

Woollahra Council loses merger fight with state government

The Daily Telegraph July 20, 2016
Miles Godfrey



Woollahra council chambers at Double Bay: The council has lost the merger battle. Picture: Justin Lloyd

- [Price of Ku-ring-gai Council's legal battle revealed](#)
- [Woollahra mayor hits out at name suggested for merged council](#)
- [Councils ignore orders to focus on local issues](#)

WOOLLAHRA Council has lost its court challenge to the Baird government's merger plans.

Land and Environment Court Chief Judge Brian Preston handed down the ruling in a packed courtroom on Wednesday morning.

Judge Preston said Woollahra Council had not established the grounds of its challenge and dismissed the proceedings, ordering the local authority to pay the government's costs.

Those costs – ratepayers' money – are expected to be high.

The council is likely to appeal the decision, which represents a major victory for the government.

Woollahra Council now faces the prospect of merging with neighbouring Waverley and Randwick councils, under the government's "Fit for the Future" reforms.



Woollahra Mayor Toni Zeltzer.

The government merged dozens of councils in May but the Woollahra, Waverley, Randwick tie-up was put on ice while the legal challenge played out.

Woollahra and its Mayor Toni Zeltzer had been trying to challenge the government on a number of points – the chief among them being that it failed to hold a proper public inquiry into the merger proposal.

It also claimed the council was denied procedural fairness because the government did not release a full report by consultants KPMG on the financial implications of the merger.

[“Woollahra Council is financially viable into the future”](#)

Ms Zeltzer, a Liberal mayor, had previously outlined her belief that the Woollahra community was strongly against the merger.

“Woollahra Council is financially viable into the future. We do not want to lose the representation and identity of our local community and we do not support rate increases without discernible benefits,” she had previously said.

“Waverley and Randwick are attractive and important areas in their own right, but they are very different to Woollahra in their geography and orientation to waterways and open space.

“If Waverley and Randwick Councils have agreed to merger and there are benefits for them in becoming bigger they should proceed. We should not be dragged along with them.”

Ms Zeltzer also previously said she was “disappointed” to spend money on the council’s legal challenge.

“The cost of legal advice and any potential action we take will be far outweighed by the whopping \$7m to \$17m cost burden in increased rates which our local residents will be left with if the amalgamation is pushed through,” she added.

Comment is being sought from Local Government Minister Paul Toole.

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/woollahra-council-loses-merger-fight-with-state-government/news-story/88d10f61b3e10fd14a253913bd5cce21>