

# Annual Conference of Local Government NSW supports demerger, Save Our Councils Coalition says

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*DEMANDING DEMERGE: Tumbarumba activists at the North Shore by-election. Photo: Supplied.*

Almost a fortnight after a public meeting to discuss the demerger of Guyra from the Armidale Regional Council, local government delegates from around the state have thrown their support behind de-amalgamation.

The Annual Conference of Local Government NSW – the policy-making event for NSW general-purpose councils and their associate members – was held in Albury on Monday.

The conference passed a binding resolution that “gives solidarity with the people of Tumbarumba and Gundagai as they seek to demerge from their forcibly amalgamated councils, and similarly supports any other communities that seek to demerge from a forcibly amalgamated council”.

It also resolved to “lobby for a change to the Local Government Act to prevent the forced amalgamation of councils or significant boundary alteration without the support of a plebiscite”.

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- [Guyra wants its old shire back – but can it afford it?](#)
- [Guyra residents to hold shire de-amalgamation meeting](#)

A spokesman for the Save Our Councils Coalition (SOCC) – formed in 2015 in opposition to the state government’s forced merger of local councils – said delegates recognized de-amalgamation as an issue burning at the heart of many local communities, and overwhelmingly passed the resolution.

“Other communities that have been fighting for demergers will take heart from this support and renew attempts to demerge from their forced bigger councils.”

SOCC president Brian Halstead said:

“We congratulate Local Government NSW and its delegates for their support on this issue, and the extraordinary level of political activism by the communities of Tumbarumba, Gundagai, Pittwater, Guyra, and many others that continue to fight for independence for their communities.”

Mr Halstead expects demerger to be a major issue in the state elections next March, and believes local communities forcibly merged are now recognising their strength in the lead-up to the election.

“This conference resolution – together with huge by-election swings against the government in NSW seats where council mergers were widely condemned – shows local communities that demergers will be a critical issue in the 2019 election,” Mr Halstead said.

Save and Grow Guyra (formerly Guyra ANTY) hope that if the Liberal-National Coalition government lose their seats in March, the winning party will restore the old council.

Labor candidate Debra O’Brien, the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party candidate Rayne Single, and the Greens have all promised to reinstate the councils if they are elected – and if enough residents want it.

They need a plebiscite of 10% of Guyra’s population (2,027, according to the 2016 Census) – and Save & Grow Guyra’s Gordon Youman said his group collected 662 signatures in a week alone.

Others believe that Guyra is simply too small to stand by itself – not without shouldering huge financial costs.

Both Armidale Regional Council mayor Simon Murray and Guyra Shire's last mayor Hans Hietbrink argue that a de-amalgamated Guyra Shire will be unsustainable.

With Tingha likely to move to Inverell Shire, they say, the 3,500 people in a new Guyra Shire could be looking at a 40 to 50 per cent rate rise.

[https://www.guyraargus.com.au/story/5716654/local-government-conference-supports-council-demergers/?cs=605&fbclid=IwAR3\\_VX6zJZtFbFgU5S8Ym9lA\\_yz1Fnq3C2XaL-NaoczUV77D6o-O4h38OM](https://www.guyraargus.com.au/story/5716654/local-government-conference-supports-council-demergers/?cs=605&fbclid=IwAR3_VX6zJZtFbFgU5S8Ym9lA_yz1Fnq3C2XaL-NaoczUV77D6o-O4h38OM)