

# NSW council amalgamations: plan to merge 14 Sydney councils abandoned

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**Premier Gladys Berejiklian says the state government will not proceed with the amalgamations of councils currently fighting the move in court**



*NSW council amalgamations: Premier Gladys Berejiklian has withdrawn the state's plans for forced mergers of Sydney councils. Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/AAP*

The [New South Wales](#) government is abandoning its controversial council merger plan for more than a dozen Sydney councils.

The premier, [Gladys Berejiklian](#), on Thursday announced the government will not proceed with the amalgamations of 14 councils currently fighting the forced mergers in court.

“Due to the protracted nature of current legal challenges and the uncertainty this is causing ratepayers, those council amalgamations currently before the courts will not proceed,” Berejiklian said in a joint statement with local government minister Gabrielle Upton.

The controversial policy was dealt a blow earlier this year after the NSW court of appeal blocked a forced merger between Ku-ring-gai and Hornsby councils due to a lack of “procedural fairness” in the government’s amalgamation process.

Read more: [Gladys Berejiklian 'will not push ahead' with forced NSW council mergers](#)

Opponents to the merger policy seized on the news, describing it as a “great day for democracy”.

Local Government Association of NSW president, Keith Rhoades, congratulated Berejiklian, saying she was “passed a pretty hard task to continue what [former premier Mike] Baird had started”.

Rhoades said it would give certainty of three-year terms to candidates ahead of the September 9 local government elections.

“We’ve said from day one the process was flawed, that’s been substantiated by the courts, and now it’s been substantiated by the government,” Rhoades told Guardian Australia.

“If you don’t consult with communities on major issues... you’re always going to find you’ll get communities offside. That has proven to be the case here,” he said.

Attention will now turn to those councils that have already been merged, having chosen not to fight the policy in court. There are 20 already-amalgamated councils across NSW.

Rhoades said many living in those council areas remained deeply unhappy with the mergers.

“One must feel for them, because they went with the flow, and didn’t challenge,” he said.

Opposition leader, Luke Foley, said the government must allow plebiscites in those council areas to allow them to determine their own futures.

Foley said the government’s treatment of local communities was the “height of arrogance” and revealed a “contempt for democracy”.

“This has been characterised by arrogance from the start, they’ve been determined to ignore local communities,” Foley said.

“I think the only reason for the backflip today is that democracy is catching up with them, democracy is coming at them at 100km/h with elections in so many of these areas on September 9,” he said.

Berejiklian in January decided to walk away from planned amalgamations in the bush but forge ahead with those in the city after she replaced Mike Baird as premier.

“This is a decision that’s weighed heavily on the government,” Berejiklian told reporters in [Sydney](#) when announcing the backflip.

“If I had my way we would’ve moved forward (with the mergers) but the court process has taken much longer.”

Foley warned Berejiklian may attempt to bring the policy back after the next state election.

Foley said Berejiklian had the chance to ditch the controversial policy when she replaced former premier, Mike Baird.

“[Instead] she doubled down on it, and now, seven months later, she finally hears the voice of the people?”

“What I detect are the liberal power brokers telling her that they’ll cop a hiding at the September 9 local government elections and they better cut and run now.”

The backflip means the merging of 14 Sydney councils into five will not proceed. It will leave the following councils in their current state: Burwood, City of Canada Bay, Strathfield Hornsby, Ku-ring-gai, Hunter’s Hill, Lane Cove, City of Ryde, Mosman, North Sydney, Willoughby, Randwick, Waverley and Woollahra.

The decision will leave some of the already-merged councils significantly larger than others in Sydney.

The city of Parramatta council, for example, [will cover 215,725 people](#), after it was formed from a merger of parts of Parramatta city, the Hills shire, Auburn city, Holroyd city, and Hornsby shire.

In contrast, Lane Cove will cover an [estimated 36,996 people](#).

Local government elections for the merged councils and the 14 affected by Thursday’s announcement will be held on 9 September.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jul/27/nsw-council-amalgamations-plan-to-merge-14-sydney-councils-abandoned>