

MEDIA RELEASE

COUNCILLORS RESIGNATION IRRESPONSIBLE

DEPUTY MAYOR KNUDSEN – DUNGOG SHIRE COUNCIL - 2 June 2017

The only three Councillors to vote against the holding of a poll on merger options at the September election have resigned in an effort to stop the poll.

A poll is the only way now of allowing the community to have its say in its future, as there has been little consultation with the community over past years.

On 1st May Councillors voted 6:3 to take three months to maximise Dungog Shire's strength through negotiation so that the Shire would both be a more attractive merger partner or be sustainable as an independent Council.

The Council was to present each of the options in the best, most objective way possible. Then, at the elections, a poll would be conducted to garner community views, which had not been done comprehensively before.

This irresponsible action by the three minority councillors was opportunist, realising that they could wield power by reducing the number of councillors to that below which a council cannot function.

They have also denied the opportunity for other matters to come before councillors in the next three months. There are important outstanding planning issues which need Councillor consideration before the September elections.

It needs to be stated that one of the councillors who voted for the poll, Councillor McKenzie resigned for health reasons. Another, Councillor Bale, just released from hospital after a major operation, resigned by email at night after an abusive email aimed at his family, then attempted to retract his resignation in the morning. The General Manager has refused to accept his retraction, allowing the number of councillors to thereby reduce.

The three Councillors, including the mayor, who resigned yesterday after realising they could close the council down, knew the consequences of their actions and the ramifications for this community. They have effectively closed down debate about our future.

The decision to reject Port Stephens offer of an instant merger at the May 16 Dungog Shire Council Meeting was not taken lightly. Despite active lobby groups, or perhaps because of them, Councillors did not know what the community as a whole wanted for their future. That is why it was important to support democracy and a poll at the September elections.

We were in the process of maximising our strength with the Minister for Local Government, Minister Upton. Meetings were also underway with the Deputy Premier, planned with both Port Stephens and Maitland Councils, and we had the beginnings of support from Hunter Councils and Local Government New South Wales. The irresponsible resignation of these three Councillors has effectively stopped this process.

Communities having a say is called 'democracy'. The community has a right to a fair hearing and to put their point of view without bias or intimidation. A poll in September can give our community a say in its future, but without negotiating a better situation the options will be much fewer.