

# Baird's Fit for the Future Farce

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## Hunters Hill goes to court to stop forced merger

'Sham Community Consultation Process' – Mayor Richard Quinn



*Hunters Hill Council endorsing the commencement of legal proceedings 26 April 2016*

***Hunters Hill Council has taken legal action against the dictatorial Baird State Government to stop its proposed forced amalgamation with Ryde and Lane Cove Councils.***

**The legal action is expected to be heard in NSW Land and Environment Court in coming weeks.**

It seeks the public disclosure of secret documents used to justify Hunters Hill Council's abolition and its replacement by a new mega council bureaucracy stretching from West Ryde to Willoughby.

The Court will also hear the Council's claims of a sham community consultation process.

"It is with regret that Council has now had to take legal action to ensure that a transparent democratic process be undertaken in accordance with legal requirements and Council be afforded the opportunity to make an informed submission on it", Mayor Richard Quinn said in a statement on Saturday.

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

Council had requested a copy of the Delegate's Report and the secretive KPMG Report on which the Government has based its financial modelling for claimed cost savings but has been refused.

Hunters Hill's legal action coincides with similar legal action currently being taken by Woollahra Council whose Mayor Toni Zeltzer recently described the government's forced mergers as unjust, undemocratic and unacceptable.

"The refusal by the NSW Government 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", Mayor Quinn said.

"If the Minister for Local Government Paul Toole continues to pursue these undemocratic forced mergers based on secret reports that have not been made public, it proves that this Government is just not listening to local communities, who want and should have a direct say in how they are governed".

The Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition has welcomed the legal action and said it hopes it will expose government lies and secrecy.

"The Hunters Hill community strongly supports the Council taking legal action to stop this deeply flawed merger proposal", Coalition spokesman Phil Jenkyn OAM said yesterday.



*Phil Jenkyn addressing Councillors at the meeting*

"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."

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

"As a result we as a community have been denied the opportunity to make an informed response to this forced merger proposal and it must not proceed".

If successful, the legal action is no guarantee that Baird will back off from forced mergers but it may undermine the current process and justify widespread local anger and scepticism.

It will also provide the Council with access to financial information which could reveal rate rises and service cuts if the forced merger goes ahead.

Mayor Quinn stressed that Hunters Hill had fought off past attempts to amalgamate Hunters Hill with Ryde and declared it would fight off this one.

“Council has fought off several amalgamation attempts in the past with the full support of the local community, and we will continue to represent the interests of our community” he said.

As well as legal action against the government, Boundaries Commission delegate Dr Robert Lang is also joined in the case.

Dr Lang is accused of withholding from the Council his report to the Commission – to be forwarded to Minister Toole – based on his notes from a recent public hearing at the Hunters Hill Sailing Club where 80 per cent of speakers opposed the forced merger.

”Hunter’s Hill Council has also been formally advised by the NSW Government that the Delegate’s Report has been completed and forwarded to the Boundaries Commission for review and comment”, Mayor Quinn said

“Hunters Hill Council has commenced legal action against the Minister Paul Toole and the Delegate Dr Robert Lang.

“The detailed financial analysis by KPMG (the KPMG Report), which was commissioned by the NSW Government last year as a means of reinforcing its case for forced council mergers across NSW has also been withheld from councils and the public.

Hunters Hill Council favours an alternative Joint Regional Authority model that saves Hunters Hill Council, which would send delegates to an Authority to decide shared services issues with Ryde and Lane Cove.

“The Joint Regional Authority model will provide increased service delivery to residents at a reduced cost whilst still maintaining existing local government boundaries and local representation” the Mayor said

“Our model delivers the savings and efficiencies the Government is seeking without a loss of local identity and grassroots representation”.

The Baird government has not accepted the Joint Regional Authority Model which has been strongly endorsed by the multi partisan 2015 NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into Local Government.

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