

## Submission to IPART in response to Mosman Council's Fit for Future submission

I am making this submission from the perspective of a former councillor. I was one of 9 independent Councillors elected to serve on the 2008-2012 council. My observations below on the claims made in Mosman Council's FfF submission have been very much influenced by my experiences as a councillor over that period and my close monitoring of the Council's performance over the current term.

1. I agree that Mosman Council has excellent staff, high quality service delivery, high levels of resident satisfaction, and provides its ratepayers with excellent value for money. Council has pioneered a number effective regional collaboration on a number of fronts, the most notable being the Kimbriki waste facility.
2. I support the claims made in the submission re financial sustainability, infrastructure and service management and efficiency
3. This submission focuses on what was not said in the Council submission, specifically on serious weaknesses that were not cited, weaknesses which I believe can only be addressed through some level of amalgamation – my preference would be with North Sydney Council,
4. Regional collaboration, which was claimed as a positive, has as many examples of failure as it has successes. In Mosman's case collaboration with its Northern neighbours has been facilitated by its membership of SHOROC. Yet despite the fact that Mosman and North Sydney have far more common challenges than Mosman and Pittwater, Mosman is not a member of NSROC.
5. Because regional collaboration is voluntary, it is restricted to issues that where the interests of all parties are aligned. In the case of SHOROC little progress has been made in collaborating on contentious issues. For example, transport solutions such as the Rapid Bus Transit will benefit Northern Beaches' residents but may mean 24 clearways though Mosman and are likely to be opposed.. Mosman's efforts to close the Beauty Point rat run were vigorously opposed by Mosman's SHOROC partners. In the 1990's Mosman was supporting a metro style rail link through Mosman to Dee Why but this was opposed by Warringah as likely to result in excessive development and population increase on the Northern Beaches.
6. Mosman Council has not performed well in responding to the needs that Sydney, as a global city has (as for example outlined in Frances Kelly's book *City Limits* and a number of reports from the Grattan Institute). In order to grow the high end consulting services sector upon which Sydney's future depends, large numbers of skilled professionals will be needed. They will be attracted to Sydney only if housing can provided in highly liveable communities within an easy public transport commute of the CBD. Attempts by the 2008-2012 Council to grapple with this issue (in the form of the Spit Junction Master Plan) were overturned by the 2012-2016 Council resulting in \$200,000 funding provided by NSW Planning being wasted. The new Council spent a further sum from its own resources on another consultant's report covering a much less visionary plan for a subset of the original area. Council has deferred any action on this report.
7. Council's claims that the overwhelming majority of residents are opposed to amalgamation need to be seen in context. The two sources of evidence that Council provides are the question that has been put to all voters at the last several LG elections. These have shown a substantial (but falling)

percentage in favour of the status quo. Since voting was compulsory even someone who had not given much thought to the issue or was aware of the arguments for and against was required to express an opinion. Such voters are much more likely to 'play it safe' with the status quo. This would also have applied to the Council's random telephone survey. A better reflection of the level of passion on the issue would be the number who bothered to take Council's online survey or fill in the response cards. Although 85% supported the status quo, only 2% of residents chose to express an opinion.

8. My own experience on Council bears out the hypothesis that a small percentage of the community take a great interest in everything Council does (a handful see it as their post retirement life's work, attending every Council meeting) but for the vast majority just what entity provides local services is not important, what matters is the quality of services provided. The only point of engagement that this majority has with Council is when development matters are being considered that impact on their interests. The fact that an independent panel now handles most development applications has distanced council from residents even here.

9. The small percentage that do take a great interest in local council affairs have a strong vested interest in maintaining the status quo. They have built up networks, they have influence and a feeling of belonging to the power elite, all of which would be seriously diluted in a bigger council.

10. In terms of making decisions for the public good, it is unhealthy that a small group can hold such sway over an elected Council. I recall as a councillor being told by one of this group 'Don't be so naïve as to think that you as a councillor can influence what happens in Mosman – you try and I will show you who really has the power'. This was at the point when Council was proposing to introduce paid parking on Balmoral Beach. Council did manage this, but it triggered a well-funded campaign that at the following election saw the majority of councillors who supported paid parking being unseated.

11. Good local government requires an appropriate balance between leadership – council recognising its responsibility to future generations and the wider Sydney community – and being responsive to what the local community is asking for. Representative democracy is more than have a plebiscite on every issue. The local community can and should vocally defend their interests, but the Council must recognise their input is just one input to their decision making. It is hard to take a big picture view in a small community.

12. A council covering a wider area would be more sustainable and less vulnerable to capture by special interest groups simply by having greater diversity – a better balance between business and residents, more diverse demographics, a better balance of jobs vs residents

13. While the Council has excellent staff at present, it is at a disadvantage in recruiting staff because of the limited career prospects offered by a small council

14. The small size of Council means that there is very little back-up and an absence of 'communities of expertise'. This and the Item 11 represent sustainability risks

15. The small size of Council means that it is more reliant than most on consultants. This mitigates against continuity in following council's strategic objectives. There is a risk that strengths are not built upon as the conceptual framework of one consultant is not appreciated by the next.

16. A bigger Council would have a stronger voice and greater influence over state instrumentalities such as RMS, NSW Transport, State Planning etc.

17. Mosman has already found difficulty in getting a truly representative council. It is a high income area where most individuals are already very heavily committed. Councillors are either in their retirement or in the unusual circumstance of coming from a family in which a single breadwinner can provide sufficient income. The more residents per politician the greater the pool from which high calibre councillors can emerge.

Warren Yates

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