

## **IPART Submission – Fit for the Future**

In 2012 it became apparent that the Liberal State government had in its sight forced council mergers.

The case for mergers is 2 fold:-

1. Free up state government finances normally reserved for local councils by encouraging councils to borrow funds with subsidized interest; and
2. Ensure that development controls are uniform to allow as stated by the chairman of Urban Growth NSW "**More opportunities for developers.** In doing so we will open greater opportunities to second and third tier developers and builders to facilitate a more rapid increase in supply." **The crucial part of Mr Brogden's speech was the promise to be speedy. Not necessarily sustainable, or affordable.** (*John Brogden's speech at the Westin Hotel 12 September 2012*).

This coincides with the "true partnership with state and federal agencies to roll out their planned development".

## **Strategic Capacity – Minimum Population**

An analysis by Mosman mayor and economist Peter Abelson, and University of NSW economics expert Roselyne Joyeux, said equating a council's financial sustainability with its size was "baseless and incorrect". This criteria should be removed. There is no empirical evidence to support such an assessment.

## **Strategic Capacity – High Quality political leaders**

### **Improving Political Leaders . Expanding the role of mayor**

Executive Mayors – the instant expert!

The introduction of an executive mayor is a disturbing proposal of an instant expert to run Councils – a highly paid Executive Mayor with power over Council's General Manager.

The Report's panel has determined "enhancing the role of mayors could make a major contribution to:

- focusing councils on strategic issues,
- improving governance and
- strengthening inter-government relations and partnerships with key stakeholders".

## **Mayor as a “political and civil leader”**

A Mayor with a political agenda, without the checks and balances, without the appropriate experience in charge of the multimillion dollar business that is Council is a recipe for the factions and divisions played out in Federal and state governments.

In many cases, the Mayor’s position will be viewed as a starting platform for a career in higher levels of Government. This removes the Mayor’s focus from the local residents to one of currying favour with those in positions of political authority.

“The second thing that would happen with large amalgamated councils is that the new legal entity would attract party politics. The new council would have a considerable budget to spend and lucrative contracts to award. It would provide a good training ground for aspiring state and federal politicians. Because of the larger population and larger area to cover, no longer would individuals be able to afford to stand for positions on council. It would only be political parties who had the funds to field candidates. Electors would be faced with only party candidates who could be expected to follow the party line, not what is best for the electorate and the maintenance of local identity.” (WSA Forum 26 November 2012 **Amalgamation and Loss of Identity** Max Hipkins p3)

## **Broadly Based Representation**

How is this going to happen if you have to be a member of a political party first?

How are persons without the big party machines going to compete with the power and might of political parties in elections.?

It is important to note that the larger the council through the proposed amalgamations the less likely that there will be a broader based representation of elected councillors.

Elections cost money and time. It will be the major political parties that will dominate the elections with their party machines. Independent candidates will struggle to fund campaigns. The burden on independent candidates will deter the wider community from becoming involved. This is a sure way of ensuring a slow death for a more broadly based representation of the community

Local government is about diversity and meeting the needs of its residents and this will be diminished by political agendas.

The role of Councillors should be equal. Each councillors representing the community, not their political party or their own agenda.

The report cites tensions between Mayors and General Managers as the primary rationale to shift the power base to an Executive Mayor. The only tensions that arise occur when the Mayor or Councillors act outside their defined role and responsibility either by pursuing personal or political agendas, acting corruptly or interfering at the detail level of Council where there do not have expertise.

These proposed models take away the essence of Local, Community, and Residents. Councils should remain local and not have the same model as Federal or state governments.

### **Reshape Metropolitan Governance**

The report states as an objective 'Create high capacity councils that can better represent and serve their local communities ... and be true parties of state and federal agencies'.

However, as stated above under various headings, it is not the residents and community that are better served. It is the Executive mayor with power to yield untold damage which is currently held to account with checks and balances and a state government that would like less 'children at the partnership table' that are better served.

It seems to me that the state government would like to slowly dismantle communities and disengage residents in any decision making process. The word 'Local' will soon be replaced with 'Regional' and local communities a thing of the past.

### **Joint Organisations**

Your assessment is based on the ILGRP report, however, you now disallow this criteria.

You may want to explain why this has been removed when you consistently refer to the ILGRP report for your assessment.

Could it be that your scope is to ensure mergers?

This process requires transparency and proper consultation, picking and choosing the criteria from a report that you heavily rely on is biased and prejudice and an abuse of process.

### **Strategic Capacity Box 3.1**

These elements should be better defined and require well described benchmarks.

Eg. What signifies credibility for more effective advocacy?

How do you assess high quality politicians? A degree? Owns a business? Is a millionaire?

Some of these elements are nonsensical and subject to interpretation that you cannot possibly assess as fit or unfit.

## **Sustainability**

Professor Samsom, chair of the State Governments Review Panel for Local Government, was quoted in his new report December 2014 ...

**“The public has been misled over the financial benefits to Sydney councils that choose to amalgamate.”**

## **In Conclusion**

In his report Prof Samson refers to the fears of residents to change. In our extensive resident feedback fear of change is not a factor. The factors are that there are no benefits to the community of Strathfield for a merger.

Prof Samson also refers to the loss of local identity which may be maintained with various methods and gives 2 examples from the many forced mergers around Australia. What about the rest?

Residents matter and their voice matters. Residents have a right to a democratic process and not political bullying by state governments.