

INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Mr Robert Dunn

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Addresse to Pittwater Council's public meeting on the options for amalgamation of Pittwater Council.

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Robert Dunn .

For those of you who do not know me, I was one of the original executive of the Pittwater Municipality Committee . This committee under the chairmanship of the late Des Creagh , between 1987 and 1991 organised and oversaw the successful application for the creation of the new Pittwater Council by secession from Warringah Council .

The Council was proclaimed on 1 May 1992 as an appointed Council, led by my friend and former colleague from Warringah Council, the late Councillor Eric green .

Following the new Council's first election on 24 October 1992 , I was elected Mayor and served in that capacity for four of the first 6 years of the Council's inception.

In 2002 under the leadership of my successor Mayor Patricia Giles and general manager Angus Gordon Pittwater Council won the Bluet award for the most outstanding local government organisation in NSW for that year.

In its short history of 23 years Pittwater Council has not been without fault but it has generally continued to show outstanding local government leadership. It has given the people of Pittwater their own democratic forum in which to ensure that this beautiful area of the Peninsula and its environment may be preserved both for its residents and for future generations.

Thus I come here tonight to speak for the survival of this democratically constituted Council now placed under threat of amalgamation by a non-democratic and heavy handed process instituted by the New South Wales government.

There are 3 options that must be considered: option 1 is the status quo; option 3 is the amalgamation of Manly Warringah and Pittwater councils recommended by the so-called "independent" Samson committee; and option 2 is a so-called compromise, namely to divide the current Warringah Council between Manly and Pittwater councils.

Option 3 is obviously unacceptable to the people of Pittwater and Manly-just as a return to an amalgamated Pittwater and Warringah Council's would be illogical and totally unacceptable given the history of secession and Pittwater's success away from the suffocating bureaucracy of the large Council.

The choice therefore being dangled in front of the people of Pittwater , as option 2, by a heavy-handed and patronising New South Wales Government is to have a "greater" Pittwater Council by annexing to it a substantial area of Warringah Council with the boundary change and population increase that would entail.

“Why not, says our local parliamentary representative , not only would this solve the continued difficulty of a still failing Warringah Council, but we could align, the boundaries to the catchment area of the Narrabeen Lagoon, so a win-win situation for Pittwater and the New South Wales government, with one less Council to worry about .“

Not only is this simplistic approach fundamentally naive but it is grossly undemocratic and unfair to all concerned.

Firstly, it fails to understand and comprehend the whole system of local government in New South Wales built as it has been built on a community of interest; on the need to petition for a majority of people within the area to be changed by any boundary adjustment as a starting point to join the new Council. Local government is not and never will be, just drawing lines on a map as simple and logical as this may appear to the bureaucratic mind. Such a simplistic approach does not take into account the community's view in the area to be joined. It does not take into account the history the culture and the interaction. In other words, the social cohesion of the area to be joined with the area that exists.

It does not take into account the fact that the people of Warringah need their own continued and still relatively large Council. It is no justification morally or democratically to justify the dismemberment of Warringah Council on the basis that it was prepared to swallow its smaller neighbours to the north and south. We did not fight for Pittwater, as some sort of power game. We went through a long labourious process of justification based on a petition signed by more than 20,000 residents of the new proposed Council area. As a community group our committee of ordinary citizens pitted itself against the Warringah propaganda and juggernaut and only one after the most exhaustive process of establishing equity and fairness and the cohesiveness and self-sufficiency of the proposed new Council area. It was no handout by the government. Quite the opposite, no one wanted change, but under the most exhaustive and Inquisition or process our arguments and evidence stood up.

The KPMG report supports the contention that this large thriving but diverse community, from Manly to Palm Beach can both support and continue to be best served by 3 councils for its communities of interest. The report finds that the 3 councils pass all the tests of being fit for the future-indeed they are in the top 22 of councils in the metropolitan area. The only justification that is advanced for the shrinkage of democratic representation for an area that is represented by 3 separate parliamentarians all ministers in the current New South Wales government is that someone has to be the sacrificial lamb to show even handedness to the western suburbs and other areas of New South Wales in which the government seeks to force amalgamations based on either economic or convenient grounds for the government's point of view.

The basis for the government's push is to simplify the system to oil the wheels for progress- read that for development.

The government does not see local government in any traditional sense, rather it wants to corporatize infrastructure organisations to speed up the development process. This local government push can be seen along with the proposed changes to planning laws as just another step in the "dumbing down process" to please corporate Australia and make or keep New South Wales is number 1.

Whilst it claims justification, pointing to the population increase that we must absorb it takes no account of the wishes aspirations of its citizens nor the protection of the environment in the areas affected by its heavy-handed planning approach.

In a nutshell this economic rationalist approach has no appreciation for the environment or the rights or liberty of individuals. It looks for only a result orientated outcome.

In short, although it may not be intended by the government which just seems to be obsessed by its economic rationalism, the broadening of local government areas at the expense of individuality liberty and freedom will guarantee an Americanised type of outcomes and values are sure to please the corporations at the expense of the individual residents and ratepayers and constituents.

In other words= A developers high rise paradise and a loss of every environmental value that we have tried to uphold for Pittwater , and for future generations.

The only answer to this proposal for amalgamation must be that there is no acceptable option except for rejection of this inappropriate clumsy and heavy-handed attempt.

The New South Wales government has no mandate for forced amalgamations.

It's very able Premier and Minister for planning, should think again. They should seek advice from those who have some experience in local government, not from their departmental bureaucrats or so-called independent committees looking for a predetermined outcome by a shot gun one solution fits all approach.

If they seek only to lift standards of councils, then they should do that through the regional council forums that already exist like SHOROC they should respect the rights of individuals to have their own council without reference to size uniformity and hence mediocrity .

They should respect the liberty of the individuals to have a say in their councils their environment and their communities of interest without being stood on by the big is best bullying approach.

We must send this message loud and clear to the government tear up the blueprint and start again!

ROBERT DUNN

19thMay 2015