Level 15, 2-24 Rawson Place

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## RE: INQUIRY INTO MERGE BETWEEN GOSFORD AND WYONG SHIRE COUNCILS

My name is Gary Blaschke OAM and I have been a resident of Wyong region for only five years. Prior to this, I like most residents of both council areas lived in Sydney, yet I had many ties with the Central Coast form my childhood till my becoming a resident.

I have sat on several Commissions of Inquiry, stood before Standing Committees on Planning and Community Liaison committees on both Environment and Disability Access issues. As the former Chairperson of the Botany Bay and Catchment Alliance Inc., former President of the South West Enviro Centre Inc. and founder of the Disabled Surfers Association of Australia Inc., I believe that I have a background and grounding to be heard by this tribunal.

I currently hold the position of National President of the D.S.A.A., President of the Northern Lakes Disability Tourism Precinct Committee Inc., Chairperson of Camp Breakaway Inc. and a member of Chain Valley Bay Progress Association.

I take umbrage with any notion that I am left wing or some form of activist, in fact it is becoming common place for community members to throw in their voluntary community towel, as when they raise any issue with Wyong Council, most fall on deaf ears. I call myself a Community and Disability Advocate that has thirty seven years experience of running my own business and close to the same on Disability and Environmental issues through several recognised and respected organisations.

As a relatively new resident to the region, I have immersed myself into many Planning and Disability issues that need addressing through Wyong Council's lack of understanding or total ignorance of what is needed for close to 32% of our community on sustainable issues.

My experiences with councils around Australia are many, most being positive as with Gosford and Lake Macquarie councils, yet my short history with Wyong Council tells a different story. From day one, I was seen to be a threat as I spoke out for the Disabled or Environment. It is obvious that Politics plays a bigger role in the hidden agenda of Wyong Council, rather than the views of those who have the audacity to want to make the region a better place for the right reasons.

I have a great rapport with councils such as Warringah and Waverly, having input into both Master Plans for disability access at Collaroy and Bondi Beaches. Gold Coast and Kempsey councils have recently contacted me for advice and yet Wyong seems to consider me as an irritation to their antiquated plans.

Hence, leading to community scepticism of our regional representatives and having their views unstabling for the region.

I have carried out many free Access Audits in the region for Disability Tourism, including two Holiday Parks for Wyong Shire Council and have never received a response to the reports, let alone a simple thank you. On the other hand I instigated the construction of the Lakes Beach Disability Access Way and along with many community volunteers built it to World Standards with not one Councillor or Council Officer to be seen for the 88 days during construction. Effectively having to get former Planning Minister Brad Hazzard MP to over-ride Wyong Council's strict and unhelpful requirements.

I have worked with Duncan Gay MP & Roads and Maritime and instigated the construction of a new disability toilet facility on the M1 at the Hawkesbury Bridge rest area. I am currently working with Yasmin Catley MP for Swansea and the NSW Department of Primary Industry for the construction of two Disability Fishing Platforms at Chain Valley Bay and San Remo.

It can be clearly demonstrated that my intentions are honourable, without political bias or any hidden agenda. I have attended most Council run Community Forums and noted that most were merely telling the community what Council wanted them to hear and when asking any questions, community members were restricted to one or it was taken on notice, never to return.

Wyong council has effectively stifled community input by abandoning Precinct Committees and limiting long term voluntary, community memberships to the Estuaries Management Committee.

I have a bias against these two councils merging outright, through having greater and direct hands on experience with both Councils. It makes greater sense to remove Wyong Shire Council all together and divide the Wards between Gosford and Lake Macquarie Councils. Thus having, the "B" Ward merg with Gosford Council and "A" Ward into Lake Macquarie Council. This would eliminate duplication and or greater impact on one proposed merger and align it more closely with current State Boundaries.

The current and past propaganda that Wyong Council has announced amounts to false advertising when they report to have interviewed some 2,500 residents and businesses. Spruiking that "ratepayers are a happy bunch" on this issue, yet failing to declare who or where these residents lived, what ward they were part of and that it effectively represented just over 1.56% of Wyong Shire's population that was interviewed.

They state that Wyong Council is financially fit for the future, no thanks to recent massive rate increases way above any normal CPI increase.

Wyong Council's constant tabloid spruiking and the amount of Media Releases on this and other issues such as record spending on roads and infrastructure, does not emulate with the general community's opinion, who still live mostly without kerb and guttering in many towns and roads equivalent to third world countries.

Public transport in the northern parts is virtually nonexistent and accessing Wyee railway station, the local State Government designated Transport Hub, is near impossible for the 32% of the local community having a disability, mobility or aging issue.

I believe that many things come to a natural end, if not through external political influences. I am of the understanding that one of the active, community driven, Councillors was evicted from the chamber at a previous Council meeting by the current Mayor for raising his voice. On investigation it was found that the Mayor himself was recorded at a higher decibel rate than that of the Councillor. This is indicative of stifling true debate on local issues expected by our ratepayers, because the Mayor did not like the Councillor raising his voice.

I personally have had many issues with Wyong Council on building a Granny Flat under the NSW Affordable housing Act., of which they knew very little of when applying for the DA and insisted on me paying some \$14,800 for the section 94 contribution. After complaining to the then N.S.W. Planning Minister, it was found that they had made a mistake and it was only \$8,000 that I needed to pay, even though it was being built for my 85 year old mother and I was not considered as a developer. Twelve months later when fully aware of the act, Wyong Council dropped the Section 94 contributions for Granny Flats, yet 16 local families were never remunerated.

As National President of the Disabled Surfers Association of Australia Inc. and running an event at Toowoon Bay of which we had a history of for some eight years, completely supported by the local Surf Life Saving Club. Wyong Council thought it was right to hand deliver on a Saturday, an invoice for taking the disabled surfing and using the beach. After requesting the Council to waiver the \$180 fee in writing, it was rejected, thus leading to The Today program on Channel 9, radio station 2UE and local tabloids taking up the protest. Some months later after an official complaint to the Human Rights Commission, it was found to be an administrative error, yet we are in receipt of many months of delivered Statements for the outstanding fee.

These are only a few of the incidences that I have had to endure in my short time as a resident and ratepayer of Wyong Shire Council. Too many issues, too much politics and too many hidden agendas.

I Gary Blaschke OAM resident and ratepayer of Wyong Shire Council am opposed to a single merger between Gosford and Wyong Shire Councils and respectfully ask IPART to seriously examine my proposal of splitting the wards with neighbouring shires.

If this is not taken into consideration, I respectfully request that an Administrator be appointed to take over Wyong Council duties for a period of four years, much the same as Warringah and Port Macquarie Councils in the past.

Yours sincerely,

Gary Blaschke OAM