

Councils stand by model

NO MERGER, GOVERNMENT TOLD

Rosaline Walters

RYDE, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove councils have used their last opportunity to respond to the State Government's forced merger proposals to say thanks, but no thanks.

In a 50-word submission on Wednesday, the councils informed the Government that they still supported their alternative joint regional authority (JRA) model.

The JRA would see each council remain autonomous, while still providing efficiencies and subregional planning across the area.

Each councils' 50-word submission said that they were "Financially fit and sustainable, and has capacity and size for effective local government.

"(The council) supports the JRA model for regional co-operation, as endorsed by the NSW Legislative Council. Council has the strong support of it's local community and rejects the need to merge with any council."

City of Ryde Mayor Jerome Laxale said Ryde would not succumb to demands being forced upon it against the will of the community.

STORY SO FAR

2014 – January – The Independent Local Government Review Panel publishes a report on local government recommending some council amalgamations

2014 – September – NSW Government announces councils must submit reports to independent body IPART who will assess if they are fit for the future

2015 – June – Ryde, Lane Cove and Hunters Hill announce they will propose a joint regional authority model, instead of being forced to merge with other councils if found "unfit"

2015 – October – IPART report finds Ryde, Lane Cove and Hunters Hill "unfit"

2015 – December – Premier Mike Baird is expected to announce which councils will merge

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Hunters Hill Mayor Richard Quinn said the Hunters Hill community had soundly rejected amalgamation.

"It's now time for the Premier Mike Baird and the Minister for Local Government Paul Toole to listen to the people and accept the



Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove councillors and supporters of the JRA join the rally against forced mergers.

JRA reform model," he said. Lane Cove Mayor Deborah Hutchens said their job was to represent the interests of the community, not the interests of the state government.

"I urge the State Government to open their ears and

their eyes to what forced mergers will do to our local communities, not just in Lane Cove but across the State," she said.

Under the State Government's proposed Fit for the Future reforms, Hunters Hill, Lane Cove, Mosman,

North Sydney, Ryde and Willoughby councils would be amalgamated into one lower north shore council if found to be "unfit".

Last month, an independent body tasked with judging councils found that Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane

Cove councils were "unfit", based on a "scale and capacity" criterion.

The State Government is expected to make an announcement before Christmas on the future of the state's councils and confirm which will merge.