

SAVE HUNTERS HILL MUNICIPALITY COALITION

A coalition of community groups and residents determined to save the historic Municipality of Hunters Hill
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SUBMISSION FROM SAVE HUNTERS HILL MUNICIPALITY COALITION (SHHMC)

Dated 28 February 2016

To: The Delegate – Council Boundary Review

Proposed Merger Hunters Hill, Lane Cove and City of Ryde councils

Council Boundary Review
GPO Box 5341
Sydney NSW 2001

1. INTRODUCTION

- a) This submission is made by Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition (SHHMC) to the Council Boundary Review, and relates to the Proposed Merger of Hunters Hill council with Lane Cove and City of Ryde councils.
- b) SHHMC is a community organisation within Hunters Hill determined to maintain its historic Municipality (1861) and keep the local in local government. Local residents highly value the area's heritage which is of national significance, the sense of belonging, local democracy and their involvement in local community activities and groups. SHHMC supports our independent council cooperating with neighbouring councils on efficiencies and regional matters.
- c) The organisation was established in 2003 to prevent the then attempt to amalgamate the council. It was reactivated in December 2012 to combat a perceived threat to its independence from the State Government and from big business and developer interests.
- d) The Baird Government's gutless act of releasing its proposal to forcibly merge many NSW councils just days before Christmas and the holiday season must go down as the greatest betrayal of local communities in NSW history. If allowed to succeed it will destroy local democracy in NSW, and create mega councils operating on a corporatised level captured by party politics.
- e) The NSW Government's proposal to merge Hunters Hill, Lane Cove and Ryde councils flies in the face of overwhelming community opinion and is contrary to Liberal Party election campaign promises and liberal philosophy. Good government policy should be developed on a strong evidence base delivering positive benefits for the public good.

f) The Government over the last 4 years has disregarded evidence from many reports (the most recent tabled by the Upper House Committee Inquiring into Local Government), many prominent academic experts and the lessons learnt from failed attempts to merge councils in Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia.

g) There has been no credible detailed analysis or modelling of what these new councils will deliver in terms of financial, infrastructure and community services to justify the Government's actions. How will their performance be measured? In fact, the Government's own "Fit for the Future" process found during the IPART review that the majority of City Councils met all the essential economic criteria to be responsive, effective, efficient and sustainable into the future. Hunters Hill passed every economic criteria.



Media Conference at Launch of Save Our Councils Coalition (SOCC) 3 June 2015

h) A coalition of community groups from across Sydney and NSW was formed in June 2015 called Save Our Councils Coalition (SOCC) with aims including – no forced amalgamations, keep councils local, and properly conducted referendums requiring majority support in each affected area. SHHMC is a member of SOCC.

i) Since that time SOCC has expanded considerably and the anger at the Government's continuing attack on local communities and their local elected representatives has risen to a crescendo heard right across NSW. Communities are sick and tired of the endless lies and deceit of this Government on this issue and its lack of transparency and good governance. It has been a pitiful performance.

2. HUNTERS HILL MUNICIPALITY

a) The Municipality of Hunters Hill (1861) is one of the earliest and most intact local government areas in Australia. It is recognised nationally for its historic and heritage significance and is known as Australia's oldest surviving 'garden suburb'.

b) It is surrounded on three sides by water and has a natural ridgeline to the west. Hunters Hill has a strong and distinct community.

c) There are many long established groups and activities – community, cultural and sporting. There is a strong sense of belonging and identity based upon this historic place.



The Hunters Hill community at the BBQ before the Rally 23 Feb 2016

3. THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL

a) The Government's Proposal is to create a bureaucratic Mega Council of 164,000 people. It proposes to do that by forcibly amalgamating Hunters Hill (14,500 residents) and Lane Cove (35,000 residents) with the City of Ryde (114,500 residents).

4. A FLAWED PROCESS

a) The Delegate appointed by the Government to assess the Proposal is not viewed by the community as being independent – he holds a number of State Government positions.

b) The Delegate and the Government are refusing to carry out a poll or referendum of electors in Hunters Hill and in the other council areas to obtain the views of residents.

c) The Proposal relies on a KPMG report for alleged benefits of mergers, but the Government refuses to provide the full report to the public and the information upon which that report is based.

5. DESTRUCTION OF HUNTERS HILL

a) This Proposal is not a merger - it is in reality the wanton destruction of the Municipality against the wishes of both its community and council. This is a clear breach of solemn promises made in 2011 by the Liberal Party at the election and repeated thereafter not to force councils to amalgamate.

b) An example of this is graphically shown in a video of the local member Anthony Roberts MP in June 2013 see [here](#) or at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lppkjHZZuZo&feature=youtu.be> What he said was "There will be no forced amalgamations, that is our stated position as a Government"; "You don't need to amalgamate Councils – bigger is not better"; "Stronger ROCs (Regional Organisations of Councils) are certainly the way forward for local government, not amalgamations."

c) If amalgamation were to proceed there would be a real loss of identity and of community spirit, and our planning protections placed seriously at risk. Inappropriate and dense developments would be highly likely.

5. LOSS OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY

a) The Hunters Hill community presently elects 7 councillors – one councillor for 2,000 residents. In the Mega council it is likely there would only be one councillor (out of 15) elected from the Hunters Hill area – one councillor for 11,000 residents.

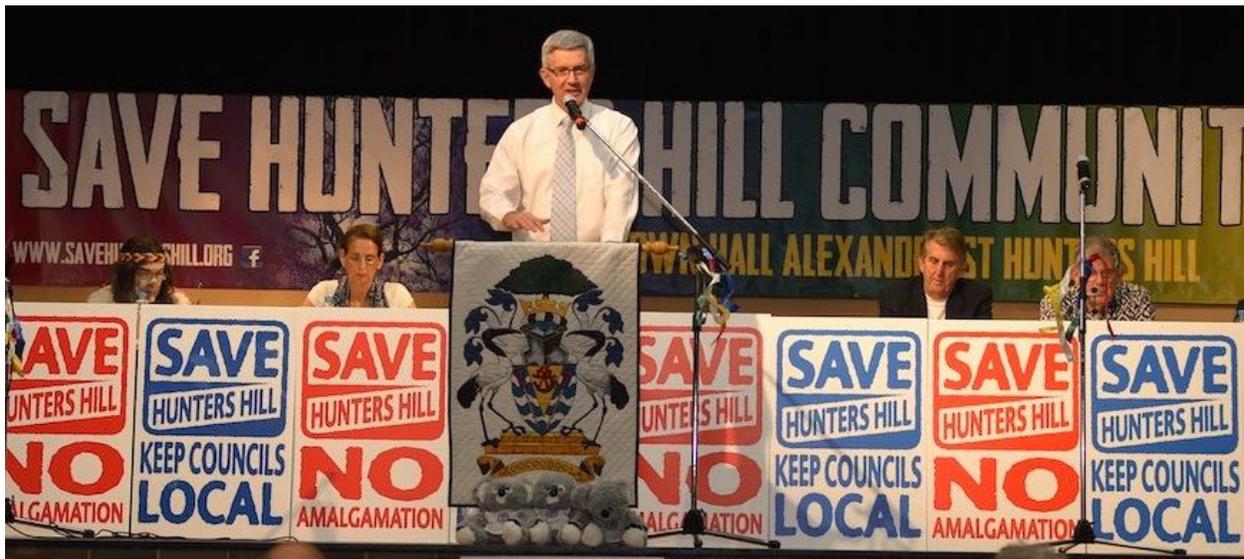
b) This serious decline in representation will severely reduce our community voice and say over developments in the area and our ability to preserve its character and heritage.

6. COMMUNITY'S STRONG OPPOSITION

a) The Hunters Hill community has been fiercely against amalgamation for many years. Large public meetings in 2003 and 2013 voted overwhelmingly against amalgamation.

b) An independent Micromex telephone survey in May 2015 revealed that 81% of the community in Hunters Hill supported the Council standing alone, and cooperating regionally.

c) Hunters Hill Council has also resolved on many occasions to reject forced amalgamations, to continue to stand alone and to cooperate regionally with surrounding councils.



The Mayor of Hunters Hill Cllr Richard Quinn addressing the Save Hunters Hill Community Rally

d) A large *Save Hunters Hill Community Rally* was held in the Hunters Hill Town Hall on 23 February 2016. The Rally heard from a number of speakers of the significant community and heritage values of Hunters Hill, of their support and indeed love of the area, and their fierce rejection of the forced amalgamation of their council.

e) This Rally was captured on film by John Illingsworth and has been placed on YouTube with titles 'Cloud Cuckoo Land – Quisling', 'Voices of Hunters Hill' and 'Save Hunters Hill Community Rally'. Further short videos may be produced from the main 'Rally video' featuring speakers –

see <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLor69SMXRyYcPvL3nXBPsgqLScAJ1wx98> and [here](#).

7. HUGE COSTS OF AMALGAMATION

a) There are many expert reports based on research of actual amalgamations, forced and voluntary, that reveal the considerable costs and dislocations to services and staff that result. It is the community that suffers. A recent and graphic example is Noosa in Queensland.

b) The Government's KPMG report alleges that the new merged Mega council is expected to lead to \$61 million in net financial savings across the 3 councils over 20 years. Recent independent modelling by Morrison Low shows that on two matters alone – back office savings and IT costs – the report is seriously flawed, and that the \$61 million figure is reduced to \$19.4 million over 8 years

c) In addition Professor Brian Dollery in his recent assessment of the report for North Sydney Council has found that redundancy costs and services equalisation have been severely underestimated. He says "It is assuredly the case that controversial and divisive mergers cannot be prescribed on the basis of demonstrably false financial estimates."

d) The proposed amalgamation will bring no economic benefits but huge additional costs that could easily exceed \$80 million – costs that will fall on the shoulders of ratepayers.

8. RATES WILL RISE

a) In spite of the attempt by Government to freeze rates for 4 years, they will increase dramatically in the medium to long term. This has been the experience in Victoria and Queensland and elsewhere.

b) In the first 4 years after forced amalgamation there will be chaos and dislocation, loss of services and attempts to sell assets and significant public buildings – such as the Town Hall.

9. PROPER REFORM SUPPORTED

a) The way forward for local government in this State is for local councils to remain truly local, while at the same time cooperating with surrounding councils on efficiencies and on regional issues. This approach was unanimously endorsed by the recent report from the NSW Parliament's Upper House Inquiry into Local Government.

10. CONCLUSION

a) The Government needs to withdraw now its flawed proposal to forcibly amalgamate Hunters Hill into a Mega council, respect local councils and communities, and support local democracy. It needs to genuinely partner with communities and councils, including when considering reform.

b) If it continues to proceed with this deeply flawed process, it will surely fail – it has no mandate and the people will not allow the loss of local democracy.



The National Trust 'Vienna Cottage' – a stone tradesman's cottage from the 1870s

Phil Jenkyn, OAM
Ross Williams, Emeritus Mayor

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