

To the IPART Enquiry Into Forced Council Amalgamations

Dear IPART –

I WRITE AS A CITIZEN DEEPLY CONCERNED THAT good local councils in sound financial position and delivering quality services to their residents are at risk of being forced to amalgamate in NSW.

As a resident of St Peters living in the Marrickville Council area, when I talk to friends I become aware that Marrickville is one of the best Councils around this part of Sydney. It is **financially responsible, provides a variety of quality community amenities, communicates well with residents & is responsive to our input, & has been & remains a leader in recycling services.**

IN FACT AS A REPRESENTATIVE & RESPONSIVE BODY I WISH THE STATE & FEDERAL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT WERE HALF AS GOOD AS MARRICKVILLE COUNCIL!

So I am not at all happy to hear that Marrickville Council is under threat of forced amalgamation with other councils.

One of the reasons Marrickville Council is so responsive to local residents is -

a) its size is not too big & not too small

Bigger is NOT always better, in fact I am quite concerned that amalgamation will lead to higher rates and reduced spending in our current Council area, as well as diminish existing services in the name of “efficiency”.

b) it is not controlled by any one political group

With some Labour, some Greens, some Liberals & some Independents, all councillors need to be on their toes & actually in touch with residents concerns. So I am most concerned that with less elected representatives for our area, a larger Council will be much more likely to be dominated by the 2 major parties, or even just by one political group, which in my experience is much less likely to make for good local government.

IF IT AIN'T BROKEN DON'T FIX IT !

ANY changes should be evidence-based.

The following observations were sent to me by one of the Marrickville Councillors in response to my concerns & I understand them to be correct:

a. There is no evidence that a large council is more effective, has better rates nor that it provides better services than a small council. In fact there is evidence that small councils are amongst the best in NSW and across Australia. **Scale and Strategic capacity should not be threshold criteria.**

b. There is no evidence to link the scale of a council with its strategic capacity, so Scale and Strategic capacity should not be linked. **The two criteria should be assessed separately.**

c. There is no evidence that bigger is better. In fact the evidence is the opposite – that smaller is better for councils. There should be no number and no minimum population size.

d. IPART itself has clearly acknowledged that there is currently no evidence base whatsoever for “**target numbers**” of councils for metropolitan or regional areas, so they should be **dropped**.

e. The 10 Elements to measure Strategic Capacity should have **benchmarks**.

f. **Measuring Scale and Strategic capacity by the degree to which it enables the State Government’s “planned development” should be removed.**

This is a classic “Catch-22” and has no place in a reputable assessment process.

This says in effect that local councils that stand up for residents who do not agree with proposed State Government plans eg. the madness of the current Westconnex (so-called) development, will be deemed to be failing.

I am deeply concerned that PLANNING DECISIONS THAT DIRECTLY AFFECT LOCAL COMMUNITIES ARE BEING INCREASINGLY CLOSED TO ANY MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY INPUT – INDEED TO ANY SCRUTINY OR OVERSIGHT BY ANYONE OUTSIDE THE MINISTERS OFFICE. It seems to me that enforced amalgamations will result in even less possibility for community concerns to be REPRESENTED.

g. Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCS) are doing a great job in enabling significant savings for councils and should be able to be built on as a **further business case model**.

Joint Organisations should be returned as an option for ALL councils, with time allowed for development of proper business cases.

h. What’s the rush???

IPART submissions close on 25 May and the final methodology and criteria will be published 1 June. This does not give enough time to fully consider all submissions; assess and respond to them and then develop the final document. In addition if changes are made to the document then the time becomes very short to enable councils to respond.

The timeline goes against good process and needs to be extended.

And in conclusion:

All submissions to IPART should be made public as soon as possible. Lets shine as much light as possible on these very important deliberations.

Yours sincerely,
Margot Oliver

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