



**The Hon. Mike Baird  
Premier of NSW**

25 November 2016

**cc The Hon Paul Toole MP  
Minister for Local Government**

**Re: Recent Council Elections Timetable**

**Dear Premier**

The Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association (TRRA Inc.) represents a community of some 26,000 residents and ratepayers on the Tomaree Peninsula in the Port Stephens LGA.

TRRA has noted the SMH article of 21 November headlined "[Chaos reigns as council elections could be delayed beyond 2020](#)". The timetable contained in this article was confirmed by information provided at this week's Port Stephens Council meeting attended by a number of TRRA members.

Our Association believes that the whole merger process has been seriously mismanaged. In particular, the latest information on the likely delays for elections involving Councils nominated for mergers but not concluded at this time, is further evidence of a bungled process.

The timetable indicates that in the case of Councils which are not merged by the end of November 2016, elections could not be held until March 2018, and there is even the possibility of some elections being delayed to 2019 or 2020. A number of councils in the Hunter Region, including Port Stephens Council, are awaiting merger announcements and will almost certainly be denied elections in the near future.

It is also our understanding that the Minister for Local Government has publicly stated that further announcements on mergers would be held over pending the results of legal challenges which are before the courts. This policy is a further concern for electors as it adds additional uncertainty to the timetable.



The practical consequence appears to be that our Council which would have been due for an election in September 2016 will remain in place, operating under State imposed restrictions on the making of major spending commitments and other key decisions. It will be operating in “lame duck” mode.

In recent years, TRRA Inc. has on a number of occasions written to the Premier and to the Minister for Local Government, raising concerns in relation to the failure of Port Stephens Council to follow proper processes in its decision making and in the conduct of council meetings. Your responses to these representations have typically advised TRRA to seek redress through the ballot box, i.e. if you are dissatisfied with your current Council, elect a new one. The timetable which has been handed down effectively disenfranchises Port Stephens electors and denies them an opportunity to replace the current Council with more accountable representatives. Instead we may have to endure our current Council for up to 4 more years. This would grant them a 7 year term without facing the voting public.

TRRA seeks your advice on the Government’s plans to bring the merger process to a conclusion and a solution to the disenfranchisement of our residents and ratepayers which is inherent in the announced election timetable.

Yours sincerely  
Geoff Washington  
President TRRA Inc.

