

DOUBLE STANDARDS: State Govt leaves communities out of pocket over mergers farce

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Thousands of people crammed Martin Place to oppose the forced amalgamation which saw councils saved and the state government ordered to pay thousands of dollars. TWT on-the-spot PHOTO

A YEAR after people power put an end to the state government's bungled forced amalgamations, it still hasn't paid councils in TWT territory millions in court-awarded costs.

An investigation by The Weekly Times has found that northern Sydney councils have not received a cent of the compensation awarded against the government after its defeats in the NSW Court of Appeal and the Land and Environment Court last year, estimated in the millions.

Lane Cove Council is poised to commence legal proceedings to recover what is owed by the NSW Government and could be supported by Hunters Hill and Mosman council.

Save Hunters Hill Municipality spokesman Phil Jenkyn said he was appalled by the state government's failure to pay up, demonstrating double standards, given its willingness to

punish the disadvantaged and vulnerable with heavy penalties if they failed to pay fines within 28 days.

“If people don’t pay what a court awards against them there are serious consequences and these consequences should also apply to the government,” he said.

“In Mosman’s case the money owed is around half a million dollars and it would be about the same for Hunters Hill and Lane Cove.

“This is money the court has ordered the state government to pay, it is money owed to our local communities and our councils who bore the costs of legal action.”

Lane Cove Mayor Pam Palmer confirmed that further legal action was being considered to force the government to pay up.

The Mayor said the issue was particularly pressing this month as councils set budgets for the forthcoming financial year.

“I have no idea why Gladys Berejiklian is not paying and if we need to go to court, we should, although it will cost us tens of thousands of dollars extra,” she said.

“I urge the government to pay as soon as possible because we are a small council and we need this money to pay for our roads and our playgrounds and many other services to our community.

“Why we went to court in the first place is that the state government tried to impose a forced amalgamation with Ryde and Hunters Hill onto us, it was not our idea.”

Mosman Mayor Carolyn Corrigan confirmed her council “had yet to see one cent” of the money.

“This was a very, very costly court case for Mosman to fight and we’ve been waiting for the costs, awarded to us by the court, for a year now,” she said.

Premier Berejiklian led the charge on amalgamations with her predecessor, Mike Baird, but growing anger and resistance to their plans, exacerbated by a lack of consultation, forced a humiliating backdown last July when the government called off all proposed mergers.

The unsavoury experience and attack on local democracy also resulted in a media backlash against the Baird Government, including numerous front pages by The Weekly Times demanding ‘Dictator Baird’ back down.

TWT was pleased this ultimately happened along with his shock departure from politics in January last year.

This week ‘Dictator Baird’ returned to Macquarie Street to be grilled by a NSW Parliamentary inquiry into the controversial proposed relocation of the Powerhouse Museum.

Interest in the issue saw a packed public gallery which showed it had very little appetite for displays of arrogance by Baird as he responded to former colleagues grilling him.

The Weekly Times believes western Sydney should have its own world-class museum and that it shouldn't come at the expense of the iconic Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo.

It's emerged there were unsolicited offers by developers for the Ultimo site, a further clue to the reasons for Baird's unpopular decision to relocate, in what may ultimately become another stuff up in his legacy of failure.

But the government's approach to cleaning up the mess created by its failed mergers plan was starting to look more like a crisis in governance.



The Weekly Times Managing Editor John F Booth AM (far right) joined communities in Hunters Hill and Lane Cove to celebrate the win against forced amalgamations last year – but when will the state government pay our communities what it owes (TWT on-the-spot PHOTO)

Mr Jenkyn said the government's failure so far to pay councils costs showed a disregard for 'model litigant' principles it had committed to, requiring honesty and fairness in legal matters, including setting an example by paying debts that fall due.

And Mr Jenkyn did not believe the government needed a year to assess and scrutinise the costs awarded against it.

"It would have known from day one what it owed because it had the bill for the costs it incurred itself, fighting and losing this war on local communities," he said.

The City of Ryde also fought the proposed forced amalgamation with Hunters Hill and Lane Cove, but Mayor Jerome Laxale wasn't surprised by the government's delay.

"I'm just as outraged but with this government nothing will surprise me," he said.

“They lost the fight over forced amalgamations in a stunning and embarrassing defeat, but this is a government that will not even pay to put proper air conditioning in our schools, so no, I’m not surprised.”

Mr Jenkyn has called on Lane Cove MP Anthony Roberts and North Shore MP Felicity Wilson to pressure Gladys Berejiklian to pay up.

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The Weekly Times Managing Editor John P. Smith AM has tonight joined communities in Moriah Hill and Lane Cove to celebrate the end of a long and difficult year. For where will the state government pay our communities what it owes? TWT on the spot PHOTO

JB's World

State Govt leaves communities out of pocket over mergers farce

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