

Sydney, Friday 31st July 2015

Before moving to Sydney in 1996, I lived in Western Australia. In the mid-1990s the State Government of WA broke up the old City of Perth to form four new and smaller council areas. The rationale at the time was that these smaller local government areas would be more responsible and would deliver better service to residents. It was an unpopular move at the time because few residents and ratepayers felt that they were having difficulties with the previous local government areas.

Less than 20 years later, the WA state government started a new campaign to amalgamate existing councils across the metropolitan area to form new "mega-councils". The rationale this time was that these newer bigger councils would be more efficient. Again this has been an unpopular move with majority of metropolitan residents opposed to the change.

(Interestingly, the one local government area where amalgamation wasn't proposed was the Shire of Peppermint Grove, which at just over 1 square kilometre is the national's smallest local government area.)

Overwhelmingly, people have resisted local government amalgamation because it does not solve a problem being experienced by residents, and indeed residents fear that these amalgamations may create problems.

It is clear to me that the situation in metropolitan Sydney is very similar. The old saying that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" is as true in Sydney as it is in Perth and in other state jurisdictions where forced amalgamations have been proposed.

I have been a resident and ratepayer in the City of Sydney since boundary changes moved Woolloomooloo and surrounding areas back into the City of Sydney LGA after a period within the South Sydney City Council. And in all that time I have been very satisfied with the services we received from the Sydney City Council. I am also impressed that the council is debt-free and is working towards responsible environmental management of the LGA, something that I believe will represent a blueprint for other council areas to emulate.

I don't want to see any changes to council boundaries.

I think it is also important for a great metropolis like Sydney that each of the local communities are able to develop their own local character. Council boundaries, as they currently exist, allow that to happen, and there is a different "feel" and character between Sydney and Waverley and Woollahra. That is a good thing. Larger, more homogenous council areas will stifle that diversity within the Sydney basin, and I think that would be a sad thing.

I also think that it is important that the commercial heart of the city not be isolated from the surrounding residents. I have often heard that the two should be managed separately, but I believe that is wrong. As a resident of Woolloomooloo, the central city streets are as much a part of my community as those in Darlinghurst and Surry Hills. I think that the

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residential areas of the city give the commercial centre a soul and that helps the central city to have a heart. The city has to be about people, not just business and commerce.

It is also wrong to think that Sydney City residents do not recognise our responsibilities, not only to the people of greater Sydney, but to the residents of the State and the Country. We are, and I think we continue to demonstrate that we are, very aware that our city is one of the most important cultural and business centres in the country. I think many of us would happily claim that it is the MOST important such centre. And I think we, as a community, through our current elected Council are delivering on those responsibilities.

There may be reasons for mismanaged councils to be brought into line. But that is NOT the case with the City of Sydney. There may also be times when boundary changes need to be made to ensure that communities are separated from their obvious associates. That was certainly the case with the last boundary changes. Our neighbourhood is more naturally part of Sydney than it was a part of South Sydney.

It should also be noted that without any boundary changes of amalgamations, Councils are growing within the greater Sydney area as urban consolidation continues. That ongoing growth will be enough of a challenge for existing councils, and it is a task that is unlikely to be better handled by the proposed new "mega-councils".

Yours faithfully,

Brian Waldron

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A large black rectangular redaction box covers the signature area below the name Brian Waldron.