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July 30th 2015

The Chairman
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
Level 15, 2-24 Rawson Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000
Dear Sir

I refer to the current review of Councils in NSW as part of the Fit for the Future criteria and submit the following submission supporting Wyong Council being left as a stand-alone Council.

Community Consultation

There has always been an association between the community and their local Council. In relation to Wyong Shire there has been little or no Community Consultation to any forced amalgamation and it is questionable whether the Community would accept any amalgamation proposals that are enforced on them. Always remember that in any Council area it is always thought of as being our Council.

Size vs Service Delivery

It has been reported in the media that amalgamations will benefit the Community in the form of lower costs. Unfortunately the numbers that are provided to this statement are estimates only and the real cost savings or cost increases of any amalgamation will not be available until it is far too late. Just by joining Councils to make a larger Council does not necessarily mean that it is an improvement. 'Big does not mean better'.

Ownership of Council's Assets

I have concerns regarding the distribution and consumption of Assets should an amalgamation with a neighbouring Council occur. In regard to Wyong Shire which has been in existence since 1947, assets have been continually purchased and upgraded. Should the residents of this shire have to pay for the upgrade and purchase of assets of a Council that it is amalgamated with which clearly do not match quality and service that residents have been used to. Similarly, the same could be said of any neighbouring Councils assets. As an example, Buttonderry Waste Facility in Wyong Shire has a life estimate of 30/40 years. Should our residents have to share the benefits of reduced waste charges as a result of this investment where neighbouring Councils have no similar facility.

Rating Structures

All Council's have different rating structures and any amalgamation of Councils would create huge difficulties in deriving a rating structure that suits all of the ratepayers of the newly amalgamated Council. There may be provisions under the Local Government Act to levy different rates in different areas to save any major change in rating structures, but this would oblige any reason to amalgamate two or more Councils.

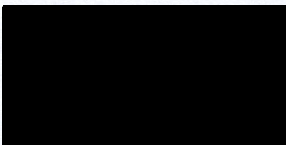
Emergency Responses

In all the calculations of the benefits of a larger amalgamated Council I believe they do not factor in the costs of what happens in cases of emergency such as flooding/storms/bushfires. In these situations the workforce currently is able to be mobilised in a very short period of time to provide relief and assistance to affected residents. Would the larger new amalgamated Council be able to provide this service. More particularly would the local staff have the necessary skills and local knowledge to meet any emergency.

Staff

With any amalgamation, what would happen to the current staff? Would they have the same award conditions? I would suggest that each Council would have different award conditions in regard to workplace agreements and rate/salary calculator.

It is requested that should an amalgamation of Wyong Council occur, all employees current award conditions be transferred to the new entity and that employees be guaranteed employment for at least 5 years.



G.J. Ashe