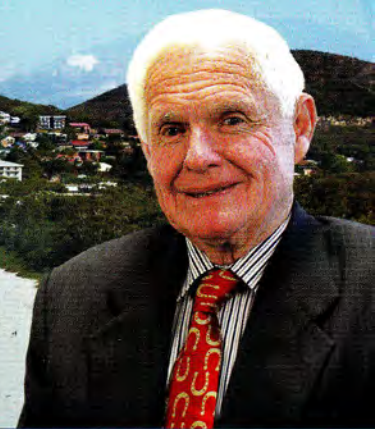




Port Stephens-Newcastle Merger Proposal

# Make your voice heard

A letter from Mayor Bruce MacKenzie



Dear fellow Port Stephens residents,

The NSW Government is trying, under the guise of local government reform, to make second class citizens of us all.

The proposal to merge Port Stephens Council with Newcastle City Council hands the legacy created by a high performing, financially sustainable, 'fit for the future' Council over to the people of Newcastle.

We, your elected body, think this is not good enough.

The proposal sees the communities of Newcastle and Port Stephens as being one and the same, with 'similar expectations' and 'many similar residential, workforce and industry characteristics'. This is an insulting over simplification, and is indicative of the lack of insight and thought that has gone into the proposal.

While we may share a border, there is much more which makes Port Stephens unique, including:

#### **Identity**

Port Stephens is a rural and coastal community of towns and villages, entirely separate from the Newcastle-Lake Macquarie urban area;

#### **Community representation and relationships**

Volunteers and committees made up of community members, and Councillors elected on local involvement, not party political lines;

#### **'Fit for the Future' financial performance**

The lowest residential rates in the Hunter, an infrastructure backlog which is low and getting lower, a multi-million dollar commercial property portfolio, and a Newcastle Airport dividend to reinvest in assets and service delivery for the people of Port Stephens.

The true impacts of a merger to the people of Port Stephens are yet to be known. However, under a merged Council, things will change – that much is certain. With the following factors at play, it's safe to say that change may not be in Port Stephens' favour:

#### **Reduced representation**

10 elected representatives down to as few as three;

#### **Rates uncertainty**

In light of Newcastle's IPART-approved total cumulative increase over 5 years (including rate peg) of 46.93%, compared to Port Stephens' cumulative increase of 11.97% over the same period (rate peg only);

#### **Impact on infrastructure and services**

Reduced representation means reduced control over where finances are spent.

Make your voice heard  
#IamPortStephens