

HUNTERS HILL

Council's taking premier to court

'Flawed consultation' and lack of
transparency cause for lawsuit



Mike Baird Picture: AAP Image/Lukas Coch

John Besley

AFTER months of deliberation, Hunters Hill Council has begun legal action against the State Government over its forced amalgamation process.

Legal action against Premier Mike Baird, Local Government Minister Paul Toole and government delegate Dr Robert Lang was officially launched after the council's request to view the details of the government's KPMG financial analysis report was formally refused.

The council has also cited the "flawed consultation process" of the Fit for the Future program as a key reason behind its decision.

According to Hunters Hill Mayor Richard Quinn, the Government was ignoring the will of communities.

"It is with regret that council has now had to take legal action to ensure that a transparent democratic process be undertaken," Cr Quinn said.

"All we ask is that the details and reports underlying the State Government's council merger agenda be disclosed and that the process be lawful, transparent and fair.

"The Government's refusal to allow access to and scrutiny of these key reports, together with a flawed consultation process that did not include a poll, has totally undermined the community's expectations of procedural fairness and confidence in the democratic process."

The council's decision has been welcomed by the Save Hunters Hill Municipality action group, with co-convenor Phil Jenkyn calling the merger proposal "deeply flawed".

"The Government has lied to us about the supposed benefits from a merger, refuses to provide relevant information and is not transparent in its actions," he said.

"It simply does not understand communities and the significance of local democracy in this country.

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Mayor Richard Quinn

"As a result we, as a community, have been denied the opportunity to make an informed response to this proposal. It must not proceed."

Hunters Hill is not the only council to sue the State Government, with Woollahra Council filing legal action last month.

Should the lawsuit be successful, the Government would need to start the amalgamation process all over again and councils would be granted more power to accommodate voluntary mergers.

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