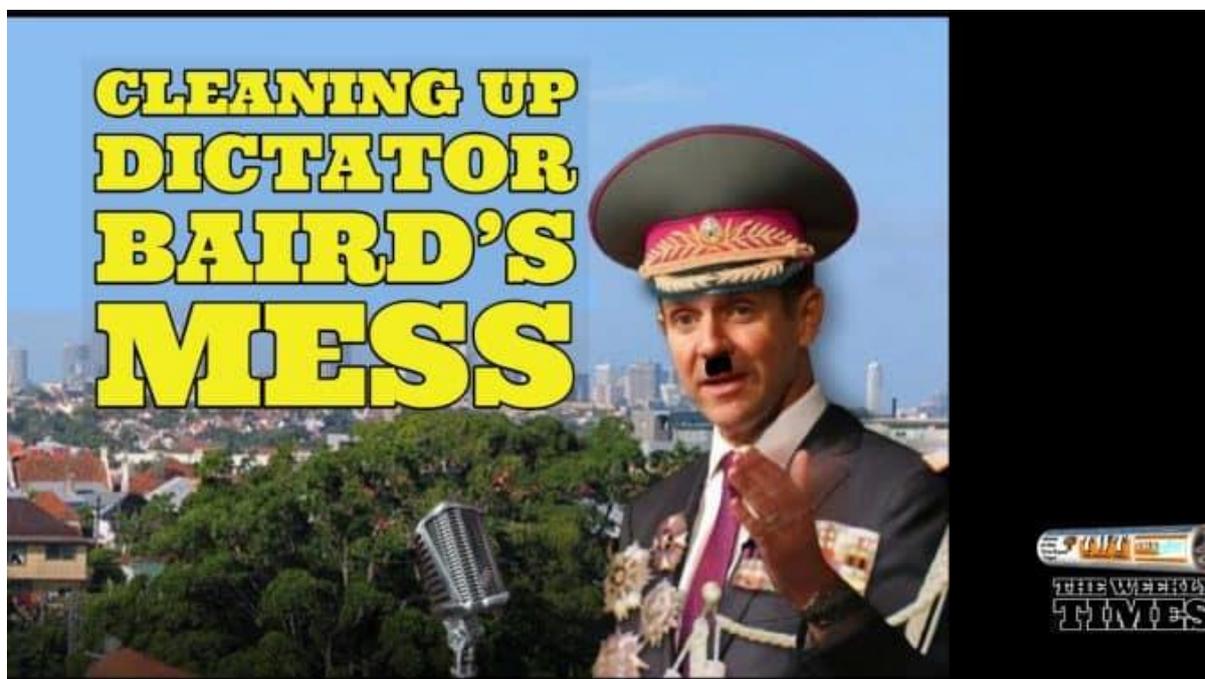


EXCLUSIVE: NSW Government finally obeys court orders to pay councils' costs over failed forced amalgamations

TWT 28 February 2019 Anthony Stavrinos



The state election has forced the Berejiklian Government to finalise overdue compensation to the four councils behind a legal challenge that brought down exiled NSW Dictator Baird's forced merger farce.

Until now, the NSW Government had openly defied court orders to pay the legal costs of Lane Cove, Hunters Hill, Mosman and Strathfield councils after defeats in the NSW Court of Appeal and the Land and Environment Court in July 2017.

But an investigation by The Weekly Times has found the government in recent weeks had sought to repay its debts to all four councils, which it is expected to finalise all four this week – a month out from the NSW election.

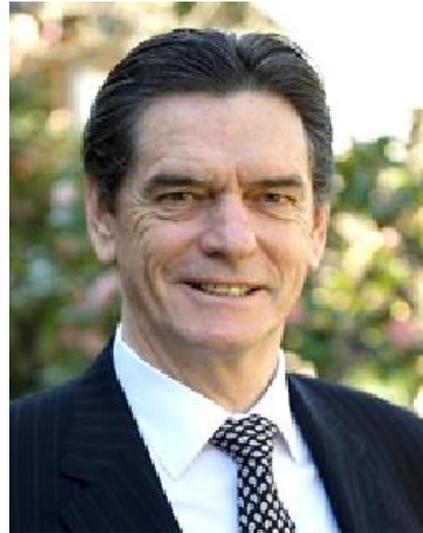
Despite the legal costs issue being resolved, affected councils in TWT Territory were unimpressed with the protracted and adversarial process.

Lane Cove Mayor Pam Palmer said she was “not happy Jan” while Hunters Hill Mayor Mark Bennett was disappointed “we did not receive all of the cost because the court ruled we should have got all costs”.

Former Hunters Hill Mayor, Richard Quinn, who this month quit the Liberal Party to run as an independent in the seat of Lane Cove in the March state election against incumbent Liberal Anthony Roberts, said it was only an election that forced the government to comply.



Lane Cove Mayor Pam Palmer



Hunters Hill Mayor Mark Bennett

“It’s abundantly clear that the government is paying this money up immediately prior to the election,” Mr Quinn told The Weekly Times.

“It’s taken more than one and a half years for the government to obey the judge’s order.

“And indeed the government hasn’t fully obeyed it because it hasn’t handed over the full cost of the expenses to all the councils involved.”

He said the costs being settled were those incurred in court actions, but more broadly there were significant other costs to all councils that resisted the undemocratic push.

“The inordinate amount of time, headspace, people’s time, councillor’s time, council staff time that was spent on the council amalgamations issue sucked all our energy away from core business, doing what councils are meant to do every day,” Mr Quinn said.

“It was a total waste of everybody’s time and money.”

Councils with non-legal expenses

Among the councils who sought reimbursement without a court costs order were the City of Canada Bay and the City of Ryde.

Canada Bay Mayor Angelo Tsirekas had written to the government seeking nearly \$500,000 and wrote to the government in late 2017 after forced amalgamations were called off, seeking reimbursement and received polite letter of acknowledgement but “heard nothing since”.

City of Ryde calculated its legal costs at nearly \$40,000, while a report quantified its costs at about \$1.2 million with consultants the big winners, accounting for \$550,000 of that total.

Asked whether the government should apologise to councils throughout the state who opposed the forced amalgamation push by the Baird Government, Mr Quinn said “that’s my view”.



“It’s abundantly clear that the government is paying this money up immediately prior to the election.”

- Richard Quinn, Former Hunters Hill Mayor and Independent candidate for Lane Cove at the 2019 NSW Election



But far from offering an apology, Lane Cove MP Anthony Roberts, suggested his role in achieving the late repayments were cause for self-congratulations.

“This is a good result and I’ve been working heavily to ensure a resolution,” he told The Weekly Times.

Mr Quinn said Mr Roberts’ comments were predictable but “if he wanted to claim credit, he should have done it last year”.

Save Hunters Hill Municipality spokesman Phil Jenkyn, who attended many of Hunters Hill Council’s court cases in the fight against the forced mergers said the government was continuing to act disgracefully.

“It’s unpardonable,” Mr Jenkyn told The Weekly Times.

“For the ratepayers and electors of this area to be told by the government ‘we don’t care, we know it’s your money, but by the way vote for us in four weeks’ time’ – you’ve got to be joking mate.”



Local Government NSW President Linda Scott said forced amalgamations had imposed “significant costs on local communities – a cost which has hurt both councils and local communities”.

“Councils entered into the Fit for the Future reforms in good faith, investing enormous amounts of time, effort and money to consult their communities, analyse council finances, develop improvement plans and prepare submissions to IPART, and to a Parliamentary Inquiry supported by the Government,” she said.

“Tragically, all this effort resulted in forced mergers, against the will of councils and communities.”

Local Government President Linda Scott

Ousting Dictator Baird! Saving Local Democracy!



Thousands crammed Martin Place to oppose forced amalgamation as part of a state-wide protest movement. TWT on-the-spot PHOTO

When we last reported on the NSW Government's relaxed approach to paying court awarded costs to the four councils who ultimately dealt its forced amalgamations farce a fatal blow, we noted its "double standards".

The Weekly Times is proud of the role it has played in the fight against forced amalgamations, including numerous front pages demanding 'Dictator Baird' back down.

For impact and to reinforce the community's anger that he was acting contrary to expectations in a modern democracy, we ensured Dictator Baird was always featured in appropriate attire.

Premier Berejiklian had jointly led the charge with her Dictator predecessor, but growing anger and resistance to their plans was exacerbated by a lack of consultation.

The unsavoury experience and attack on local democracy resulted in a media backlash against the Baird Government and it was all too much for Dictator Baird who made a shock exit from politics in January 2017.

Less shocking to his victims in local communities across the state was his career switch to become a banker.

Left to pick up the pieces of the government's daft plan, Premier Gladys Berejiklian at least deserves credit for having the sensibility to pull the plug in what will be remembered as a shameful chapter in local democracy.

<https://weeklytimes.com.au/exclusive-nsw-government-finally-obey-courts-orders-to-compensate-four-sydney-councils-over-failed-forced-amalgamations/>

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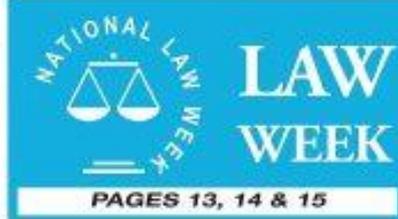
**Tigers
whip Pups
to extend
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Dictator Baird's Day one of Hell!

'Democracy Killed by sham process'

BY OUR CIVIC ROUNDSMAN



Hunters Hill, Lane Cove and Ryde Councils will be abolished by dictator Premier Mike Baird in what our local Mayors have described as "Day One of Hell".

The death of local democracy going back more than 150 years was announced last Thursday by Dictator Baird who gave in principle support to the forced amalgamation of our three councils pending legal action by Hunters Hill.

The Premier justified his killing with the unsubstantiated claim the forced mergers would strengthen local communities and the merged councils would have more money to spend on local infrastructure.

The sense of outrage is widely evident across Hunters Hill which will lose its democratic representation, its heritage protection laws as well as its community services and cultural events.

Mayor Richard Quin was scathing about the Premier's announcement.

"Baird has ripped democracy from under our feet and destroyed our fundamental right to be represented by locally elected councillors," Mayor Quin said.

"The big loser is democracy, the voice of our community has been ignored and the whole thing smacks of a sham process used to justify an undemocratic, dictatorial agenda that's been apparent right from the start.

"And its not that people in Hunters Hill haven't been screaming from the rooftops to save our democracy"

Lane Cove Mayor Deborah Hutchens said she is disgusted by the announcement, which forcibly amalgamates Lane Cove into Ryde and Hunters Hill.

Continued on Page 3



JB's World

THIS WEEK, JB's World comes from the other side of the world, Transformed to fact, after a few days in the MidWives in the Indian Ocean south west of Sri Lanka where Ulika and I represented Australia on the Asia Pacific Committee of the International Scout and Guide Fellowship planning the next Regional Gathering.

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WIN! with TWT!

Classical Guitar Society Orchestra

Five TWT readers can win double passes to the annual Classical Guitar Society Orchestra concert on Saturday May 28 in St Anne's Anglican Church hall Ryde at 7.30pm. SEE PAGE 1.

TWT's front page – 18th May 2016