

Relief on the lower north shore as Gladys Berejiklian dumps controversial forced council merger plans ahead of local government elections

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NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian abandons council mergers

- [Council merger of Hunters Hill, Lane Cove and Ryde called off](#)
- [Woollahra mayor: 'It is a great win for democracy'](#)

REACTION to today's decision by Premier Gladys Berejiklian to dump her government's forced council merger program was one of relief on the lower north shore, where Mosman, North Sydney and Willoughby Councils were to be amalgamated.

"This is fantastic news and it is a very happy day for North Sydney," said North Sydney Mayor Jilly Gibson. "The timing is important because there needs to be some certainty for before heading into the September election.

"I want to thank Gladys for listening to us and I'm just glad it's all over. It has been very disheartening for the council staff and elected officials.



Premier Gladys Berejiklian and North Sydney Mayor Jilly Gibson.

“It has also been horrendously expensive, and I expect the state government will be the ones paying for it.

“Now we can go back to the concerns that are affecting our community, because we’ve got a lot of big issues to address.”



Mosman Deputy Mayor Roy Bendall.

Mosman Deputy Mayor Roy Bendall, a Liberal Party member, said the abandonment of forced council amalgamations was a victory for the local Liberal heartland on the north shore.

“We have been working on this for a long time and a lot of the credit should go to the Mosman Liberal Party branch, because they all passed motions to send to our parliamentary state colleagues against this policy,” Cr Bendall said.

“And the dogged determination and sticking to their guns by Mosman Council as well has vindicated us, because the policy was never about what was in the best interests of the community, it was always what was in the best interests of the development lobby.

“At last, the Premier has realised that you can’t keep beating up on your most loyal supporters.”



Save our Council Coalition spokesman Phil Jenkyn.

The Save our Councils Coalition (SOCC) said it was inevitable that the Berejiklian Government would back down on the amalgamations.

SOCC spokesman Phil Jenkyn said the burden of forced council amalgamations was having a negative impact on the popularity of the State Government.

“This has been a hard battle and today’s announcement flags a great victory for all those people who have fought so hard to keep councils independent,” he said.

“We need to give thanks to all the anti-merger groups, politicians, community activists, residents and councils that have kept the fight alive. They are entitled to savour this victory.

“Now it is important that the Upper House Bill that contains all the elements of abandonment of the council amalgamation policy be adopted in total on presentation to the Lower House. This bill includes important elements including plebiscites for amalgamated councils that want to demerge and this is an objective that must not be abandoned.

“However, we will not accept any statements from the Premier on the abandonment of the existing court cases on forced amalgamations and any future threats to do so until the legal pursuit of councils is officially abandoned. The government must also officially withdraw their court cases against the challenging councils.

“This amalgamation policy by the Liberal/National Government has been a complete failure and we must now act to complete the abandonment process and restore democracy and independence to councils that did not deserve the merged fate.”

Federal Member for North Sydney Trent Zimmerman also welcomed the decision.

“I am pleased the Premier and the local government minister have taken the decision to not proceed with the mergers planned for our area,” he said.

“The uncertainty it was causing for residents and, importantly our hardworking Council staff was unsustainable.

“I want to acknowledge the work of our local Mayors and Councillors in putting the case against amalgamations so forcefully and the many community groups and residents who were part of the campaign.



Gladys Berejiklian and NSW Minister for Local Government Gabrielle Upton arrive at today's press conference.

In a statement today, Ms Berejiklian said: “Due to the protracted nature of current legal challenges and the uncertainty this is causing taxpayers, those council amalgamations currently before the courts will not proceed.”

The Premier said the government had chosen to “draw a line under this issue”.

“The Government’s merger policy has always been about putting ratepayers first and it has become increasingly clear that certain councils are happy to continue lengthy and costly legal proceedings,” Ms Berejiklian said.

“We want to see councils focusing on delivering the best possible services and local infrastructure to their residents. That is why we are drawing a line under this issue today and ending the uncertainty.

“We are proud of what we have already achieved for local communities in the 20 merged councils, where significant savings and improvements to services and infrastructure have been delivered.”

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