

# MEDIA RELEASE

31 July 2017



## Forced merger of Hunters Hill Council with the City of Ryde Council and Lane Cove Council

In a landmark decision today that is sure to put an end to any proposal by the NSW Government to force the merger of Hunters Hill Council, the NSW Court of Appeal has ruled that “the proposal made by the Minister for Local Government under Section 218E(1) of the Local Government Act 1993 for the amalgamation of Hunters Hill, Lane Cove and Ryde local government areas is invalid”. Further, the Court of Appeal has also ordered that the Minister pay Hunters Hill Council’s costs of the original hearing before the Land and Environment Court and the subsequent Court of Appeal hearing.

“This is a victory for grassroots democracy”, said the Mayor of Hunters Hill, Cllr Richard Quinn. “The ticking timepiece of the NSW Government’s *Fit for the Future* forced mergers agenda has ground to a halt and fallen apart cog by cog. The real losers in all of this are the electors of NSW who now have to foot the bill of yet another stuff-up by the Government.”

“From day one in this whole debate we have argued that forced mergers should not proceed, and that communities should have a direct say in how they are governed. Any merger proposal must have the majority support of the local community” Cllr Quinn said. “Communities expect and demand the opportunity to have a direct say by way of poll or plebiscite, not some disingenuous process masking as consultation that is a stitch up from the start.”

Cllr Quinn also called on the NSW Government to enshrine in legislation the requirement for a poll or plebiscite in any future merger proposals by supporting the Referendums Bill which has passed the NSW Legislative Council and will come before the Legislative Assembly this Thursday, 3 August, for debate.

“The *Fit for the Future* agenda has preoccupied our headspace for the last three years, and has been a huge distraction from the core business of local government. We now need to put this behind us and continue to work cooperatively with our neighbouring councils and the NSW Government to deliver the best possible outcomes and services for our community” Cllr Quinn said.

He also gratefully acknowledged the resolve of those councillors who supported the Council’s legal battle and the extraordinary commitment of the Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition, led by Phil Jenkyn OAM and Ross Williams, and the unrelenting political advocacy of Save Our Councils Coalition (SOCC). Cllr Quinn also commended the professionalism of Council officers and staff who have continued to perform their duties admirably during a period of ongoing uncertainty about their future. “This has been a huge joint effort by the Council, the staff and the local community, united in a common purpose and a shared vision for our future.”

As the 9 September local government elections approach, Cllr Quinn called on all candidates for election to affirm their commitment to genuine local community representation and advocacy and the future of Hunters Hill Municipality. “We need councillors whose primary allegiance is to the interests of our community, not self-interest or the interests of Macquarie Street” he said.

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