

Submission to IPART - Fit for the Future – 31 July 2015

As residents of Leichhardt Council we are opposed to the amalgamation of Leichhardt Council with other Sydney councils for the following reasons.

Leichhardt Council is the 3rd most financially sustainable council in Sydney. According to the Office of Local Government's Your Council Report, this ranking comes from the operating performance ratio, which the NSW Treasury Corporation regards as a core measure of financial sustainability.

Leichhardt Council, with a population of 58,000, has stated in their submission that independent research by Morrison Low consultants found that an inner west amalgamated council with a population of 342,000 would only meet 4 of the 7 Fit for the Future criteria after 10 years.

Therefore this makes the proposed amalgamation a nonsense. Furthermore, we reject the State Government's financial benchmarks for determining the Fit for the Future criteria for the following reasons -

- Leichhardt Council has a strong sense of community and an amalgamation with an inner west mega council would mean a loss of this shared community interest, as well as a loss of identity.
- Community consultations/meetings and online surveys overwhelmingly voted for Leichhardt Council to remain a stand-alone Council. We do not support the proposal in Leichhardt Council's submission to amalgamate with Ashfield and Canada Bay Councils in the instance of a forced amalgamation, this proposal is clearly not supported by the community.
- Bigger councils mean less democracy, eg the councillor per resident ratio would be far greater, ie with an amalgamated inner west council at 23,000, as opposed to the current slightly less than 5,000. Local representation would be minimal. Local government is the last bastion of democracy, for example Leichhardt Council has a long tradition of allowing unlimited numbers of residents to routinely speak at Council meetings on matters that affect them, ie anyone who wants to speak can speak - a tradition not shared by many other councils,
- Local councillors are accessible for residents to raise concerns and issues with, unlike State and Federal ministers who are frequently held hostage to 'big money' – on a State and Federal level the ordinary person does not have this same level of access. This is evidenced by the overwhelming disillusionment of the population to Federal and State politicians.
- The proposed council amalgamations will reduce democracy, therefore, if IPART is truly independent it must place democracy front and centre of the factors to be considered in the Fit for the Future council amalgamations.

We strongly support Leichhardt Council remaining a stand-alone council for these reasons.

Rosemarie Gates and Sean Ferns

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28 July 2015