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# Mergers were 'forced' on staff and communities

**Megan Gorrey**

An inner Sydney council boss has seized on a new audit to criticise the NSW government's controversial amalgamations process as "forced upon the community" and poorly executed.

The Inner West Council, Snowy Monaro Regional Council and Queanbeyan Palerang Regional Council had made progress towards "efficient organisational structures" since the council mergers, the NSW Audit Office found.

"All three councils are now operating with a single workforce and have largely achieved the milestones they planned for the first stage of their amalgamations," the

report detailed last week. However, that progress had been slowed by the need to integrate multiple IT systems and databases, align services across the former council areas, and combine staff working conditions and policies. "They need to do this to be in a position to implement an optimal structure."

The three organisations were among 19 amalgamated councils created across NSW in 2016.

In his response to the audit's findings, Inner West Council general manager Michael Deegan said the state government "did not adequately prepare for amalgamation". Mr Deegan - who was appointed in February - is the for-



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Inner West Council general manager Michael Deegan

mer chief executive of Infrastructure Australia and has held senior positions with the Labor Party.

He said the Coalition's amalgamations policy was "forced upon the community with little or no regard for them or the staff".

"Consequently, amalgamated councils are still, three years since proclamation, in a situation of transition and transformation,

whilst delivering services to the local community."

Mr Deegan said councils could not realise the benefits of amalgamation until they "align services across the former council areas, complete integration of ICT systems and adopt common practices". "These matters should have been managed much better by the state and funded properly."