

INDEPENDENT PRICING and REGULATORY TRIBUNAL
Local Government Division
Review of Local Council Fit for the Future Proposals

Submitted: Friday 31 July 2015-07-31 Forwarded by:

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and

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Retired corporate executive and volunteer in Sydney City boundaries

Please acknowledge receipt of this submission.

Cc: Clover Moore, Lord Mayor, City of Sydney

FIT FOR THE FURE IN THE BEST CITY IN THE WORLD

The following submission is written: in support of the Sydney City Council submission; to raise concerns about Government manipulation of the amalgamation process and to highlight the unacceptable disruption and risk to the future plans and achievements from amalgamation.

Rejection of State Government Incentives

The State Government has offered handouts and incentives to local councils to amalgamate. Yet only five have responded to the preferred rewards. Citizens have responded to surveys and thirty six councils have reflected the wishes of citizens and considered the impacts of amalgamation. They have indicated that they deserve to stand alone and have rejected the incentives. Indeed, the general feeling is so opposed to the proposed amalgamations and in fear of a State Government broken promise (see below), that protests will now take place outside the NSW Parliament and Councils are combining forces in a merger battle; a reflection of the ludicrous way proposed *voluntary* amalgamations are being managed.

State Government Promise

The current Premier has made the promise, that there would be *no* forced amalgamations. If citizens are to believe the public commitment of the Premier, why is there a *second* review focussed on cutting Sydney councils to 18, against the wishes of local communities?

Manipulation of the Rules

When Council resources – our taxpayer resources – are dedicated to months spent preparing submissions to the ILGRP – why are citizens forced to now spend time on submission writing to address the partisan self-interests of a State Government?

How can months of work undertaken rigorously, and in good faith, be cynically ditched in favour of the self-appointed umpire changing the rules?

Taxpayer cost, including thousands of hours of Council effort, cannot be treated as if it does not exist.

Criteria changes from meeting ‘Fit for the Future’ to ‘superior’ has shocked citizens and led to lack of confidence that the process is fair and transparent.

What legitimacy can the State Government claim when it shifts the goal posts once independent auditors (see below) and their constituents have documented their positions in accord with the stated rules of the process?

We understand, and are incredulous, that the outcomes of the hastily contrived IPART review are not to be shared with the citizens they affect.

What right of reply do communities now have?

Why would citizens not be suspicious of the motives of a Government that provides less than two months to address controversial rule changes?

Independent Financial Audit

PricewaterhouseCoopers has undertaken a comprehensive and *independent* review of Sydney City Council’s status as ‘Fit for the Future’ with extremely positive results.

Despite establishing this reputation, the Sydney City, Council finds itself having to respond to ‘Superior to the Future’ – a nonsense.

What is the community to make of a State Government review that attempts to void these findings?

Either an audit is independent and conducted by experts or the consultations undertaken by Councils have been nullified by a State Government showing all the hallmarks of an ideological commitment to a pre-determined outcome.

Citizens’ democratic rights

The citizens who live and work in this thriving city are thrilled that the City is in the competent hands of a *non-corrupt*, community-focussed City Council

Surveys of citizens are just that, feedback on what we want and expect from our city. Shifting goal posts when a Government doesn't get the result it wants is blatantly undemocratic.

We fail to understand why, in a democracy, the outcomes of an independent review are ignored unwelcome intervention risks the collapse of public confidence in the transparency and accountability of the whole costly process.

Known Problems with Amalgamations

Councils work to support the (quality) lives of their citizens. The State Government has *not* demonstrated the benefits of amalgamation. Indeed, a quick of overview of *just some* of the *outstanding* performance highlights by the current Sydney City Council demonstrates how destructive amalgamation would be.

Current Exceptional Performance by City of Sydney	Risks of Amalgamation
<p>1. SUBMISSION The City of Sydney submission documents high level performance including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaching targets above benchmark performance in many instances; <i>and</i> meeting milestone dates 	
<p>2. FINANCIAL CAPACITY Validation by PricewaterhouseCoopers financial audit, finding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sydney City Council is the 'benchmark against which other councils could be compared' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens who are very happy with the performance of the current Council, who know and understand the achievements of this Council, will become more disillusioned with the leadership/politicians at a State level, if an independent review showing Sydney City Council as the economic benchmark Council is treated as 'an inconvenient truth'
<p>3. FINANCIAL FUTURE NSW Treasury Corporation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An annual \$108 billion, currently under sound economic management, to be

<p>(T-Corp) rating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sydney City Council is the only Council rated ‘strong’ with a positive outlook. • Over 70% of businesses are so satisfied with the current Council they want existing boundaries to remain 	<p>disrupted/penalised/risked</p>
<p>4. BUSINESS SUPPORT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful private investment • Booming construction activity, indicating effective and efficient planning within reasonable controls • 40% of all jobs growth in Sydney metropolitan area taking place within the boundaries of the City of Sydney <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient development processes: Consistently represented in the top 10 Councils for DA assessment time, despite the volume, size and potential impact of city development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current investment risked, leading to, not only Council difficulties, but also negative impacts on the NSW economy • Inevitable decline and delays in constructions • Negative impact costed as in excess of \$300 million (<i>for decline in construction activity of just one per cent over the next decade</i>)
<p>5. CULTURAL LIFE & ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cultural and environmental credentials/achievements of the current Council are renowned • Over 250 major projects delivered 	<p>At risk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A legacy of policy, libraries, theatre, cultural spaces, live music etc • A 10 year plan of ongoing desired and supported cultural projects • Established design excellence • Australia’s first Carbon Neutral Government • It would be a travesty if the Council was prevented from continuing its ground breaking work to ensure the sustainability the citizens demand

<p>6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</p> <p>The current Sydney City Independent team led by the iconic Lord Mayor, have been world-class community builders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens love the upgraded laneways; promotion of village precincts and life; the emergence of the inspired small bars; the attention to alcohol abuse issues; the food trucks, the 24,000 (!) car sharing memberships , the list of achievements is far too extensive to enumerate 	<p>It is virtually impossible to image destroying the vibrant community engagement that this Council has achieved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size does not assist <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ engagement ▪ social cohesion ▪ inclusivity ▪ quality of life - in fact, it's a 'no brainer' – size, anonymity, loss of connection, destroys social capital. This cannot be allowed to happen to the city we love. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing scale and thereby paying less attention to social impacts is a major and unacceptable cost
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Do not recommend the dismantling of a high performing Council that continues to deliver to us, the citizens, liveability, creative environments, a secure economic future, non-corrupt planning process, environmental sustainability and confidence in local government.

Sydney is a highly successful, renowned global city: the envy of the world. As our London friends call it: 'our favourite city'. "If it ain't broke

Sydney is more than 'Fit for the Future'!