

Level 15, 2-24 Rawson Place

Sydney NSW 2000

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 from 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.

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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 Toowoona 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

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