

KEEP COUNCILS LOCAL

MEDIA RELEASE

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BAIRD GOVERNMENT MUST REVEAL AMALGAMATION PLANS

Opposition is growing on Sydney's north shore to the threat of forced council amalgamations, with the Mayor of the City of Ryde, Cr Bill Pickering, launching a public campaign on the issue: **Keep Councils Local**.

Supported by the majority of councils on the north shore, including the adjoining Hunter's Hill Council, Ryde is calling on the Premier to come clean on the Coalition's position on forced amalgamations before the March 28 State election.

"Over recent months, we have had no unequivocal statement of position on forced amalgamations from the Premier," Mayor Pickering said today.

"He needs to answer a simple question: **Will the Baird Government, if re-elected, force councils to amalgamate?**"

"Mr Baird currently has no mandate from the voters to axe councils.

"If he wants to do this, he needs to tell the voters before they vote at the end of this month.

Mayor Pickering said that the business case for amalgamating councils simply did not exist.

"Overwhelming economic analysis shows that the vast majority of metropolitan councils, including those in northern Sydney, are economically viable," he said.

“The government’s claim of one million dollars a day losses is simply incorrect. There has been no independent cost benefit analysis undertaken to support this argument.’

Mayor Pickering said that Professor Graham Sansom, chair of the independent Local Government Review Panel, had declared a few months ago that too much had been made of the financial benefits of amalgamation, stating that: *“Any one of the metropolitan councils in Sydney can be financially sustainable within their current boundaries. No ifs, buts or maybes.”* (SMH 9 December 2014)

Mayor Pickering said that proposed ‘super Councils’ would mean:

- A dramatic reduction in local representation for ratepayers and businesses and the impact of this on the local community; and
- Cuts in the quality and quantity of local government services.

“Crucial services like childcare, disability care, free immunisation, maintenance of sportsfields, libraries, swimming pools and Meals on Wheels could be reduced or scrapped altogether,” Mayor Pickering said.

“There is no evidence to suggest that amalgamations of Councils will create financial savings.”

The Mayor of Hunter’s Hill and President of the Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils, Cr Richard Quinn, said that people would lose their voice in local government.

“There will simply be fewer councillors representing larger populations.”

Mayor Quinn said that the very essence of local government, namely its close connection with, and responsiveness to its community would be lost.

“The Premier needs to tell us where he stands on forced amalgamations,” Mayor Quinn said.

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