

# Liberals divided as top Federal MPs oppose forced amalgamations

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TWT EXCLUSIVE

BY OUR CIVIC ROUNDSMAN

**Influential Federal MPs have called on the Baird Government to stop the push for forced mergers before it causes further damage to the Liberal Party.**

**With a Federal election weeks away, National Party leader and New England MP BARNABY JOYCE joined North Sydney MP TRENT ZIMMERMAN last week to oppose the forced amalgamations which would see Hunters Hill and Lane Cove amalgamated into the City of Ryde.**



*North Sydney MP Trent Zimmerman talking to North Sydney constituents. He suffered a swing against the Liberals in Hunters Hill of 17 per cent at the recent North Sydney by-election.*

In a clear sign of the division within the Coalition, Barnaby Joyce has urged local residents to keep fighting against forced mergers, particularly in his local township of Walcha which is under threat of forced merger with Tamworth Regional Council.

His call mirrors the outrage in Hunters Hill and Lane Cove which fear a loss of identity, local democracy and services in a merger.

“It is important that communities are supported to maintain their own identities rather than see them consolidated into larger local government regions as proposed”, Barnaby Joyce said.

“I fully support the strong community calls for the proposed amalgamation to be withdrawn”, he said.

North Sydney MP Trent Zimmerman has already felt a community backlash of up to 17 per cent in Hunters Hill during the recent by election, which he won.

A Liberal Party source also told The Weekly Times he voted against forced amalgamations during a split vote at a recent Liberal State Council meeting.

He told The Weekly Times that while he cannot comment on the State Council vote or his party political role, his opposition to forced mergers is strong and consistent.

“I’m opposed to forced amalgamations because I served on North Sydney Council for eight years and I strongly believe you should only merge councils with the clear support of the community, which is not the case in Hunters Hill and Lane Cove”, he told The Weekly Times.

“I’ve no doubt the swing of 17 per cent against the Liberal Party in Hunters Hill was because of the strength of community feeling about the forced merger”.

Mr Zimmerman said he found it hard to argue there is a common community of interest between Lane Cove, Hunters Hill and Ryde, an argument being put forward by forced merger supporters.

“Our councils are the level of government closest to the community and that contact that you have, where the community can contact a local councillor seven days a week on a local issue, is at risk of being lost”.

<http://www.weeklytimes.com.au/liberals-divided-as-top-federal-mps-oppose-forced-amalgamations/>