

Revitalising Local Government City of Ryde Submission

Panel's Recommendation

Under the section of the report – *Merger and Boundary Change Options for Sydney Metropolitan Councils*, the report provides the following in relation to Ryde:

Auburn, Holroyd, Parramatta, Ryde (part), The Hills (part)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amalgamate (eastern two thirds of Ryde to be included with North Shore group) and - Move northern boundary of Parramatta to M2 (balance of The Hills to remain an individual council) or - Adjust Parramatta's boundary to include parts of Ryde and The Hills and combine Auburn, Holroyd and Parramatta as a strong Joint Organisation.
Hunters Hill, Lane Cove, Mosman, North Sydney, Ryde (part), Willoughby	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amalgamate or - Combine as a strong Joint Organisation

Please note that no detail has been provided regarding where the boundaries would be for determining the 'eastern two thirds of Ryde'

The City of Ryde welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission on Revitalising Local Government (Final Report of the NSW Independent Local Government Review Panel – October 2013) and wishes to make the following key points:

1. The City of Ryde

The City of Ryde categorically rejects any proposal that would fundamentally split the current local government area.

Council has previously (20 April 2013) resolved that while it understands the principle of local government boundary adjustments, it does not see a future for the Ryde area as part of an enlarged Parramatta City. Indeed, the City of Ryde believes that not only should Ryde remain whole but that it is well placed to challenge Parramatta as a second CBD with the development and expansion of Macquarie Park.

The City of Ryde Council strongly believes that Ryde should be a separate centre of governance because of the area's history, geography, economic structure and the existing communities of interest.

We are one of the oldest local government areas in Australia with a long and proud history that should be respected and maintained.

On the 3rd January 1792, the first land in the Ryde area was granted to eight marines, along the northern bank of the river between Sydney and Parramatta. The area was named by Governor Phillip the 'Field of Mars', Mars being the ancient God of war, named to reflect the military association with these new settlers. Today, Field of Mars

Reserve is the remnant of a district which once extended from Dundas to the Lane Cove River.

These grants were followed soon after by grants to ten emancipated convicts in February 1792, the land being further to the east of the marines grants, thus the area was called Eastern Farms or the Eastern Boundary. By 1794 the name Eastern Farms had given way to Kissing Point, a name believed to have originated from the way in which heavily laden boats passing up the Parramatta River bumped or 'kissed' the rocky outcrop which extends into the river at today's Kissing Point.

Few local government areas in Australia, let alone NSW, can lay claim to such a long and proud history as the City of Ryde. To see Ryde Council identified in the Panel's report for division amongst other areas disregards Ryde's heritage and importance in NSW local government history.

The residents of Ryde have told Council and the Panel, in no uncertain terms that they do not identify with Western Sydney. At the Community Consultation held 3 June 2013, 79% of those present indicated that they place strong importance on maintaining a sense of local identity within the City of Ryde.

2. Communities of Interest

The City of Ryde wishes to express its deep concerns that a program of amalgamations (voluntary or otherwise) will be a costly exercise that will divide local communities, and not deliver the desired efficiencies. This is why any suggested merging of Local Government areas must have the considerations of 'community of interest' central to this decision. The other critical issue is ensuring the community understands the proposal and has had a genuine opportunity to express their views and opinion.

As a result of the Panel's report, *Future Directions for Local Government*, the City of Ryde commissioned SGS Economics and Planning to review the option presented by the Panel as well as a scenario incorporating North Shore Councils. The work done by SGS Economics and Planning found that travel patterns were weak between Ryde and Parramatta. It also found that the journey to work linkages between Ryde and Parramatta were also weak.

In contrast, the report found strong linkages between Ryde and the North Shore with regard to household and shopping travel patterns. Public accessibility mapping undertaken also highlights an overall strong connection between Ryde and the East. Another strong connection identified through this work was with regard to household travel patterns which are strong from Ryde to the North and East than to the West.

We suggest that just as the community of interest linkages for Ryde are towards the East that the community of interest linkages for Parramatta would likely be towards the West. Consequently, the Panel's position represents a worst of both worlds which will



not benefit the residents of Ryde nor the residents of the proposed Parramatta local government area.

Further, the State Government's own planning and strategy work has identified Ryde with Northern Sydney Councils and never as part of Western Sydney. This includes the Draft Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney, NSW 2021 (Regional Action Plans), A New Planning System for New South Wales and Destination 2036.

The proposal contained within the report does not follow one of Sydney's most significant natural geographical features; the Parramatta River. This natural boundary not only separates Ryde from western Sydney but creates distinct communities of interest as demonstrated by the information gathered by SGS Economics and Planning.

This evidence indicates that Ryde has stronger linkages to the East and as such, it would be more appropriate for Ryde to remain as a whole local government area with the option to join with Hunters Hill, Lane Cove, Mosman, North Sydney and Willoughby as a strong Joint Organisation.

The City of Ryde is not opposed to limited boundary adjustments, particularly in instances where these are done to correct historic anomalies such as boundaries in the middle of local streets. In addition, the City of Ryde supports boundary expansion for the Ryde area to accommodate natural catchment areas and natural boundaries such as Terrys Creek and the Lane Cove River.

3. Towards Joint Organisations

Throughout the recommendations of the report, numerous local government areas have been identified for potential amalgamation. However, in almost every case (except for Ryde), there is also the optional recommendation for those Sydney Metropolitan Councils to join as a Joint Organisation.

In our original submission, the City of Ryde supported flexible approaches with regard to shared services and a framework that would allow Council to negotiate preferred outcomes for the community. This would facilitate improved service delivery and service quality for our communities while maintaining the local focus and representation vital for local government.

It is heartening that the Panel has extended its recommendations regarding shared services beyond country Councils to include Joint Organisations for metropolitan Councils. The City of Ryde, as part of NSROC has already been party to meetings with SHOROC to consider proposals for new regional collaboration.

However, Ryde would be robbed of the opportunity to take advantage of Joint Organisations were the Panel's recommendations regarding splitting the local government area put into place.



The City of Ryde has already had significant discussions regarding shared service opportunities and has been supportive of a model that allows for a flexible approach to service delivery balanced with local representation.

The Panel's recommendation in the case of metropolitan Councils that mergers should be considered a greater priority than the establishment of Joint Organisations is not supported. Council has previously made its case that there is no evidence that larger Councils are more effective or efficient. In fact, in our previous submission, the City of Ryde presented a significant amount of evidence that the opposite is true and has been proven in other States.

The City of Ryde is a strong Council with a proven track record of implementing best practice and innovative thinking. As part of a Joint Organisation, Ryde would be well placed to provide a leadership role for local government and to be an intrinsic part of a robust and economically sustainable shared services model.

4. Financial Sustainability

The City of Ryde encourages a more holistic and broader review of the financial sustainability of local government as an industry.

Ryde questions the Panel's position with regard to rate-pegging. We believe that the entire financial system, including the rating system must be reviewed and that rate-pegging, at its core, is one of the key factors restricting local government sector sustainability. The City of Ryde is strongly recommending the removal of rate pegging.

A full and comprehensive review of the Local Government funding model is required. We are very concerned that the Panel's position will set Councils up to fail by not providing for adequate provisions to bolster their revenue base.

Over a number of years, Local Government has been the recipient of extensive cost shifting from both levels of government, with no increase in revenue. Somehow, Local Government has been expected to absorb and deliver these additional services with in many cases no additional revenue. In NSW, Local Government has so many constraints such as rate pegging that makes it more difficult in raising additional revenue.

Additionally, the Federal Government over the past decade has slowly reduced the total quantum of funds for the Revenue Sharing Grant. The revenue sharing grant was introduced back in the 1970's to provide Local Government with a share of personal income tax receipts, originally set at 2%. This Grant is Local Government's only receipt of a 'growth' tax, which has been reduced steadily in real terms over the last few decades. It therefore is essential that this grant continue to be paid to each Local Government authority.

For the same reasons, serious consideration should be given to giving local government access to revenue raised through the GST.

In total, these issues have significantly impacted Local Government's ability in being financially sustainable. While there are other contributing factors, these areas have played a critical role and need to be addressed by all levels of Government.

Finally, Ryde believes that the Panel's recommendations to consider a state-wide borrowing authority should be extended also to include a state-wide investment authority. This would further facilitate the objective in providing reduced borrowing costs to Local Government with the potential to also increase returns from investments.

5. Consultation

The City of Ryde is concerned that the consultation undertaken by the State Government in calling for submissions has been inadequate given the significant impact the recommendations could have on local communities. The final report from the Panel was complete in October 2013 and released to Councils in January 2014 with submissions due in March 2014.

This document outlines recommendations that would fundamentally change the face of local government in NSW and, in particular, Ryde. The timing for submissions has precluded our ability to consult effectively with the community and their elected representatives; a situation which, for the City of Ryde, is unacceptable.

We strongly recommend that prior to any further action being taken or recommendations being finalised that further more extensive consultation be undertaken.

6. Detail

The City of Ryde understand that this report contains recommendations only and that for many NSW local government areas there is clarity within the report as to the impact of the recommendations.

This is not the case for the City of Ryde.

The report recommends that Ryde be split with the Western third becoming part of a 'second CBD' with Parramatta and the remaining two thirds joining with the North Shore group. The map provided at page 107 is inadequate with a vague indication to 'Review Boundaries'.

It is unreasonable to expect the City of Ryde to be able to provide any kind of informed comment and we strongly recommend that both Council and the community be provided with adequate detail prior to any decisions being made. Indeed, we believe it is unacceptable to ask a community to comment based on such unclear and vague information.



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