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Submission: Thank you for the opportunity afforded to Council today in Wagga Wagga to ask a question regarding IPART's intentions in the scenario where a merger proposal (Template 1) is submitted for which the agreement of all councils has not been indicated, as per Clause 1.1 of Template 1, through a minute of the council agreeing to the submission of the proposal. Whilst Council appreciates that you were not in a position to make a definitive response Council would like to take this opportunity to suggest what the appropriate response should be.

The appropriate response should be that the merger proposal be immediately disregarded, and if no other proposal has been forthcoming from the council submitting the merger proposal, that council should be 'Not Assessed, deemed Not Fit'.

Council bases this view on the fact that the NSW Government has not made any announcement which would cause Council to believe that the NSW Government has changed its previously stated policy that there would be 'no forced amalgamations'.

Council is of the belief that a council submitting an uninvited merger proposal without the agreement of the other councils involved is effectively attempting to force a change in NSW Government policy by causing IPART to make and present to the NSW Government a Fit for the Future assessment on what is tantamount to a forced amalgamation.

Council understands that the process which the NSW Government has adopted, involving IPART in assessing the Fit for the Future status of councils, may well provide the NSW Government with an opportunity to change its previously stated policy regarding 'no forced amalgamations'. However, if this is to happen it should be as a result of a considered and deliberate statement by the NSW Government, and not by the manipulation of what is supposed to be an open and transparent process involving IPART assessing councils under the Fit for the Future process.