

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

Name: Mrs Mariko Smith

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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 6
Parliament House
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Dear Sir/Madam,

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

In my local government area of Hornsby, the Local Council (Hornsby Council) is proposing:

1. That Hornsby Council amalgamates with Ku-ring-gai Council, as well as a number of boundary adjustments including:
2. That part of the suburb of Carlingford, east of Marsden Road, currently within the Parramatta City LGA, be transferred to the proposed new Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai LGA;
3. That part of the suburb of Eastwood currently within the Parramatta City LGA be transferred to the proposed new Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai LGA;
4. That part of the suburb of Epping currently within the Parramatta City LGA be transferred to the proposed new Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai LGA;
5. That part of the suburb of Eastwood currently within the City of Ryde LGA be transferred to the proposed new Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai LGA;
6. The suburb of Marsfield, currently within the City of Ryde LGA, be transferred to the proposed new Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai LGA;
7. The suburb of Macquarie Park, currently within the City of Ryde LGA, be transferred to the proposed new Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai LGA.

I **disagree** with the State Government's approach of forced amalgamations and changes to Hornsby Shire LGA for these reasons:

- The Government (through local State MP Matt Kean) and Hornsby Council have not provided any evidence that amalgamations will benefit communities;
- The Government (through local State MP Matt Kean) and Hornsby Council have not undertaken any substantial community consultation and are not taking community feedback seriously;
- The main source of information about the amalgamation proposal is via mainstream media, not from Hornsby Council. Hornsby Council has not engaged in comprehensive and open discussions with residents about its proposed amalgamation plans. There has been no public meetings, compared to neighbouring Ku-ring-gai Council which had organised public forums for its residents;
- The proposal appears to be driven by agenda, not public interest – it appears to me that the Councils which are opposed to amalgamation are the ones which are readily informing and engaging with their residents, since it is an unpopular proposal. On the

other hand, Hornsby Council has been at the forefront of the pro-amalgamation movement, and it has firmly made up its mind and is not seeking public input because it knows that it does not have the support of its residents;

- Ku-ring-gai Council has made it plain and clear through formal procedural and media channels that it and its residents want to stand alone and do NOT want to amalgamate with Hornsby Council;
- Amalgamations cost a lot of money, and it is the ratepayers who will have to pay;
- Amalgamations will be confusing and distracting, and while the new Council is focusing on making it work, local issues and customer service to ratepayers will suffer;
- Hornsby Shire LGA already covers a large geographic area, encompassing a number of rural and river communities. These communities have no close ties to Ku-ring-gai Council and do not share the same community of interest;
- Hornsby Council's proposed takeover of Macquarie Park (NSW's second largest commercial centre that continues to grow in economic output and jobs growth for Sydney and NSW) will undermine the City of Ryde's careful planning for this commercial centre, and seriously puts into question the continuation of the sustained and planned growth that has been achieved under the City of Ryde's stewardship of Macquarie Park;
- Hornsby has a proud history as a "Bushland Shire", and its heritage should be respected enough to not be merged and diluted by high-density housing communities;
- Local Councils are supposed to be LOCAL, being close to the people and working with communities to plan for neighbourhoods and town centres;
- If Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai Councils form a Mega Council, along with the additional gains borne of proposed boundary changes, the residents will lose and not get the proper services and representation they deserve;
- In addition, all residents' access to their Councillors will be reduced, so for Hornsby residents this means even less say in our local communities – which is saying something in light of Hornsby Council's controversial decision-making, namely in respect of liquidating public assets, which went against community interests;
- Increasing the number of Councillors and Wards under an amalgamation will not promote the creation of close and meaningful relationships between Councillors and residents needed for mutually beneficial outcomes, and ultimately there is a risk that competing for attention with a larger pool of other communities will mean that many residents will miss out on proper representation. Apathy and disengagement with our elected representatives is a real issue in our communities. What is needed is ultimately a change in composition of individual Councillors on the present 10-seat Council in 2016, rather than adding more bureaucracy, political agendas and egos to the mix;
- An amalgamation will bring a number of different Local Council areas together, that are so different it will mean that the communities will get a "one-size-fits-all" service,

instead of services that are customised for each community of interest, especially since the Hornsby Shire LGA area covers urban, river and rural communities;

- Hornsby Council is capable of providing the services that the local communities need and expect; and
- Hornsby Council is financially sound, especially in respect of the number of public asset liquidations currently underway, so why is there a need to amalgamate?

I believe that State Government should work with Councils to find a better way to solve problems and to address future goals, instead of using amalgamations as a “one-size-fits-all” solution, as bigger is not always better.

If amalgamations do occur, it will be local ratepayers and residents that are expected to pay higher rates, accept reduced access to Councillors and have less say in what happens in their neighbourhoods.

I urge the Committee to give these matters close consideration during its deliberations.

Regards

Mariko Smith