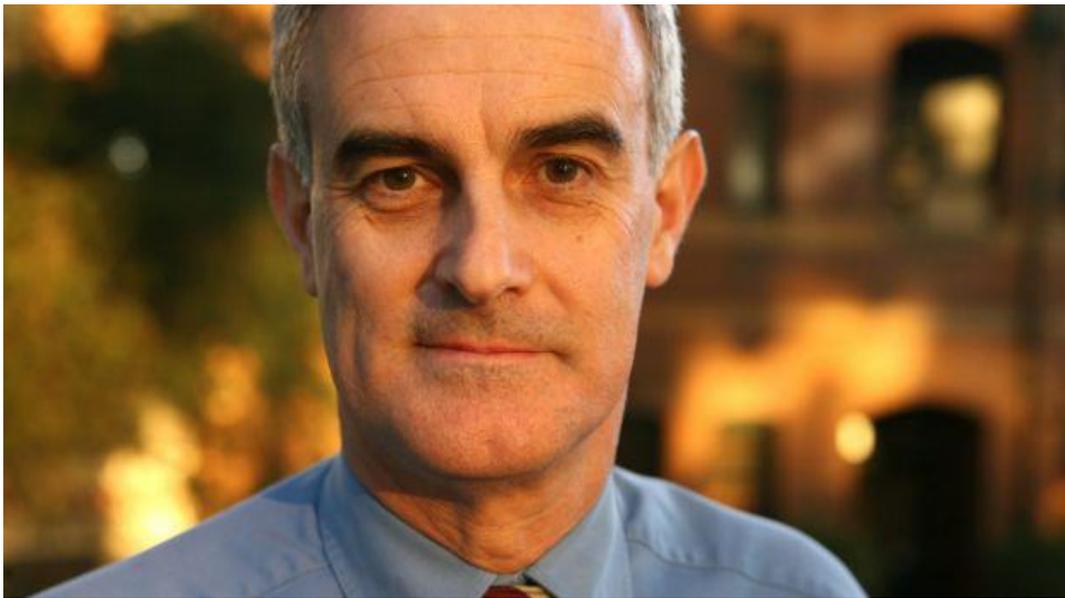


Boundaries Commission chairman Bob Sendt says 'priority will be to get the job done properly'

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Bob Sendt: "We haven't been given a deadline, we're independent." Photo: Jim Rice

The newly appointed head of the Boundaries Commission says the state government's promise to finalise council mergers by the middle of the year creates a tight deadline but he is not foreseeing any setbacks.

Chairman Bob Sendt says the body, which will provide feedback on the proposals to amalgamate councils, has been promised access to whatever resources it requires.

"We haven't been given a deadline, we're independent," said Mr Sendt, who was NSW Auditor-General during the Carr administration.

"We understand the government is keen to get this wrapped up by the middle of the year. We'll do what we can to assist, but our priority will be to get the job done properly. Having said that, we're not anticipating any problems at this stage."

The government has put forward 35 merger proposals, although an additional 10 mainly initiated under section 218E of the Local Government Act will also be assessed. Delegates have conducted public inquiries and are preparing reports on the original proposals, which the Boundaries Commission will review.

Mr Sendt said the commission had not been given any criteria by which to judge the reports. The body, he said, would be guided by legislative requirements which set out the factors

delegates are required to have considered, such as the attitude of residents towards the proposed merger.

"We don't go back to the start and examine the proposals per se," Mr Sendt said.

"Our role is to make sure that the delegates have done their part of the process properly and in particular considered all the factors they are required to take into account under the act."

Mr Sendt said he was not sure when or if the commission would review last minute alternative proposals that have been submitted to Local Government Minister Paul Toole, including one between Kogarah, Rockdale and Hurstville.

"Even if that proposal came in today it would probably be a minimum of a couple of months at least before it got to us and by that stage we would be well on our way I would hope to completing many of the reports," he said.

"Whether the minister would want to pass it on to us to do as part of this exercise or as a later exercise I'm not sure, I couldn't speculate on that."

The three other commissioners that have been appointed are Temora Shire independent mayor Rick Firman, Burwood independent councillor Lesley Furneaux-Cook and Natasa Mitic, from the Office of Local Government.

Graham Sansom, author of the report that fuelled the government's push to transform local government, has made recommendations to give the commission more independence and strength.

But Mr Sendt said he was "comfortable" with the body's level of independence and stressed that he himself had worked for state and federal governments of different political parties.

"I think this is probably the biggest change to local government in decades if not longer, so it's understandable there's going to be a lot of angst by some people, a lot of anxiety and a fair degree of opposition," he said.

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/boundaries-commission-chairman-bob-sendt-says-priority-will-be-to-get-the-job-done-properly-20160325-gnr0de.html>