

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

**Name:** Dr Ian Tiley

**Date received:** 9/08/2015

---

Dr Ian M Tiley

8<sup>th</sup> August 2015

The Director  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 6  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Committee members

**Submission Local government in New South Wales (Inquiry)**

I am belatedly responding, for which I apologise, to a request (unsure of female caller's name) for a brief submission to your Inquiry and to appear before the Committee, preferably at your Armidale hearing on 18<sup>th</sup> August. I previously had a conversation hereon with your officer John Miller.

For Committee members who may not know, I have over 50 years continuous, practical involvement in local government and have a wealth of knowledge and experience including political and community leadership. I was an employee in senior management positions in the sector for 24 years including Shire Clerk for 15 years and am a retired Fellow of Local Government Managers Australia.

From 1991 to 2012 I was an elected local government representative serving on three general purpose and two county councils, and was Mayor to two councils including, from 2005, first Mayor of the amalgamated Clarence Valley Council. I have unique insights on the role and responsibilities of mayors and councillors, effective local government representative democratic practice and especially on structural reform and successful mergers in local government.

From June 2009, I was the inaugural Chairperson of Regional Development Australia Committee Northern Rivers until January 2015 and have held several other State and Commonwealth Ministerial appointments. I am Deputy Director of the Centre for Local Government (School of Business) at the University of New England Armidale, NSW with which I have been connected since 2002. My office is at the Institute for Rural Futures with which I am also engaged. I was a member of the Local Government Acts Taskforce which provided its final report to former Minister Don Page in October 2013.

I commenced university study at age 50 and am now an academic, specialising in political science. I have a PhD (2012) with a doctoral thesis since published as a book titled "Divided we Fall: An Insider's Perspective on Local Government Amalgamations".

I make this (belated) submission because my long experience in local government and Doctoral study which conclusively proved that, at least in some circumstances, council amalgamations as a reform method can and do work. My thesis examined the case study of the 2004 amalgamation of six councils in the Clarence Valley and the

substantial empirical evidence I produced showed that the amalgamation provided net economic benefits. I am able to address specifically the Committee Terms of Reference 1(g) to 1(o) inclusive.

There are many worthwhile recommendations in the Final Report of the Independent Local Government Review Panel, some of which I would seek to address with the Committee. It is heartening that the NSW Government substantially adopted the recommendations of the Local Government Acts Taskforce, to which I would also make reference if desired.

My other motivation to address the Committee is the continuing very long term, often uninformed and unjustified resistance, even intransigence towards structural reform from within local government leadership and some councils. I would welcome the opportunity to debunk some popular “myths” in this regard. Of particular concern is some of the current ‘mantra’ of LGNSW.

The LGNSW catchcry of ‘fix the funding first’ could be argued as seeking to sideline the vital importance of more appropriate and modern local government structures for the future. Present boundary structures were established in 1906 during the horse and buggy days as you well know. The matters raised in the LGNSW submission, while also important are separate issues to the need for structural change in this age of rapidly improving information technology.

One matter raised by LGNSW is the need for a modern rating system. I would argue that the present rating system has been tried and tested over many decades and has on the whole worked reasonably well, rate pegging aside. The Act now provides an effective tool with Special Rate Variations to address financial sustainability, infrastructure maintenance and renewals gaps, and revenue needs with genuine community engagement, as required under the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) provisions. The primary Acts Taskforce recommendation is to strengthen and place IP&R at the centre of a new Act.

The various concerns raised by LGNSW require genuine collaboration with government and community over time and there is no ‘quick fix’. My experience is that the ‘systemic flaws in funding model’ underscores a long-held, negative perspective and even a hand out mentality.

While the funding framework should be properly addressed I am critical of LGNSW for its lack of a solutions-based focus. In my view local government in this state needs to ‘lift its game’. Better sector structures are integral to this occurring so that capacity can be strengthened.

As I am overseas from 19<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> August I am unable to attend the Committee hearing at Armidale. If the Committee saw value, I could fly to Sydney any day after 29<sup>th</sup> August. Earlier suitable dates are 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> August.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ian Tiley  
Emeritus Mayor