

SAVE HUNTERS HILL MUNICIPALITY COALITION

A coalition of community groups and residents determined to save the historic Municipality of Hunters Hill

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SUBMISSION FROM SAVE HUNTERS HILL MUNICIPALITY COALITION (SHHMC)

DATED 21 JULY 2015

TO: THE INDEPENDENT PRICING & REGULATORY TRIBUNAL (IPART) REVIEW OF LOCAL COUNCIL FIT FOR THE FUTURE PROPOSALS

RE: HUNTERS HILL COUNCIL FIT FOR THE FUTURE PROPOSAL

To Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal,
PO Box K35,
Haymarket Post Shop, NSW 1240

1. SAVE HUNTERS HILL MUNICIPALITY COALITION (SHHMC)

a) This submission is made by Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition (SHHMC) to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART), and relates to the Hunters Hill Council Fit for the Future Submission and Proposal – see [here](#).

b) SHHMC is a community organisation within Hunters Hill determined to maintain its historic Municipality (1861) and keep the local in local government. Local residents highly value the area's heritage which is of national significance, the sense of belonging, local democracy and their involvement in local community activities and groups. SHHMC supports our independent council cooperating with neighbouring councils on efficiencies and regional matters.

c) SHHMC was established in 2003 to prevent the then attempt to amalgamate the council. It was reactivated in December 2012 to combat a renewed threat to its independence from the State Government and from big business and developer interests. See Attachment A – SHHMC Position Statement December 2012 and Attachment B – The Battle to Save Hunters Hill is on again! 26 February 2015.

See also website www.savehuntershill.org and Facebook page www.facebook.com/savehuntershill

d) SHHMC made a submission re IPART's Consultation Paper concerning population and number of councils; see Attachment C – SHHMC Submission to IPART 20 May 2015.

2. LOCAL COMMUNITIES

a) Local communities want local government to remain local. They are strongly against forced council amalgamations and believe that if councils want to voluntarily merge then a majority of residents in each council area must give their approval by way of referendum. SHHMC strongly holds these views.



A section of the community groups and councillors that attended with colourful banners and T-shirts the Save Our Councils Coalition launch on 11 June 2015

b) 'Save Our Councils Coalition' (SOCC), a coalition of community groups, residents, councillors and mayors from across the political spectrum and across the State, was launched on 11 June 2015 in the Domain behind the NSW Parliament. See Attachment D – Save Our Councils Launch Report 14 June 2015 and Attachment E – video of the Launch. See also www.facebook.com/saveourcouncils. SHHMC is affiliated with SOCC and is a strong supporter.

c) An independent local council, one that is cooperating in joint regional arrangements with surrounding councils, is well positioned to consider not only local issues and economies of scale but also play a constructive role in regional issues. It should be noted that councils spend only 10% of their time engaged in regional planning as the bulk of their time and resources are devoted to local planning and service delivery issues.

3. LOCAL GOVERNMENT

a) It is often said that local communities know their own areas best. They are motivated and inspired by a sense of community, belonging and place. In Sydney many councils have existed for considerable periods of time, one of the earliest being Hunters Hill (1861). Communities highly value their local governance, the built areas with special character, bushland and open space. They also know the places appropriate for development or improvement. Many community, cultural and sporting groups rely on a commitment to place. All these factors enhance community well-being, health, and encourage service and volunteering. This very much applies to the Hunters Hill community and has become embodied in their elected Council.

b) It is the local in local government that has helped make Sydney one of the world's most liveable cities.

c) Both the 'Local Government NSW' association and the 'Australian Local Government Association' have a policy of no forced amalgamations.

d) What the NSW Government appears to many to be doing in its 'Fit for the Future' proposal, by seeking councils to meet the scale of a Mega Council and by offering incentives for mergers, is attempting to force amalgamations by the back door. Whether it is the back door or the front door this is a direct attack on local democracy and is totally unacceptable to local communities.



Community addressing the Launch with cross-party political support

4. REGIONAL ISSUES

Looking to the future for Sydney it is clear that in addition to caring for and guarding the legitimate interests of local communities, local councils need to cooperate with surrounding councils on joint efficiencies and services, and be able to deal with regional issues and the State Government. At the initiative of local government, councils have now for over 20 years been doing that through Regional Organisations of Councils called ROCs. This has been a voluntary and collaborative process, and is capable of improvement.

5. JOINT REGIONAL AUTHORITIES (JRAs)

a) BACKGROUND

A number of councils including Hunters Hill, The City of Ryde and Lane Cove Councils have been working on an improved model for joint regional cooperation, with the assistance of recognised leading experts. It is a model that would be suitable for a grouping of a number of northern Sydney Councils - Hunters Hill, Lane Cove, Mosman, North Sydney, Ryde and Willoughby – if supported by their councils and communities. It is a model that could easily be applied to agreed groupings of councils across all of Metropolitan Sydney.

b) MEMBERSHIP AND STRUCTURE

Existing councils would become equal members of the Joint Regional Authority. The Mayor and one other councillor elected by the Council would represent that Council on the Board. Each representative has one vote and is bound by the decision of its own Council. Decision-making by the Board is to be unanimous, that is by consensus. Membership fees are equal, but payments for services and the like are based on population or as otherwise agreed. Meetings would be attended by a relevant NSW Government nominee. An Advisory Committee of General Managers of Councils assists.

c) REGIONAL FUNCTIONS

The functions of the Regional Organisation would include establishing a shared services centre to deliver services that provide benefits through economies of scale; regional and land use and infrastructure planning; providing regional leadership and advocacy to government; and working with State and Federal Government on regional issues and strategies.

6. EXPERT EVIDENCE

a) A number of experts looked at the merger option proposed in the Sansom Report as favoured by the Government; that is a Mega Council of over 300,000 people consisting of six existing councils – Hunters Hill, Lane Cove, Mosman, North Sydney, Ryde (part of) and Willoughby. These experts also considered other and improved options. Professor Brian Dollery provided an empirical analysis of collaboration and shared services; Professor Percy Allan & Associates considered the structure of a regional organisation; SGC Economics provided a business case for a Joint Organisation; and Morrison Low carried out a review of the Sansom recommendation.

b) Professor Percy Allan & Associates in his report 'A Shared Services Centre..for North Shore Councils' 7 May 2015 (see [here](#)) states at p4: "There is no compelling evidence that centralising all local council activities in a single mega-council produces cost efficiencies. That's because with scale some activities obtain economies while others develop diseconomies. Hence the most efficient path for local government is to share those activities that benefit from size while keeping in-house those activities done best on a small scale."

c) Professor Brian Dollery in the conclusion to the report 'Compulsion versus a Collaborative Regional Approach' May 2015 (see [here](#)) at p264 states: "there is no empirical justification for the proposed merger of the Hunters Hill, Lane Cove, Mosman, North Sydney, Ryde and Willoughby local councils" and at p265 "that no common 'community of interest' exists." At p267 the report states "The weight of empirical evidence on municipal mergers in the scholarly literature and the Australian national and state public inquiries into local government falls overwhelmingly against forced amalgamation. This body of evidence holds that shared services and other forms of council collaboration provide a superior method of securing the advantages of greater scale."

7. STRONG SUPPORT FOR HUNTERS HILL COUNCIL SUBMISSIONS

a) Hunters Hill Council made a Submission to IPART dated 30 June 2015 that included an Improvement Proposal and attached the supporting expert reports. This can be viewed on the Hunters Hill Council website [here](#), and on the IPART website [here](#).

b) SHHMC strongly supports the Hunters Hill Council Submission and the Joint Submission from Hunters Hill, The City of Ryde and Lane Cove Councils.

c) The Mayoral Forward at page 5 summarises the position. With amalgamation into a Mega Council residents would suffer a dramatic reduction in local representation, and the quality and quantity of local government services. Residents, after extensive community consultation, overwhelmingly rejected the Government's proposal to merge Ryde, Hunters Hill, Lane Cove, Willoughby, North Sydney and Mosman Councils into a Mega Council of over 300,000 people. A significant majority of residents were in favour of retaining their own independent council and establishing a 'Joint Regional Authority' of surrounding councils to deal with regional planning, procurement, infrastructure delivery and services achieving economies of scale. This is a model that could be readily adapted for implementation anywhere in Metropolitan Sydney.



*Save Hunters Hill convenors and coordinators outside Hunters Hill Town Hall Dec 2012
Courtesy The Weekly Times*

d) The Submissions demonstrate that Hunters Hill and its two adjoining councils, Ryde and Lane Cove, have proven scale and capacity. They currently meet, or will meet within the prescribed time, the Fit for the Future benchmarks. The JRA model is economically viable, low cost, tailored for purpose and a best practice model. It will enhance strategic capacity and enable intergovernmental collaboration. It will strengthen the economic competitiveness of the region.

e) The attached independent expert reports strongly support Council's Submission. There is indeed no compelling evidence to the contrary. Sections of the reports can be summarised as follows:

Professor Dollery's research shows that the empirical evidence is overwhelmingly against forced amalgamations. Shared services and other kinds of inter-council collaboration best secure the advantages of scale. He found that there was no difference in the performance of merged and unmerged councils in previous NSW amalgamations, and that the assertion that large population sized councils deliver savings from economies of scale is false. He also identified significant

impediments in implementation, including disparities in rates, problems with loss of representation and lack of 'community of interest'.

Professor Percy Allen is of the view that a JRA enables regional decision making without detracting from the core role of local councils to serve local needs and aspirations. There is no compelling evidence that centralising all local council activities in a single Mega Council produces cost efficiencies.

f) Keeping the existing councils with their strong and supportive communities, combined with a flexible and viable JRA for strategic collaboration, is a far superior alternative to the proposed Mega Merger.

8. COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

a) The result of the random telephone survey in May 2015 was that over 80% of the community in Hunters Hill supported the model of keeping its own local Council and in addition cooperating with surrounding councils in a joint regional organisation. At the Community Forum held in May 2015, over 80% of those present were supportive of retaining the Council and exploring the possibility of a joint regional organisation with a number of other councils within the northern Sydney region.

b) On 6 June 2013 a large public meeting took place in the Hunters Hill Town Hall. Speakers included Anthony Roberts MP the local State member and then Minister for Fair Trading and Richard Quinn the Mayor of Hunters Hill and President of NSROC. See 3 minute video of meeting on YouTube [here](#). Resolutions passed by an overwhelmingly majority included:

- i) That Hunters Hill Municipality retains its independence and historic boundaries.
- ii) That the NSW Government recognises and protects the significant character and heritage values of Hunters Hill Municipality.

c) In 2003 in one of the largest public meetings ever held in the Hunters Hill Town Hall, residents unanimously resolved to "affirm its overwhelming support for the retention of our historic boundaries."

d) In 1999 in answer to a question at the Local Government Election residents voted overwhelmingly (over 80%) against amalgamation.

9. CONCLUSION

a) The view of the local community of Hunters Hill and its elected Council and the findings of the experts is at one; there should be no merger on any basis; Hunters Hill Council should retain its independence whilst also working jointly on a regional organisation basis with surrounding councils. Council would maintain its local identity with local representation, and continue delivering those services best delivered at the local level. At the same time regional issues and joint services can be effectively dealt through best practice at the regional level.

b) This is not only the best result for local communities and local government, but clearly for the State Government. It is the most effective way for Government to deal with councils and

communities, does not involve huge expenditure and dislocation to communities, and is the best way forward for regional planning.

c) This Submission is a public document and is not confidential. We have read and accept IPART's Submission Policy.

d) The SHHMC Submission was emailed to IPART ipart@ipart.nsw.gov.au on 21 July 2015.



Banner 'Preservation Not Amalgamation' at historic Vienna Cottage (1871) in Hunters Hill

10. ATTACHMENTS

A [SHHMC Position Statement](#) December 2012

B [Battle to Save Hunters Hill is on again!](#) 26 February 2015

C [SHHMC Submission to IPART](#) 20 May 2015

D [Save Our Councils Launch Report](#) 14 June 2015

E [Video of Save Our Councils Launch](#) (short version [here](#))

Phil Jenkyn, OAM

Ross Williams, Emeritus Mayor

Co-convenors,

Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition (SHHMC)

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21 July 2015