

SHHMC REPORT ON NSW GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL TO AMALGAMATE COUNCILS INCLUDING HUNTERS HILL

SHHMC 23 Dec 2015

On Friday 18 December 2015 NSW Premier Mike Baird made the announcement that Sydney's existing 43 councils are to be reduced to 25, and 109 regional councils to 87.



The Premier Mike Baird making his announcement

The Premier said that the target population size for councils in Sydney is to be 150,000. Previously the Government had put councils and communities through a Fit for the Future process based on councils having a scale of approximately 250,000, and then through a 30 day period of finding a neighbour of any size to merge with. It now proposes new criteria after the final bell has sounded.

The process has been a shambles and a farce from start to finish. The Government's plan reveals groupings of councils not based on evidence of 'community of interest' or common identity, but on base party political considerations.

The Government's proposals will be sent by the Minister to the chief executive of the Office of Local Government for reports by appointed 'Delegates', with comments by the Boundaries Commission. There is no independence in this process which is controlled by Government, with a Minister able to exercise his discretion as he sees fit. Communities can have a limited say, but their views can be ignored. However there are public hearings and the light of day can be shone on these dark deeds.

In relation to Hunters Hill, the Government's proposal is that it merge with Ryde and Lane Cove and form a new council of a size of 160,000. This would result in Hunters Hill having 1 councillor on the council, Lane Cove 2 and Ryde with a population of 114,000 with 9 councillors.



Hunters Hill Mayor Richard Quinn, Ryde Mayor Jerome Laxale and Lane Cove Mayor Deborah Hutchens discussing the Government's announcement.

This proposal by the Government ignores the strong wish of the Hunters Hill community to retain its historic council, and unanimous resolutions of its council. It ignores the alternative model of independence and joint cooperation with surrounding councils. This model was unanimously approved by the Upper House Inquiry, and accords with the wishes of the surrounding councils Ryde and Lane Cove, and their communities.

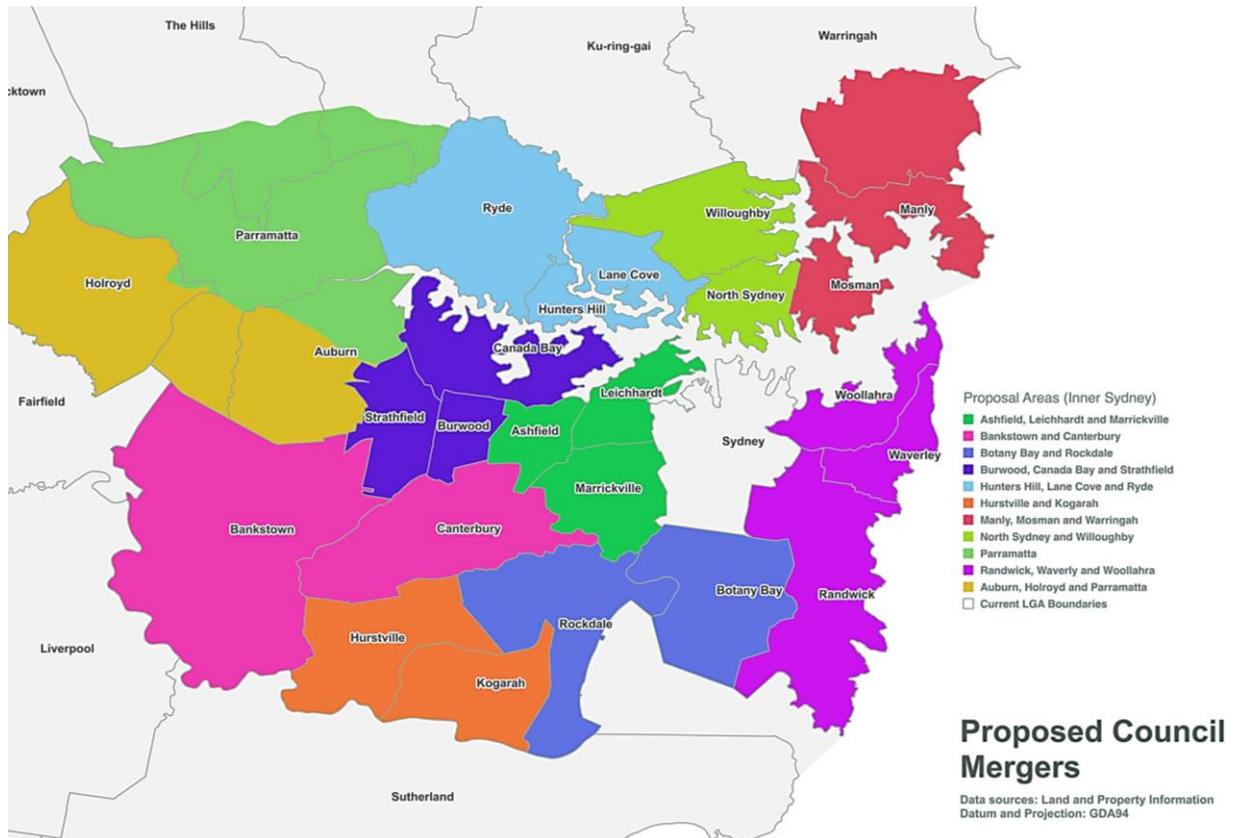
The Premier's announcement and the reaction of councils and communities to it was covered by every TV station, including [TEN News](#), [7 NEWS](#), [PRIME 7 News](#), [Sky NEWS](#), and [ABC News](#) (iview for limited time).

There have also been a number of media articles, which are listed hereunder:

- State Government Plan for forced amalgamations [ABC News](#) 18 Dec 15
- Baird under fire [SMH](#) 18 Dec 15
- Dark day for Local Democracy [LGNSW](#) 18 Dec 15
- Our communities ignored says Hunters Hill, [Ryde](#) and Lane Cove Councils 18 Dec 15
- Reaction from councils to mergers announcement [Daily Telegraph](#) 18 Dec 15
- Sansom slams merger proposals [SMH](#) 19 Dec 15
- Baird's Farce [TWT](#) 23 Dec 15

For the reaction of the Labor Party see [here](#) and The Greens [here](#).

The Government has established a special [website](#) that contains maps of the mergers and the usual spin about alleged benefits. Specifically in relation to Hunters Hill see [here](#).



In relation to the process to be followed for mergers and creating new councils see [here](#).

The reality is that the Government has failed at every stage of the process. It alleged that Sydney's councils were not economically fit, and were not efficient and sustainable. IPART proved this wrong. The Government claimed that bigger councils were better and more efficient. Expert evidence and research has shown this not to be so. It has said that communities want bigger councils, but consultation and polling has revealed that communities want to keep their councils local.

There is clear evidence that members of the National Party are at odds with each other over this issue, and are certainly at odds with their coalition partner the Liberals. There is division within the Cabinet and amongst Liberal MPs. Members of the Liberal Party and branch members are aghast at what is happening. They remain firmly against forced amalgamations. The Liberal/National Party has no mandate to force amalgamations.

The Government's manic drive to destroy local democracy will fail. It will pay a heavy price for not respecting and listening to the people.

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