

NSW council plan a 'travesty of democracy'

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Warren Barnsley - AAP on May 12, 2016

NSW residents will decide if their local councils will de-merge should the state government lose the next election, Labor says.

The state coalition government also faces the risk of future legislation being blocked in the upper house in response to its controversial plans for 19 council mergers, unveiled on Thursday.

"This is an appalling, travesty of democracy in our state," NSW Opposition Leader Luke Foley told reporters on Thursday.

"What we've seen is the greatest act of boundary-rigging in Australian politics since Joh Bjelke-Petersen's notorious gerrymander of the 1970s."

Mr Foley said Labor would allow affected residents to determine their councils' future "democratically".

Greens MLC David Shoebridge said he will soon introduce legislation to hold plebiscites for affected residents to decide on de-mergers.

"(NSW Premier) Mike Baird has delivered a hell of a mess for local government across the state," the Greens MLC told reporters.

"We can unwind the damage Baird has done."

Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party MLC Robert Brown has vowed to vote against any future legislation Mr Baird's government puts forward, saying the premier has risked losing control of the upper house.

"Go to buggery," Mr Brown said.

"You've made a bad mistake."

The NSW government had planned to reduce 152 councils in NSW down to 113 but that will now become 115.

Reverend Fred Nile from the Christian Democrats said he believes the councils which were spared amalgamations were done so to hold onto votes in the upcoming federal election.

"I'm sure Malcolm Turnbull got on the phone to Mike Baird saying, 'take the heat off our candidates'," he said.

Mr Nile stopped short of pledging to take the same road as Mr Brown but said the move will prompt him to "scrutinise very closely" any legislation the state government puts forward.

Mr Shoebridge, Mr Nile and Mr Brown said their respective parties would support a union proposal to give council staff whose jobs were at risk by mergers five years of job security.

The politicians were joined at NSW Parliament on Thursday by several local government figures and community groups.

"All they're interested in is to deliver to their development mates and to deliver to their political aspirations," Leichhardt Greens councillor Rochelle Porteous said.

