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31 July 2015

The Secretary
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
Local Government Division
Review of Local Council Fit for the Future Proposals
PO Box K35
Haymarket Post Shop, NSW, 1240

Also by email: localgovernment@ipart.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sir or Madam

PROPOSED AMALGAMATIONS WITH THE CITY OF SYDNEY

We have lived in Glebe for about 45 years, having arrived just after the suburb was hived off from the City of Sydney into Leichhardt Municipality in 1969, clearly so that the Liberal Party, which was then in government, could consolidate its hold (via the “Civic Reform Group”) on the Town Hall. Then, in 2003, the Labor government, with the same motivation, transferred Glebe and South Sydney back into the City. But that plan came spectacularly unstuck when Clover Moore led an independent team into power in the City. So you can see why we are somewhat cynical about this latest push for the City to amalgamate with four other Councils, none of which wishes to amalgamate, and all of which claim to be “fit for the future”.

There may well be a case for some Councils in New South Wales to amalgamate, but Sydney City Council is not one of them. It has the scale and capacity to deliver high quality services, whilst keeping rates comparatively low. We understand that the City has a residential population of about 200,000, and has about 1.2 million people in its area daily. The current proposal is for the City to amalgamate with the Councils of Botany Bay, Randwick, Waverley and Woollahra, which would increase the residential population to over 500,000 (the size of Tasmania), but with no increased responsibility or authority – in effect, a “mini-State” without State powers.

The process of amalgamation is always protracted and disruptive. For example, when Glebe was transferred from Leichhardt Municipality to the City, it took nine years for the complex issues involved in the various Town Plans to be resolved. It took a number of years for issues such as public consultation, social services, capital works projects and future developments to be sorted out, as is to be expected in such a large and varied urban area. This process is now largely complete, and the City has for some years been operating effectively. It has not only addressed the problems and needs of these diverse areas within its boundaries, but has also become a leader in sustainability and energy conservation.

The further expansion of the area of the City by incorporating four other LGAs would be far more disruptive than the amalgamations in 2003. From the point of view of current residents of the City, as well as businesses in the City, there are no perceptible benefits.

As far as we can tell, the City meets all the published criteria for future fitness, and is one of the

strongest Councils in the State, both financially and administratively. As mentioned above, it appears that, none of the proposed candidates for amalgamation with the City is interested, and neither is any significant group within the City itself.

The various parts and interests of the City are well represented, and any diminution or dilution of these representations would be felt as a serious disadvantage and backward step. We do not support the proposal for the City to amalgamate.

Yours faithfully

Alison McKeown

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cc: Premier Mike Baird MP
Minister for Local Government Paul Toole MP