



KEEP COUNCILS LOCAL

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday 12 May 2015

RESIDENTS UP IN ARMS AT POSSIBILITY OF FORCED AMALGAMATIONS

More than 250 Residents in Sydney's North were up in arms last week at community meetings held in Ryde, Hunter's Hill and Lane Cove to discuss the State Government's *Fit for the Future* initiative.

The proposed destruction of their communities, the prospect of higher rates, the high probability that services and service standards would decline in addition to diminished local representation were touted as unacceptable and irresponsible by the people who attended the meetings.

Residents clearly stated their opposition to forced amalgamations, however they were very supportive of the three Councils exploring the formation of a Joint Organisation (Regional Authority).

Residents of the City of Ryde and neighbouring councils were incensed at the proposal to split and dissolve the City of Ryde into two mega councils, with the western one-third being merged with a Parramatta-based mega council, and the eastern two-thirds merging with a number of north shore councils.

An online survey by the City of Ryde currently shows that 81 per cent of people reject the amalgamation of their Council with others and that opposition to the prospect of forced amalgamations is growing.

There was strong support for the exploration of a Joint Organisation option that would address regional issues, which is currently being investigated by the City of Ryde, Hunter's Hill and Lane Cove Councils. The regional approach, would allow councils to remain in place as an entity to deliver local services with proper representation. This was considered by the participants as a superior approach to that of amalgamation. This approach meets all of the State Government's objectives for local government, whilst retaining local identity and communities of interest.

Live polling was conducted at all three public meetings where 88 per cent of attendees stated they were not supportive of forced amalgamations and more than 70 per cent supported exploring the possibility of a Joint Organisation of Councils within the Northern Sydney Region.

The other concerning issue was the strong opposition to the loss of local representation where Ryde residents would be represented by just 2.18 Councillors, down from the current 12, Hunter's Hill Council would only be represented by 0.64 of a Councillor down from its



current 7 and Lane Cove Council would only be represented by 1.52 Councillors down from its current 9 Councillors.

It was clear at the public meetings that residents considered that their respective councils represented them well and that they are the voice of the people. Attendees at the meetings had major concerns on the level of local representation residents would have under the proposed new mega council structure.

The Mayor of the City of Ryde, Bill Pickering said that residents are very concerned about the impact of forced council mergers under the State Government's *Fit for the Future* package.

"City of Ryde Council is not against reform. We are realists and believe that a better approach to improved local government is for councils to retain autonomy, preserving 'local voice' and 'local choice'. This avoids the heavy costs of mergers and enables neighbouring councils to collaborate for the benefit of the region," said Mayor Pickering.

The Mayor of Hunter's Hill, Richard Quinn said: "That is why the City of Ryde, Hunter's Hill and Lane Cove Councils have agreed to investigate the formation of an innovative, collaborative Joint Organisation that would deliver the desired *Fit for the Future* reforms of size and scale, without the heavy price tag. The view, held by many in NSW government, that mega councils are cheaper and more efficient has somehow obtained urban myth status."

"Our councils are committed to working together to deliver shared services and programs. The mounting evidence demonstrates that forced amalgamations simply don't work," Mayor Quinn said.

The Mayor of Lane Cove, David Brooks-Horn said: "In our Council alone, 93 per cent of the people who attended our public meeting were opposed to Lane Cove Council being merged into a new mega Council, they much preferred that we investigate the formation of a Joint Organisation for the region, a partnership that has the potential to meet the State's criteria of size and strategic capability and also deliver good outcomes for the region while maintaining each council's identity and representation."

A new *Fit for the Future* information pack has been produced by the City of Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove Councils setting out what all residents and ratepayers need to know about forced amalgamations. It also sets out the superior alternative of a Joint Organisation and how it would work.

You are invited to take part in the online survey which can be found at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FFFhaveyoursay> Be part of the conversation, have your say and help contribute to our submission to the State Government which is due at the end of June.

If being *Fit for the Future* requires councils with vision and leadership, the City of Ryde, Hunter's Hill and Lane Cove Councils have proved their credentials in their governance frameworks, financial prudence and the ability to hold steady when times are tough.



The Councils have taken an innovative approach to addressing the NSW Government's objectives and firmly believe that the Joint Organisation (Regional Body) is a superior alternative for the State Government to consider as opposed to forced amalgamations.

**CONTACT: Angela Jones-Blayney, Manager Communications and Media, City of Ryde
0407958023**