

Council steps up fight on forced Council mergers

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HUNTERS HILL HAPPENINGS
with Mayor RICHARD QUINN



HUNTERS HILL Council is continuing to fight the proposed merger with Lane Cove and the City of Ryde Councils.

At the last meeting Council resolved to approach the Australian Electoral Commission to conduct a plebiscite within the Hunters Hill LGA to give all residents a chance to vote on the issue of whether they support the merger of the three Councils.

There is some precedent for this course of action.

In 2007 the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Democratic Plebiscites) Bill 2007 was enacted in response to the Queensland Government's actions to merge local Councils.

At that time the then Prime Minister, the Hon John Howard, spoke strongly against the arbitrary jackbooted fashion in which the Beattie Government has pursued forced amalgamations and the total travesty of democracy to refuse to consult the people.

He explained during the debate and passage of the bill that the allegations regarding the lack of consultation and the possibly involuntary nature of the Queensland measures had led him to offer funding to allow the AEC to undertake any plebiscite on the amalgamation of any local government body in any part of Australia.

THROUGHOUT the current local government reform process, the NSW Government has had several opportunities to conduct a poll or plebiscite in communities where forced mergers are proposed, as per the provisions of the Local Government Act 2009, but the Government has failed and refused to do so, as was the case in Queensland in 2007.

Indeed, the Baird Government has refused to provide Council with the relevant documents that underlie the Government's case for reform, until ordered to do so as part of the current legal proceedings.

Kiama Council recently conducted a poll of its residents on the merger proposal.

In that poll 95.4 per cent voted against the forced merger.

The NSW Government subsequently decided that the proposed merger would not proceed.

The NSW Government has clearly shown that, like the Beattie Government in Queensland in 2007, the only way in which it will listen to the views of our community is by court-ordered proceedings and other legally binding actions, including taking advantage of the provisions of the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Democratic Plebiscites) Bill 2007 to conduct a poll.

Council's legal action is to be heard in the Land and Environment Court starting Monday May 30.

At the time of writing the outcome of this action is not known however I will continue to update residents as more information becomes available.