

MM/2: **Mayoral Minute: Correcting some Misrepresentations in the Government's Merger Statements (MM)**

MAYOR: **Cr Peter Abelson**

MOSPLAN REF: **Leadership and Engagement (Strategy Two)**

RECOMMENDATION

That the Mayoral Minute be noted.

MAYORAL MINUTE

Unfortunately there are numerous misrepresentations and errors in Government Statements, Merger Proposals and Advertisements. This is not the place and there is not the time tonight to deal with all these misrepresentations and errors. I will just deal with three major issues, the first two of which are related.

In the week-end Manly Daily, the Premier Michael Baird stated that Mosman had opted "to join with Manly rather than with North Sydney or Chatswood. Their argument was that if anything had to happen – they'd rather go this way than towards the high density areas".

This is simply not true.

Prior to the Government announcing the proposed merger, I advised our local member Jillian Skinner in writing, with a copy to Minister Stokes, that (a) Mosman Council is very strongly opposed to a merger with two or more councils and (b) that if Mosman had a simple choice between a merger with Manly and North Sydney, polling suggests more local support for a merger with North Sydney and I indicated that this would be a more natural and seamless partnership.

Mosman has never been presented with the merger choice, or made the choice, that the Premier states.

A related point is the statement in the NSW Government's Merger Proposal for Manly, Mosman and part of Warringah (page 5) that "This option was the preferred merger option for this part of Sydney for three of the four councils impacted by this proposal".

This is also a misrepresentation. We made it clear in many written statements including the letter cited above that (a) we oppose all mergers, (b) we especially oppose mergers with more than one other council and (c) the larger the merger the more community opposition there is to a merger.

The following was our formal 150 word response to the Government's request to merger proposals.

Forced amalgamation is opposed. At the 2013 election 81% of voters opposed amalgamation. In recent polling only 23% of residents supported merger with North Sydney, 17% with Manly and 7% with the Government's six council model. Surveys show opposition to amalgamation increases significantly the more councils involved in a proposed amalgamation.

Thirdly I briefly draw attention to the Government's empty, meaningless and expensive advertising for "stronger councils". A core claim is that with 152 councils in NSW we have twice as many councils as in Queensland and Victoria.

Well we have nearly twice the population of Queensland and we are three times the size of Victoria. What the Government also does not tell us is that in the latest Local Government National Report for 2012/13, local council tax per capita was nearly 40% higher in Queensland and Victoria than in NSW. \$499 in NSW, \$684 in Queensland and \$692 in Victoria. The Government's rhetoric is again grossly misleading. Indeed it could be described as false advertising.