

To whom it may concern

Whilst the new council boundaries are not set there are concerns regarding the creation of mega councils. I am a resident within the City of Sydney council and the consideration, as per council's flyer, has hinted the possible amalgamation with eastern suburb councils – Woollahra, Waverley, Randwick and Botany Bay.

I understand the state government's reasons for larger councils in terms of providing more efficient services to ratepayers and for improved financial stability, which makes logical sense but the City of Sydney has a poor history regarding amalgamations. In 2004, the City of Sydney amalgamated with South Sydney and the result was a mess for a number of years. Firstly, you had two councils with different population profiles – Sydney with commercial and mostly high density residential profile and South Sydney with predominately residential and semi industrial profile. Secondly, City of Sydney roughshod most of South Sydney regulations (eg: DA planning process) by simply applying its city's regulations upon South Sydney ratepayers with different needs and profile. This issue still exists. Thirdly, rates and fees which are a determinant factor for ratepayers did not decrease in real terms.

It took City of Sydney about 7 years to come to some normalisation related to the provision of services to all ratepayers. Amalgamations may be good in theory but for the City of Sydney, it is already large enough and because of its past history, its different ratepayer profile (more commercial based) it would not be able to provide the appropriate services to all its ratepayers. Therefore, I ask not to force City of Sydney council to expand any further.

There are cases in Australia where amalgamations have mixed results. The WA government was also endeavouring in council amalgamations for over 2 years till it placed the whole programme on hold earlier the year. I had experienced the early stages of amalgamation and it was clear the councils were resisting. The GMs and councillors were already concerned about the roles in a mega council. The same resistance will be apparent in NSW councils, especially in Sydney. If two or more councils are to be amalgamated then certain engagement principles need to be put in place beyond the dangling of financial carrots. For example, a project plan would be required to rationalise / consolidate policies, procedures, rates, services, finances and operations over a 3 to 5 year period depending on council size. This is a similar period applied to Westpac with the takeover St George bank. WBC would have liked to wash St George with WBC culture however it actually discovered that regulator's restrictions proved to be beneficial for the total banking organisation. The point is amalgamation needs to be planned and progressive and not rushed to make it a success for the mega-council and ratepayers.

If the NSW Government's endeavour is to reduce council /shire outlays then it should look at its own house as well with Whole of Government services. For example, It does not make sense that each government department have different back office operations, technologies and so forth. For example: Payroll is payroll irrespective of all the different employee rights and entitlements. Other examples include finances, case management, accounts, human resources, ICT and so forth.

In summary, I don't agree for City of Sydney to amalgamate with any other of the eastern suburbs councils for the reasons mentioned above, and if there are amalgamations of any councils / shires then the NSW Government needs to show leadership by helping amalgamated councils establish a plan for an orderly amalgamation.