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Submission: I oppose the recommended amalgamation of Leichhardt Council with other inner-west councils to create a mega-council.

Should such all-encompassing amalgamations of local councils take place voters would be effectively disenfranchised at a local government level. They would remove the rights of local communities.

The cost of amalgamation would far exceed the proposed financial contribution from State Government. Rates are likely to increase just to cover the additional cost of amalgamation.

Leichhardt council is well placed financially to continue to stand alone and already has co-operative organisations in place with other councils that improve efficiency and help provide good service to its ratepayers.

Joint Organisations were originally recommended by the Independent Panel. Then the Government ruled them out in metropolitan Sydney. They should be returned as an option and time allowed to develop business cases.

The culture and policies vary significantly between councils in the inner-west. I suggest that an amalgamated council with such a large population, diverse interests, financial circumstances, character and policies would be costly and difficult to set up and manage.

Heritage items, conservation areas and local character would be subsumed by overall State Government plans, with little recourse or representation for local residents. The sense of belonging and place is likely to be lost.

Some of the criteria in the 'Fit for the Future' requirements are vague and unexplained, making comparisons and assessment difficult for IPART.

"Scale" and "Capacity" benchmarks don't appear to be valid criteria for the future success of Councils.

They do not ensure residents' interests are well taken care of as far as services and maintaining local infrastructure are concerned.

There is no evidence that a large council is more effective, has better rates, or that it provides better services than a small council. In fact there is evidence to the contrary. There is no evidence to link the scale of a council with its strategic capacity, so the two criteria should be assessed separately.

There should be no minimum population size.

Strategic Capacity is to be measured by the degree with which the local council co-operates with the State Government in rolling out its "planned development". This prejudices local councils which stand up for the rights of their residents. This criteria requirement should be removed.

IPART has acknowledged that there is no evidence for targets. There should be no target number of councils for metropolitan/regional areas.

The present timeline does not allow good process and needs to be extended. IPART submissions close on 25 May and the final methodology and criteria will be published by 1st June. This does not give enough time to fully consider all submissions, assess and respond to them and then develop the final document.

I believe that the amalgamation of inner-west councils is a retrograde step which would reduce local representation and amenity for residents and would be very unpopular.

I request that IPART recommend that amalgamation of Leichhardt Council with other inner-west councils should not proceed.

Christina Ritchie

