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Submission: Government Attacks Local Communities and Councils

I object to any forced mergers of Councils in NSW and in particular merging of Hunters Hill Council.

The NSW Government is hell bent on forcing Sydney's existing councils into 18 Mega Councils of over 250,000 people each through a mock "Fit for the Future" process, thereby destroying local democracy and local communities.

This is despite sustained NSW community and council opposition and no empirical evidence to support the State Government's assertions that mergers will improve performance, sustainability and services. Last week community polls across Lane Cove, Hunters Hill and Ryde reinforced the fact that over 80% of residents are opposed to mergers.

The Government has also learnt nothing from experiences with previous mergers of councils in NSW, the failure and reversal of recent amalgamations in Queensland and the abandonment of a similar process in Western Australian due to community outrage.

What are the real motives of the Government?

Removing the "Local" out of Local Government by sidelining resident views resulting in a regional and corporate approach to planning and service delivery. The result is centralised control leaving Macquarie Street pulling the levers.

The community's voice muffled through politicisation of the elected representatives and the demise of independent community councillors.

Facilitating uniform planning outcomes in favour of developers disregarding social, environmental, heritage and community values.

Cost shifting by moving responsibilities to the regional level rather than delivery by state agencies, at rate payers' expense.

What the Experts Say;

Professor Dollery says that "when he compared the financial ratings of previously merged NSW councils he found no material difference in performance between merged and existing councils".

Drew, Kortt and Dollery further state "far from the earlier claims of leaner more efficient local authorities the Queensland mergers produced more expensive Local Government funded by higher rates and fees".

Professor Percy Allan states that "there is no compelling evidence that centralising all council activities into a single mega council produces cost efficiencies"

What the community stands to lose;

Local democracy removed in favour of a regional focus and a commercial corporate ethos. We have all experienced the insensitivity and lack of access to corporate entities such as Telcos and government departments.

Loss of the unique local character and sense of community offered by smaller councils resulting in a dull, bland and uniform Sydney.

Shift of priorities and funding away from the needs of our community towards a centralised council based in the North Sydney CBD.

Community events we currently enjoy most likely curtailed in favour of regional events.

Planning controls eroded and our heritage, and natural and built environment compromised.

Reduced volunteerism due to disconnected communities.

The future;

We all have a responsibility to demand of our government to follow the wishes of the community and abandon this misconceived and flawed process of mergers. The future is to retain robust and democratic local councils strengthened by the scale and capacity offered via partnerships, such as shared service centres, and effective regional collaboration.

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