

Save and Grow Guyra plans public meeting to discuss shire amalgamation

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UNMERGE: Save and Grow Guyra will hold a public meeting next Tuesday. "We want to decide our destiny," spokesman Gordon Youman said.

Could Guyra demerge from Armidale Regional Council?

Save and Grow Guyra spokesman Gordon Youman hopes so.

"We want to be able to get back to where we decide our destiny," Mr Youman said, "not another big centre that we're supporting with our rates."

His organisation – formerly known as Guyra ANTY (Amalgamation? No, Thank You!) – will hold a public meeting at the Guyra Bowling Club at 7pm on Thursday, October 11.

The meeting will discuss the outcome of the merger, particularly after the news that Armidale Regional Council had a \$2.6 million deficit.

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“The town's going backwards,” Mr Youman said. “We've not only got a deficit; our rates are definitely going to go up, and our services are declining already. Our roads appear in a disgrace, and our depot has gone backwards.”

Guyra Shire amalgamated with Armidale Dumaresq two and a half years ago, in May 2016 – and promised benefits, Mr Youman thinks, failed to materialise.

“We've been deceived. We've gone along with the merger; we were promised all these savings and how good it'll be.

“Guyra's got nothing out of it. The few projects that we've got, the Guyra Shire already had going, and funded – the likes of the Tenterden Bridge, and the aged care centre.

“The only thing that Guyra's got was a promise to do the main street up, which they're blaming on the fuel tanks. They knew about the fuel tanks 12 months back.

“To top it off, the council are now looking at a \$3.8 million deficit. You don't need a calculator. What has Guyra got out of it? Nothing, except the debt.”

Mr Youman and his group hope to have Guyra demalgamated from Armidale – and they believe they have the backing.

More than 90 per cent of the Guyra community, Mr Youman said, were against the merger – and many still want to unmerge.

He had, he said, two petitions showing support: a statewide one begun in 2016, with more than 6000 signatures protesting the merger; and one started two months ago, with 662 signatures collected from Guyra people in a week alone to change the boundaries. Ten thousand signatures are needed to table the motion in the state parliament.

“We're not a small group, even though the politicians paint us as a nuisance group,” Mr Youman said. “We're not a minority; we're a majority – and we're fed up with it!”

Their chance may come in March. All the parties except the Liberals and the Nationals, Mr Youman said, have promised to have a plebiscite of the old Guyra shire then, three years after the merger.

“If Tingha can get a boundary change, with the small amount of signatures they have, that sets a precedent. Why can't Ben Lomond go to Glen Innes; why can't Ebor go to Bellingen; and why can't Guyra get out on its own? If the council can support Tingha, why can't they support us?”

Guyra was not the only rural shire to be merged. Other small towns, Mr Youman pointed out, like Tumbarumba, Gundagai, and Harden-Murrumburrah had been forcibly amalgamated.

“Guyra’s not alone,” Mr Youman said. “Rural communities have been treated so poorly with these forced amalgamations. We’re all in the same boat. This government will not listen to us.”

<https://www.guyraargus.com.au/story/5685127/guyra-residents-to-hold-shire-demalgamation-meeting/?cs=605>