

State refuses to reveal forced merger papers

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Despite a defeat in court last week, local communities will continue to pressure the Berejiklian Government to release secret cabinet documents used to claim cost savings from a forced merger of councils.

The Civil and Administrative Tribunal upheld the government's case to withhold the KPMG documents from the public, raising doubts about any cost saving at all.

'a sham process by government'

Pittwater resident Phil Walker and Save Hunters Hill Municipality spokesperson Phil Jenkyn OAM had sought a court decision to force the government to release the documents and Mr Jenkyn said political pressure will continue.

"Something in that report is so secret and embarrassing, the State Government just wants to hide its head in the sand," Mr Jenkyn said.

"It is extraordinary that a document that is referenced as support for the amalgamation proposals is not available for the community to review.

“All major political parties except the Liberal Party want these documents released now.”

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The argument in favour of the KPMG documents release is that they were paid for by the taxpayer although the government argues that they are confidential reports for the cabinet only.

“This makes it really hard for the public to find out what information and documentation it has in its records as it will have already stamped everything that might cause it grief with the words Cabinet-In-Confidence,” Mr Jenkyn said.

“One might be tempted to say it is a sham process.”

Mr Jenkyn said if the documents backed the government’s claim of cost savings from the forced merger of councils such as Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove it could only be in the government’s interest to release the documents to back the claim.

“Not to do so means that this government will be forever condemned as a dishonest, deceptive, arrogant and incompetent government that fails to listen to communities and will never learn.

“Clearly such a government does not deserve to govern.”

Court of Appeal judge Justice Basten commented on the documents in his verdict in the Ku-ring-gai case on a forced amalgamation.

“It would be incoherent for the Minister to assert that any material presented to Cabinet to support an amalgamation of local government areas should not be disclosed. Particularly where the proposal expressly relied on financial information which was derived from an external report submitted to Cabinet,” Justice Basten said.

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