

# Bill Shorten promises John Howard style plebiscite to stop forced Council mergers

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**Plebiscites on forced mergers will be held in Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove if Labor is elected, Opposition leader Bill Shorten promised on Monday.**



**The Opposition Leader promised \$20 million in funding to the Australian Electoral Commission to hold the plebiscites in council areas forced to merge against the wishes of ratepayers and it includes Canada Bay, Strathfield and Burwood as well as Leichhardt, Ashfield and Marrickville.**

Ratepayers in Epping are also expected to have a say as to whether they want to be part of the new mega Parramatta Council to be renamed the City of Cumberland.

Mr Shorten said the plebiscites will ask ratepayers if they want to keep their existing councils.

He said they will be based on a precedent used by Liberal Prime Minister John Howard in 2007 for forced mergers in Queensland.

“The Liberals’ plan to sack directly elected representatives and force councils to amalgamate is an insult to democracy,” Mr Shorten told the media.

“This move will give people the power to stand up to the Baird Government and its plan to unilaterally dispense with democracy, force councils to merge and to sack elected councillors.”

Mr Shorten's promise is in direct defiance of Baird's decision to deny ratepayers a say until elections for the so called 'mega councils' are held next year and with only one new councillor to represent Hunters Hill on a mega council dominated by Ryde.

His election promise comes days after NSW Opposition leader Luke Foley addressed a conference of mayors at NSW Parliament – including Mayor Jerome Laxale from Ryde and Mayor Deborah Hutchins of Lane Cove – where he spoke of diplomatic sanctions against the Baird Government and the recall of Consul Generals in protest.

Court action to get to the truth behind the forced merger process taken by Hunters Hill and Lane Cove Councils will resume in the Land and Environment Court today (Wednesday).

Despite the court action, Baird has reiterated his determination to abolish our local councils against the surveyed opinions of more than 80 per cent of local ratepayers and will push ahead to replace our elected councillors with government appointed administrators.

“We will take whatever action is required,” he told the media.

“We want the community to have confidence in councils again and unfortunately this confidence has been shaken by councillors who have put self-interest ahead of community interest.”

Ryde MP Victor Dominello told *The Weekly Times* Ryde Council is dysfunctional and it is time for “a fresh start” while Lane Cove MP Anthony Roberts dismissed Hunters Hill and Lane Cove anti-amalgamation protests with a claim that the community is not defined by who collects the garbage and repairs potholes.

<http://www.weeklytimes.com.au/bill-shorten-promises-john-howard-style-plebiscite-to-stop-forced-council-mergers/>

