

30 July 2015

## **CITY OF CANADA BAY COUNCIL FIT FOR THE FUTURE SUBMISSION**

I wish to voice my strong opposition to the City of Canada Bay Council (CCBC) proposal to amalgamate with Auburn and Burwood Councils.

Forced amalgamation is anti-democratic, especially when community polling shows significant support (over 70%) to stay independent.

Local government should be just that – in touch and accountable for local outcomes.

The State Government should be promoting reform – but the criteria should be outcomes based, with more accountability and more true local representation.

Ultimately, the claimed benefits of amalgamation are based on an assumption that big means better and automatically leads to improved efficiency.

Economic outcomes can be achieved through other means. Local governments already co-operate in many areas of shared infrastructure (like recycling) and bulk purchasing. These benefits could be extended through a more formal structure and oversight at State level, not forced merger. Democratic principles and representation could be enhanced by mandating wards to bolster local advocacy.

In responding to the Government, IPART may wish to comment on the broader evidence of public and private sector mergers – what is the track record of mergers (especially forced mergers) in meeting expectations? Is the certain cost of transition worth theoretical and marginal future benefit?

The degree of reliance that should be placed on self-assessment (in particular CCBC claims) against key criteria also requires critical and independent evaluation. As a long term resident of the LGA, the examples given in the proposal by CCBC should be challenged – for example, KNOWLEDGE, CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION and many other examples cited by CCBC are weak. CCBC is generally unresponsive to areas of community concern in Cabarita and Breakfast Point including maintenance of parks, transport advocacy, and an integrated approach to development.

City of Canada Bay Council was formed around 15 years ago by the amalgamation of Concord and Drummoyne. These councils already shared infrastructure. The subsequent financial performance has been largely driven by circumstances, not good management, with windfall gains in Section 94 contributions as former industrial sites became high density residential. Councilors are even more insular and unresponsive than ever. CCBC residents have lived through an amalgamation, and know there is no up-side.

The only positive was that the former amalgamation had some coherence in terms of merged entities. Geography is common, with both former LGAs having the Parramatta River to the north Parramatta Road to the south, largely consistent socio economic groupings, similar travel to work profiles, and cultural diversity. The current proposal by CCBC to merge with Auburn and Burwood offers no such cohesion.

Auburn is one of the most disadvantaged LGAs in the state. The massive and arbitrary grouping of the three proposed LGAs will drive further indifference over true local community issues and weaken accountability.

City of Canada Bay had a public position of stand-alone up to mid-June 2015, and mounted arguments aligned to the Fit for the Future criteria. At the 16 June meeting, a resolution without notice was passed and CCBC turned pro-merger.

CCBC's proposal for merger with Auburn and Burwood is supported by a document comprising mostly pictures, and only superficial and generalised arguments. If it's such a good idea, why was staying independent the prior preferred position, and why ignore the fact that the significant majority of their community oppose merging?

To conclude, arguments for forced amalgamation are generalised and skewed to a narrow set of criteria. As a long term resident, I saw no benefit from the merger in 2000 that formed CCBC. What I did experience is a Council chamber that now requires an addition 20 minute commute (and significantly inferior parking options), more than a decade of disruption to basic process, and Councillors who have become increasingly indifferent to the concerns of my local community.

I am very supportive of local government reform, but not through the flawed concept of forced amalgamation.