

# media release

Tuesday, 23 August 2016

## City and country councils facing amalgamation join forces

Mayors and councillors from seven local government areas around NSW facing forced amalgamation have called upon Premier Mike Baird to suspend his "undemocratic" merger program.

Elected officials from Mosman, Hunter's Hill, Ku-ring-gai and Strathfield along with their regional counterparts from Cabonne, Oberon and Shellharbour councils, which represent local government areas with a total population of over a quarter of a million residents and ratepayers, penned an open letter to the Premier urging him to reconsider the program.

"As the democratically elected leaders of over a quarter of a million residents and dozens of communities in both rural and urban New South Wales, we are disturbed by the processes adopted in the recent inquiries into the proposals to forcibly amalgamate councils," the group wrote.

"These inquiries undertook no polling of local communities and the Delegate reports largely ignored the overwhelming majority of articulate and deeply felt submissions opposed to the proposals. In our view this process was not democratic or fair.

"We request that you respond to the wishes of our communities and your citizens by suspending the threat of forced amalgamations for all councils in NSW for the immediate future."

The letter also requested a meeting to "hear our concerns first hand that the process to date has been undemocratic and, importantly, to discuss alternative ways of meeting your Government's strategic objectives" and that the government agree to poll residents and ratepayers about amalgamations which would then only occur with majority support.

Mosman Mayor Peter Abelson said he invited a number of metro and regional councils to attend a top-level meeting in Mosman prior to penning the letter so that elected officials from metropolitan and regional areas facing potential amalgamation had the opportunity to jointly convey their concerns to the Premier. The two-hour meeting held on Wednesday 17 August was attended by representatives from Mosman, Hunter's Hill, Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, Strathfield and Woollahra, along with their regional counterparts from Cabonne, Oberon and Shellharbour.

"The proposed forced amalgamations would have adverse consequences for metropolitan and regional council services and communities and it is important that we work together to seek a cooperative outcome with the NSW Government for the greater good of Sydney and the state," Cr Abelson said.

The letter requested a response from the Premier within a week and the group will meet again in the near future.



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