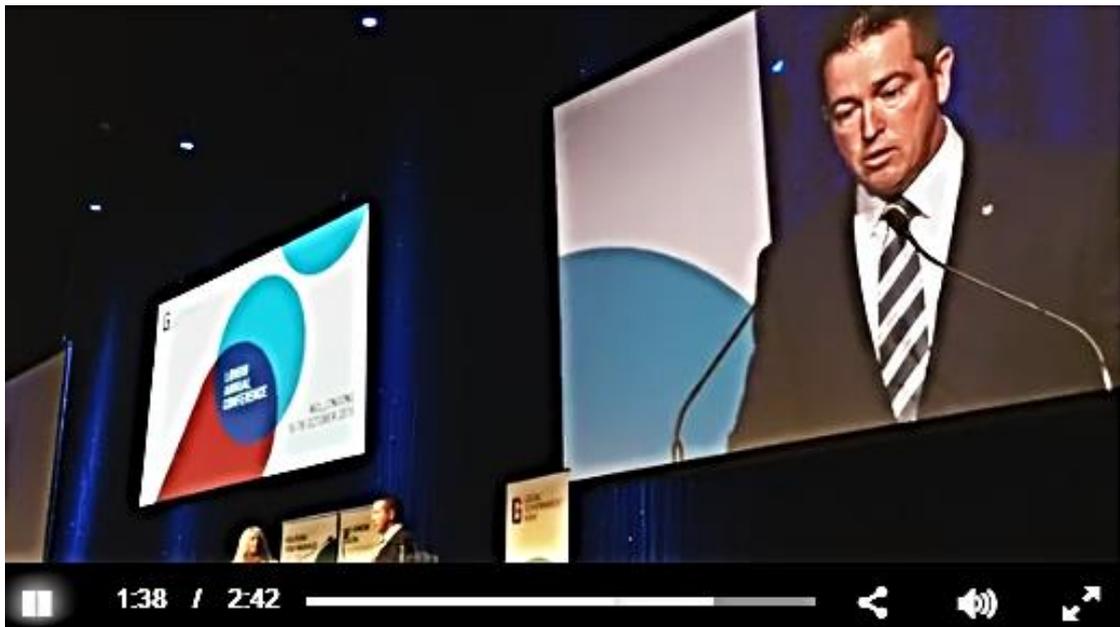


# Shellharbour mayor heckles Paul Toole over merger

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Shellharbour mayor Marianne Saliba publicly heckled Local Government Minister Paul Toole during his response to her question at the WIN Entertainment Centre on Tuesday, but it was a separate behind-the-scenes exchange that had the councillor fuming.

Mr Toole couldn't escape being grilled on the government's forced council mergers as he fronted hundreds of councillors and administrators at the Local Government NSW conference.

After the minister's 21-minute speech, which addressed the mergers among other local government changes, Cr Saliba used the first question from the floor to quiz him on the Shellharbour-Wollongong plan.

Cr Saliba's comment and subsequent query itself spanned more than a minute, prompting the emcee to ask her on two occasions to get to the question.



**DISCONTENT:** *Shellharbour mayor Marianne Saliba heckles Local Government Minister Paul Toole during his response to her question on forced council mergers.*

The councillor told Mr Toole Wollongong and Shellharbour councils have been deemed “financially fit for the future” and were part of the Illawarra Pilot Joint Organisation.

“I believed you when you said there would be no forced amalgamations,” Cr Saliba said.

“How can I believe you now when you’re saying it’s every council’s right to decide on a joint organisation, when you have gone against your own word of no forced amalgamations.”

In response, Mr Toole said the government had done four years of research.

“There's been reports and they’ve all come back showing that change is needed in the sector,” he said, adding “significant savings” would be delivered to communities through mergers.

“Not for Shellharbour,” Cr Saliba yelled across the room.

Earlier, Mr Toole told the gathering the government was implementing “the most significant reforms that this state has ever seen in local government”.



*UP FRONT: Local Government Minister Paul Toole speaks during the Local Government NSW conference at the WIN Entertainment Centre on Tuesday.  
Pictures: Adam McLean*

“When we look at structural reform, people generally only talk about mergers,” he said.

“Mergers over the last 12 months are only one part of that reform.”

After his speech, Mr Toole fronted the media backstage and later briefly crossed paths with Cr Saliba and fellow Shellharbour councillor Kellie Marsh in the corridor.

“I don’t trust the man. I don’t want to talk to him, he’s a liar,” the Shellharbour mayor was heard to say as she walked past.

In similar fashion to Monday, when she was bundled into a lift by security after trying to interrupt Premier Mike Baird’s media call in the same backstage location, Cr Saliba was approached by a conference staffer and told to remove herself and Cr Marsh from the media area.

After a heated exchange, during which Cr Saliba indicated she was using a nearby bathroom, the councillors and staffer parted ways.

<http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4235607/shellharbour-mayor-heckles-minister-over-council-merger-video/?cs=300>