

Dictator Baird to suspend our democratic rights for years – shock new claims

TWT CIVIC ROUNDSMAN 23 NOV 2016

Dictator Mike Baird could suspend local democracy in Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove for up to four years to destroy independents and punish the overwhelming majority of local ratepayers opposed to a forced merger.

The Local Government Association quoted a government circular which announces that elections for a proposed mega council may not be held until 2020, with rate rises, development applications, roads and traffic issues, council services and community grants to be decided by a Baird appointed administrator until then.

“The Baird Government’s council amalgamation process has become even more shambolic, with concerns some communities may not see a return of local democracy before 2020,” Local Government NSW President Keith Rhoades said.



Save Hunters Hill signs

“This Office of Local Government (OLG) circular states that councils with mergers still pending, essentially those who challenged their amalgamation in court, are required by the Local Government Act to hold an election, probably in September 2017.

“But it goes on to say that if these councils have not been amalgamated by the end of this month, they can’t hold an election before March 2018.

“And if a forced amalgamation occurs after August 2017, the election can’t be held before September 2019.”

Clr Rhoades said the OLG circular seeks to justify the delay by blaming it on the need to avoid any conflict with the State Government election, scheduled for March 2019.

“But wait, it gets even more shambolic,” he said.

“The OLG then says that elections for these particular councils might be better held in September 2020.

“They say the delay will reduce the potential for voter confusion and additional cost but I wouldn’t be worrying too much about voter confusion, as we’ve just seen in Orange.”

Ryde Labor spokesman Clr Jerome Laxale said Mike Baird is “punishing” local ratepayers, of whom more than 80 per cent oppose a local forced amalgamation according to independent surveys.

He said protesting local ratepayers are being suspended from democracy, like a disruptive child gets suspended from school.

“The clear fact is that anyone who doesn’t agree with Mike Baird is first threatened and if you continue to disagree with him you get punished,” Clr Laxale said.

“And its an example to others that, if you speak out against him, you get crushed.”



Clr Keith Rhoades

Ryde’s independent Clr Terry Perram and others have long argued that the aim of a mega council is to destroy independents by creating too large an area for them to campaign across without substantial cash resources and almost impossible to successfully campaign on issues that affect the communities where they live.

Independent councillors also fear that by suspending democracy, Baird wants to break the links between councillors and communities that critically rely on regular democratic contact.

“These forced mergers in Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove are a blatant gerrymander,” Opposition leader Luke Foley told a recent rally at the West Ryde Hotel.

“It is to ensure cashed up Liberals are elected to local government.”

Jerome Laxale believes the suspension of democracy will also protect Ryde Liberals from a local government backlash.

“Isn’t it interesting the speculated date is well after the State election and isn’t it arrogant to think the whole thing will be forgotten and our do nothing local Liberal MPs will be comfortably re-elected.”

Labor believes Mike Baird will also dishonour a promise made to Hunters Hill Clr Dr Meredith Sheil to discuss the forced merger and listen to alternatives.

“I was at that local government conference in Wollongong and I heard Baird give Dr Sheil that iron clad guarantee,” he said.

“As Alan Jones would say, another lie!”

Dr Rhoades questioned the timing of the OLG circular.

“The circular was conveniently released by the Government as the sun went down on Friday afternoon.

“It isn’t the first time they’ve done this sort of thing, with the Government’s merger announcement in December last year made just hours before the government shutdown for two weeks over Christmas,” he said.

“It’s another clumsy attempt to slip this further denial of democracy through quietly, but the people of NSW are awake to the Government’s tricks.”