



KEEP COUNCILS LOCAL

Thursday 29 October 2015

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY VINDICATES JOINT REGIONAL AUTHORITY AS A SUPERIOR MODEL FOR COUNCILS IN METROPOLITAN SYDNEY

Today, the Parliamentary Inquiry into Local Government in NSW, General Purpose Standing Committee Number 6, released its report which strongly supported City of Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove Councils proposed Joint Regional Authority (JRA).

Recommendations 16 and 17 of the report stated: *“that the NSW Government make Joint Organisations available to all Councils in New South Wales”* and,

“That the NSW Government work with local government on a statutory model for Joint Organisations based on the Hunters Hill, Ryde and Lane Cove Council model as a cooperative and consensus model for local council reform in Metropolitan Sydney”.

This report absolutely vindicates the strong position we have held from its inception, that the City of Ryde, Hunter’s Hill and Lane Cove Councils’ proposal of a Joint Regional Authority (JRA) is a bold, visionary and a superior alternative to the NSW Government’s Fit for the Future proposals.

It is a sophisticated and contemporary model which breaks the traditional mould of amalgamations. The amalgamation option lacks innovation and the flexibility to move with the changing demands of our communities.

Ryde Mayor Clr Jerome Laxale said: *“This is a significant development, which vindicates our City’s position on amalgamations as not being the answer to Local Government reform in NSW.*

We now call on the NSW Premier, Minister for Local Government and our Local Members to support our visionary proposal and allow us to enter into a 12 month pilot of the JRA so we can prove its effectiveness. It is now time for the State government to step up and accept that there is a viable alternative to amalgamations”.

Hunter’s Hill Mayor Clr Richard Quinn said: *“This report clearly confirms that our JRA model is the superior option to forced amalgamations, and has bipartisan support for and acknowledgement of its very real merit. I now look forward to restoring a more genuine and open dialogue with the NSW Government as we seek to ensure grassroots democracy for our local communities”.*

Lane Cove Mayor Clr Deborah Hutchens said: *“Today’s recommendations by the Upper House clearly show that communities do not need to lose their access to local democracy in order to satisfy the State Government’s current ideology that bigger is better.*

The Upper House has clearly given genuine consideration to the Joint Regional Authority as a well-researched, merit-based solution that addresses the areas of improvement the State Government



claims to be seeking. I urge the State Government to heed the advice of this Inquiry or, if not, publically address why every Council in Sydney should be denied the opportunity to use the Joint Regional Authority model”.

As distinct from the State Government, the Parliamentary Inquiry has actually listened to our communities. This is supported by the fact that out of a total of 401 submissions sent to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Local Government in NSW, 199 of those submissions were from Ryde, Hunter’s Hill and Lane Cove, representing over 49% of the total submissions received. In addition, of the 199 submissions from our region, 169 were in support of our proposed Joint Regional Authority, another clear demonstration from our communities of their support for the formation of a JRA.

Using the State government’s own criteria, the City of Ryde, Hunter’s Hill and Lane Cove Council met all financial requirements. We are all financially fit councils, yet the NSW Premier is hell bent on merging Councils into oblivion. It is shameful that the Premier is pushing through with a plan that has no support from our communities. It is refreshing to hear that someone is actually listening to us and can finally see the sense and value of the JRA and its applicability throughout NSW.

Our residents have clearly shown their preference for us to work together which was demonstrated by their 92% level of support of our JRA as their first or second preference, which is a very clear mandate from our communities on this issue.

It is disgraceful that the State Government is locking out our communities in having a final opportunity to respond to the content of the IPART report by requiring all Councils to respond in 50 words or less by 18 November 2015! The State government is completely disregarding our communities’ views on this matter and the timeframes and process they are dictating to us is farcical.

The decision to amalgamate Councils demonstrates the State government’s rigidity and a lack of innovative thinking. The JRA by comparison is a strong and unique model that we are convinced would meet our communities’ needs and allow them to have a say in their future together in working with the State government in the strategic planning of Greater Sydney.

What was announced recently in the IPART report was a slap in the face to our local communities and clearly demonstrates that the State government went into this process with a predetermined outcome.

We will continue to keep fighting hard for the residents of Ryde, Hunter’s Hill and Lane Cove who clearly have pride in their history and unique identity, have confidence in their Council’s financial and governance performance and have a strong desire to be in control of their future.

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