

27/07/15

Submission

The City of Sydney Council is already fit for the future

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal,

The submission made by six local councils plus Sydney to the Independent Local Government Review Panel otherwise known as the Samson Review makes all the relevant points to my mind. The five other councils which supported Sydney were Botany, Randwick, Woollahra, Leichhardt and Waverley. This submission can be accessed from <http://clovermoore.com.au>

To my mind its most salient points are:

- We believe that consideration of reform in local government should start by identifying the purpose of local government. It is meaningless to argue about how local government should be structured if we do not have a clear view on why we even have local government. The Panel has not been clear on this point.
- Local Government is the level of government closest to the community and must have the authority and capacity to identify community needs and aspirations; to set strategic priorities; and to develop effective plans to implement them.
- Through the ability to exercise democratic control over shared spaces and shared services, individuals develop their community pride, their sense of community responsibility and their capacity for responsible self government. Without meaningful local control, individuals feel less sense of ownership and responsibility and retreat to defending their personal short-term best interests. When communities feel they lack control over their place, public spaces suffer, volunteering declines and neighbourhood disputes become more intense.

(That this factor seems to count for little in the Baird Government suggests that they are driven by a neoliberal ideology of leaving everything to the market. Margaret Thatcher, a famous spokes-person for this position famously asserted that there is no such thing as society! Neoliberalism has been responsible for creating increasing inequity everywhere; is deaf to all arguments other than the freedom for individuals to make money).

- The Panel has put forward a number of arguments to support its case for amalgamations. These arguments are characterised by a complete lack of evidence. In some cases, the evidence cited does not apply to the “Global Sydney” councils. And the specific arguments made for the “super Sydney” council are specious and weak.

It then gives detailed answers to the 8 arguments for amalgamation by the ILGRP. A major flaw in the proposal - no evidence!

- (In answer to Argument 1) This is perhaps the single clearest statement of the theory that underlines the case for amalgamation: the need to build strategic capacity. It also demonstrates quite clearly, that the case for amalgamations is fundamentally built on the proposition that amalgamations deliver financial efficiencies. *The Panel has failed to cite any data in support of this theory* [my emphasis]. Once you account for population density and remove very small Councils from the comparison, there is no correlation between size and efficiency or between size and achievement of outcomes.

(I live in the Rockdale Council area and agree that there is some sense that say Kogarah and Rockdale merge but I note that even that it is hotly contested. But the City of Sydney is not

small as it is).

- (In answer to Argument 4) No evidence has been provided that larger local government areas are more able to work effectively with state and federal government. Existing large councils in western Sydney cannot point to better outcomes with state governments as a function of their size. While it may be true that fewer councils would be easier for the state and federal governments, *this is not a justification* [my emphasis]. Councils exist to support the legitimate aspirations of the community, not for the administrative convenience of the State. (Neoliberalism again? If the freedom to make money in the market is all that really matters what's all that concern about the community all about?)
- (In answer to Argument 6) This argument is vague, probably due to its lack of substance. Sydney is already internationally recognised as one of the world's great cities. Indeed there is no relationship between international recognition of Sydney as a global city and the size of its local government area.

Much of the above can be placed on the theory side in the scientific method whereby knowledge advances by the interplay between theory and observation. On the empirical side it is the fact that for several years, Sydney has been recognised as a global city. It consistently is placed near the top of the major global city lists.

The submission compiles some rankings of global cities. Sydney is up near the top of lists. Only Melbourne gets within cooee of the top. Brisbane which does have super councils is well down lists.

There are reasons why Clover Moore's leadership of the City of Sydney has achieved what it has. Her following words in a way says it all, "2014 marked ten years since I became Lord Mayor of the City of Sydney. That's a decade of strong, stable, corruption-free Independent leadership, from a progressive, efficient and outcome-focused organisation, with a long-term vision for our city's future and \$1.9 billion budgeted for infrastructure over the next decade."


The lack of corruption says that her standing is based on genuine democratic commitment and accountability. Her rule is not based on "clientelism" (ref: Fukuyama *Origins of Political Order and Political Order & Political Decay*) or "patronage" in other words. We know Clover personally and can attest that she is driven by genuine motives to do good for the community.

The significance of this achievement can be clearly see when one only has to look at what happens when the opposite is the case. "Graft and corruption is like an anchor which weighs you down stopping you achieving what you can", Barack Obama speaking to Kenyans as reported this morning: http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2015/07/bst_20150727_0710.mp3 (that statement is located at about 14 min into the podcast). Some local councils have been found to be corrupt and they and their consituents have suffered.

This is not the case with Sydney City Council. ***They are already fit for the future.*** They should not be weighed down with another round of amalgamations. They've already been through that when Sydney South was amalgamated many years ago and it was an energy and wealth consuming activity.

In short Sydney City Council is already fit for the future and they should be left alone to get on with it.

Yours faithfully,

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Victor Bien