the end of the process, it also means that local authorities have a mere two months to assess their performance under the new IPART (2015) benchmarks. It need hardly be noted that this is a chaotic way of conducting public policymaking." (Dr Brian Dollery 21 May 2015)

As it now transpires, the two months that Professor Dollery alluded to now amounts to less than one month. IPART released their final methodology on 5 June 2015, leaving just 16 working days before submissions close on 30 June 2015 for Councils to adjust their submissions.

Comparison of the Fit for the Future (2014) and IPART (2015) Criteria and Benchmarks

Performance measure	FFTF Benchmark (2014)	IPART 2015- All councils (except rural Councils)	IPART 2015- Rural council (option)	IPART 2015 - Merger case ^a
SUSTAINABILITY				
Operating Performance Ratio	Greater than or equal to break-even average over 3 years	Must meet within 5 years	Plan to meet within 10 years	Must meet within 5 years for non-rural councils Plan to meet within 10 years for rural councils
Own Source Revenue	Greater than 60% average over 3 years	Must meet within 5 years	Plan to improve within 5 years & consideration of FAGs	Must meet within 5 years for non-rural councils Plan to improve within 5 years & consideration of FAGs for rural councils
Building & Infrastructure Asset Renewal Ratio	Greater than 100% average over 3 years	Meet or improve within 5 years	Meet or improve within 5 years	Meet or improve within 5 years
EFFICIENCY				
Infrastructure Backlog	Less than 2%	Meet or improve/ inform within 5 years	Meet or improve/ inform within 5 years	Meet or improve/ inform within 5 years
Asset Maintenance	Greater than 100% average over 3 years	Meet or improve/ inform within 5 years	Meet or improve/ inform within 5 years	Meet or improve/ inform within 5 years
Debt Service	Greater than 0% and less than or equal to 20% average over 3 years	Meet within 5 years	Meet within 5 years	Meet within 5 years

^a For mergers, we will also consider whether meeting each of the benchmarks is practical in the short term for the new council.
(Source – IPART Methodology 27 April 2015)

A Timely Manner -

The Fit for the Future timeline has indicated that following the receipt of submissions on 30 June, IPART will present their recommendation to the NSW Government on 16 October 2015. Following this, the Government has indicated that it anticipates that the elections scheduled for September 2016 will proceed on the new boundaries.

The Government has also indicated that progress will be made on the legislative changes to the Local Government Act (1993)

“Streamlining the legislation that governs councils in NSW is a key priority of the reform package, with a new Local Government Act scheduled to be phased in from September 2016. Consultation sessions to help refine the new Act will be held from mid-2015.

Some of the planned legislative changes include:

- *A stronger role for Integrated Planning and Reporting*
- *Statutory recognition of Joint Organisations*
- *Reductions in regulation*
- *Simplified reporting*
- *Revised rating requirements*
- *A new way for councils to measure their performance*
- *Increased accountability to the community*
- *Longer terms for Mayors and clearer roles for council leaders*
- *More flexibility for councils with procurement and managing contracts”*

(Fit for the Future website)

No further information has been provided as to how these legislative changes will affect councils or how they will be involved in progressing these changes.

This is very different to how the ILGRP saw such a process or how groups such as the Sydney Metropolitan Mayors felt they could be involved in the reform of the sector. Instead of being willing participants in a reform agenda, it seems as if the reform is being ‘done to us.’

In his submission to IPART Professor Sansom articulated how the ILGRP saw the process developing. It was very much an orderly, timely process ensuring all players: councils, community and government had a role to play. Additionally, it acknowledged the considerable body of work that is undertaken both by Councils and by IPART in preparing and assessing the submissions and allows progressive investigations building upon legislative reform, rather than as a standalone process.

“For mergers to occur and prove durable, the ILGRP saw a need for a much-improved statutory process for identification of options, analysis, consultation and determination. In turn, this would require a more independent, better-resourced Boundaries Commission. The Panel also proposed that groups of councils be referred progressively to the Commission for detailed investigation over the next few years. This would facilitate thorough, transparent, independent and firmly evidence-based assessment of merger proposals, including extensive community and stakeholder consultation, ensuring due process for all concerned. The Panel was particularly concerned that:

- *Mergers should be designed to pursue ‘big picture’, long-term strategic goals rather than simply ad hoc ‘marriages of convenience’ that may achieve little more than a reduction in council numbers – this ‘big picture’ agenda is especially important in metropolitan Sydney*
 - *Sound business cases and implementation plans must be prepared – this will presumably require considerable work over and above IPART’s assessments”*
- (G. Sansom Online Submission to IPART Methodology 25 May 2015)

The Role of co-operative models for local government including the “Fit for the Future’s” own Joint Organisations, Strategic Alliances, Regional Organisations of Councils and other shared service models

For many Sydney Metropolitan Councils, regional organisations, cooperative alliances and shared services have been a feature of our operating environment for decades.

Canterbury is a founding member of the Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC), the Cooks River Alliance and the Sydney Metropolitan Mayors and are active participants in a range of actions undertaken by all of these bodies. Beyond these specific alliances we regularly partner with individual neighbouring councils on issues of mutual interest and endeavour. We have an active city/country partnership with Cobar Shire Council and regularly share resourcing and policy development expertise with our remote partner.

Joint Organisations were proposed by the Independent Local Government Review Panel (ILGRP) as an alternative to amalgamations and would address the following objectives:

- *“Create high capacity councils that can better represent and serve their local communities on metropolitan issues, and be true partners of State and Federal agencies;*
- *Establish a more equitable pattern of local government across the metropolitan area, taking into account planned development;*
- *Underpin Sydney’s status as a global city*
- *Support the implementation of the Metropolitan Strategy, especially the planning and development of major centres and the preparation and implementation of sub regional Delivery Plans”*

(Graham Sansom Presentation to LGNSW Roundtable “Amalgamations: To Merge or not to Merge” 27/02)

The NSW State Government has established pilots for JOs in Regional areas and the First Interim Report was released in December 2014. While the NSW Government has to date confined their pilots to regional areas, the conclusions that have emerged from the regional pilots could equally be applied to metropolitan councils. They have described the JO process as “A new Way of working together” with the following elements:

- *“A forum for local councils and the State to work together to deliver the things that matter most to regional communities.*
- *Making it easier to initiate and manage important projects across traditional council boundaries.*
- *A fresh start that will require new relationships, new ways of working together and real commitment to change from both the State and Local Government sectors.*
- *A commitment to work together for the long term and support a shared vision for each region.”*

(Fit for the Future - Joint Organisations Pilot First Interim Report, December 2014)

We are strongly concerned that the Joint Organisations, which were such a strong feature of the ILGRP’s recommendations have been overlooked in the Fit for the Future Package. The Pilots for the Joint Organisations in regional areas were significantly delayed and have been postponed indefinitely in the metropolitan area.

Despite this, many metropolitan councils have considered the JO as a suitable way forward – preserving local democracy while reaping the benefits of shared servicing.

Exploring the potential for Joint Organisations within the Sydney Metropolitan Area provides the government with an opportunity to use these organisations to assist with regional strategic planning. The recently announced Greater Sydney Commission will have the responsibility to oversee the implementation of the *Plan for Growing Sydney* (Dept of Planning; released Dec 2014).

The Canterbury / St George grouping, together with the Shire of Sutherland comprises the Southern Region in the Department of Planning's new *Plan for Growing Sydney* and would therefore address one of the key elements of the JOs as proposed – that of Strategic Regional and sub-regional planning

The map below shows the existing sixteen members of the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC). It is possible that one or two JOs could emerge from the current SSROC councils, which would result in the creation of two or more JOs which would benefit from the existing strong relationships between the member councils.



EXISTING 16 SSROC COUNCILS –

(Ashfield, Bankstown, Botany Bay, Burwood, Canada Bay, Canterbury, Hurstville, Leichhardt, Kogarah, Marrickville, Randwick, Rockdale, Sutherland, Sydney, Waverley, Woollahra)



POSSIBLE SOUTHERN SYDNEY JO -

Core Members – Canterbury, Rockdale, Hurstville, Kogarah

Potential Additional Members – Bankstown, Botany Bay, Sutherland

Overlooking the use of Joint Organisations in the Sydney Metropolitan Area wastes an opportunity to build upon decades of shared servicing and resource sharing and to utilise this expertise among the regional groupings of councils as a valued partner in the development of Sydney as a 'global city.'

Conclusion

In conclusion we wish to reiterate our key points:

1. The focus of the Fit for the Future package has narrowed the broad scope and focus of the ILGRP's 65 wide-ranging recommendations which provided a review of the local government sector as a whole and recommended a package of measures to address long term financial sustainability. The Fit for the Future Package reduces this focus to one – to amalgamate or not.
2. It is our long-held view, widely supported, that if the majority of the proposed reforms outlined by the ILGRP were implemented, amalgamations could ultimately prove to be unnecessary.
3. In response to the IPART Final Methodology, the differences between the development of TCorp's benchmarks, the 2014 Fit for the Future Criteria, the IPART Draft Methodology (April 2015) and the IPART Final Methodology (June 2015) have been well-described by Professor Brian Dollery as *"a chaotic way of conducting public policymaking."*

In the light of these differences, and the short time-frame between the release of the final methodology (5 June) and the submission deadline (30 June), it is difficult to see how any Council could be deemed to be "Fit for the Future."

The difference between the method of assessing the timeframes and the timeframe in which it is expected that Councils will address the benchmarks is unrealistic, unfair to councils and their communities, and will not achieve the outcome that is required.

4. The process of reform to date has been an orderly process of review, recommendation and consultation. This final portion, led by the announcement of the Fit for the Future package in September 2014 and the IPART methodology in April-June 2015 has unfairly and unrealistically changed a genuine whole of sector reform process into one of deadline driven amalgamation.
5. The Fit for the Future Package ignores the regional groupings of councils in metropolitan Sydney as a 'genuine alternative to mergers' and an important method of progressing Sydney as a genuine 'global city.'

It is our belief that the majority of Councils in NSW are committed to a process of local government reform as we see great benefits for our organisations and our communities in a sound reform process.

The City of Canterbury wholeheartedly supports reform and reiterate this is not simply about amalgamations or boundary adjustments. It needs to be a whole of sector reform that addresses the political, financial, administrative and governance objectives that are fundamental to improving the strategic capacity of NSW councils. Done well, it will ensure NSW local government is in the strongest position to provide the services and infrastructure that our communities need and that we can take our place at the table as a capable, well-resourced partner for State and Federal government.

We thank the Inquiry for the opportunity to present our views on the current reform process.

Sources:

1. CJ Barnett (Chair) Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Local Government Area and Administration in NSW (1974)
2. Terms of Reference, Independent Local Government Review Panel, LGIRP Website
3. G. Sansom – Online Submission to IPART Methodology 25 May 2015
4. IPART – Final Report Review of the Fit for the Future Criteria September 2014
5. TCorp – Online Submission to IPART Methodology 22 May 2015
6. Brian Dollery, IPART’s Methodology for assessment of the Fit for the Future Proposals, on behalf of Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove Councils. Online Submission to IPART Methodology 25 May 2015
7. Fit for the Future website
8. G. Sansom – Presentation to LGNSW Roundtable “Amalgamations – to merge or not to merge” 27 February 2015
9. Fit for the Future – Joint Organisations Pilot First Interim Report December 2014
10. Plan for Growing Sydney – Department of Planning December 2014