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Submission: Walcha Council presides over a close knit caring community, with a long history of efficiency and caring. We are on a geographical extremity and would be completely overlooked if we were forced to amalgamate with any other Council. We need to be in control of our own destiny, so we need to become a rural council.

As noted in our submission, our Council does so much more than just administrate the usual local government issues. It is part of the caring hub of our community - indeed it is the centre from which the spokes go out - and in again..

Since you seem to only give us the option to amalgamate or be a Rural Council, Walcha MUST become a rural council.

Carolyn and David Salter

SUPPORTING A RURAL COUNCIL AND AGAINST COUNCIL AMALGAMATION FOR WALCHA

The heart and soul of a community is not its bricks and mortars, not its monuments, not even totally its visible achievements such as our Open Air Art, the streetscape, and so much more, though these are an indication. The real heart and soul of a community are its people and the way they live together and work together for each other and for that community. This community has a great heart. Many of those in our community have witnessed how caring this community is. I believe that Council amalgamation would diminish the heart and soul of this community.

I dispute your method of gathering figures (I am reminded of Mark Twain – “There are lies, there are damned lies, and there are statistics”.) So, with the imposed guidelines, our best option for our community, not just our council, is a Rural council. We must not be amalgamated.

Our Council is not just its achievements, though they are many, it is not just its efficiency and its effectiveness in our community, though we know it IS effective and it IS efficient. It's not just that our dirt roads are graded, though that is important. Our Council reflects our community and is often the hub from which spokes go out into the community and back again. It is a focal point for community views, questions and discussions. Ours is a caring Council – supporting many diverse community activities, especially those relating to the less fortunate. Our Council knows us not just as rate payers but as individuals within our community, we are ALL a part of our community.

If we were to just evaluate our Council's efficiency, it would get the tick, its management – a tick; its effectiveness – a tick again, its staff – a tick, its councilors – a tick. Even the financial bottom line for the bean counters (except maybe in government's and bureaucracies' eyes) – a big tick. However, its caring for and in our community gets much more than a tick – it is exceptional – as in support for the Relay for Life, the Arts Council sculptures, many Sporting bodies, health related and caring bodies and those are just a few of the ones I know. There are more.

I am involved in a Support Group for life threatening and debilitating illness. When we approached the Council with possible problems regarding operational issues the Council placed us under its umbrella and told us to just keep doing what we were doing for our Community. Would that sort of instant support come from an amalgamated Council? I do not think so. Our Council supports our Community in so many ways. It works for the Community and with the community.

Why on earth would we want to amalgamate with Councils who cannot tick all the boxes we can? Why would we want to be responsible for their debt, why would we want to be dragged down to mediocrity when we have something unique and much better than that? Why would we want to have a Council that did not even know Walcha, its people and its concerns, and had its main interests elsewhere in another, larger centre? WE know what our community needs – all of us who live and work here – community members, councilors, council staff and management NOT some independent person or body in Sydney, Armidale or elsewhere who neither understands or cares about our Walcha community.

If we are forced to amalgamate, it will greatly diminish the heart and soul of this community. It will take away our options of talking informally as well as formally, with those who make decisions for our community. It will lessen our access to these people; it will underrate our community input. I hope that is NOT what the Government or its bureaucracies would want to do. At present, the community has huge input into our Council, and we are represented by councilors who live in our community and make decisions for the betterment of our community. I don't believe we would have that representation in an amalgamated Council. Will we be better off? I believe not. Will we pay more rates? Probably. Will we save money on staffing? I don't think so. Amalgamations elsewhere suggest not in the medium or long term. Amalgamations have not been proved to be more efficient to my knowledge, in fact, I'm told, to the contrary. Will we have enough representation? How could we, with our small population? We should have greater representation, being a much bigger geographical area. I can't imagine that happening. How could this possibly be

better for Walcha, situated on an extremity of a proposed amalgamation? My worry is that this great new Council may become a “yes Minister” sort of bureaucracy.

We know a lot of people in all parts of the world. I emailed most of my address book asking for opinions of those who have had experience in local Govt amalgamations. Responses came back from all over the world and lots from Australia. There was NOT ONE favorable comment for amalgamation. Most said cost go up in all ways - from staff wages to rates to grave plots – and efficiencies go down – from getting Council inspectors to visit, to road maintenance. Councils become cumbersome. Towns die in the outlying areas. I repeat, towns die in the outlying areas. That is us; that is Walcha. I had NO positive feedback from my contacts - NONE. They all said “Don’t do it”.

Our Walcha Council is not broken – it’s not even broke, unlike some others. It does not need to be fixed. Please do NOT recommend that we amalgamate with any other Council. We are unique in our council area and our Council serves us well AND efficiently. Please do not underestimate the need for our community to have its own Council. If amalgamation is forced on us, it will remove one of our community’s major support systems, it will NOT be economical in the long term, and it will seriously diminish the heart and soul of our Walcha community.

For this heart and soul to remain flourishing, under your options, we MUST become a rural council.

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